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THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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State Counsellor visits flood-stricken areas in Kayin, Mon states

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi meets with local residents at Shweyinmyaw Pagoda's temporary shelter in Hpa-an, Kayin State. **PHOTO: MNA**

STATE Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi visited flood relief centres in Hpa-an in Kayin State yesterday, giving words of encouragement, food supplies, aid, and monetary support to the people there.

The State Counsellor left from Nay Pyi Taw International Airport in the morning by Myanmar National Airlines flight to Mawlamyine in Mon State. Accompanying the State Counsellor were Union Ministers Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe, Lt-Gen Ye Aung and Dr. Myint Htwe, Deputy Ministers U Min Thu and U Kyaw Lin, and other officials.

The State Counsellor and her entourage were welcomed at the airport by Mon State Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan, Kayin State Chief Minister Daw Nan Khin Htwe Myint and other officials.

The State Counsellor and her entourage then departed for Hpa-an in Kayin State by car together with the Kayin State Chief Minister. Upon arrival in Hpa-an, the State Counsellor visited Shweyinmyaw Pagoda, where a temporary flood relief centre has been opened. The State Counsellor made offerings to the images of the Buddha in the altar room and entrusted donations to the pagoda board of trustees.

The State Counsellor then met with local residents at the pagoda's temporary shelter, greeted them cordially and gave words of encouragement and provided rice, cooking oil, medical supplies, food supplies, clothing, and financial aid.

Next, the State Counsellor viewed the rising water levels in Thanlwin River from the pagoda's raised platform.

The State Counsellor visited Moekai Monastic School Sayadaw Badanda Tayzeinda, member of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, to pay respect and offer items of donation.

Next, the State Counsellor and entourage visited local residents at the cyclone shelter in Ward 3, Hpa-an. They discussed the local residents' occupations and professions, adherence to the law, working within the legal framework, and the necessity of everyone's cooperation in rule of law. They then transferred food supplies, aid and financial support for the people to relevant authorities.

Likewise, they also visited the temporary flood relief centre opened at the state indoor stadium and asked the people about their livelihoods, health conditions and support being given, followed by a distribution of rice, cooking oil, medical supplies, food supplies, clothing and financial aid.

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Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

2nd Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's 9th regular session holds third-day meeting

THE third-day meeting of the 2nd Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's 9th regular session was held at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw meeting hall yesterday morning.

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw being convened in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: AYE THAN (MNA)**

Announcement on appointing Central Bank of Myanmar Governor

First, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than informed the Hluttaw about the President nominating U Kyaw Kyaw Maung to the post of the Central Bank of Myanmar Governor, as the previous governor's term had expired, and Hluttaw representatives who wanted to object to the matter were asked to enroll their names.

Ministers explain income and expenditures in National Planning Bill and Union Budget Bill

Next, income and expenditures in the National Planning Bill and the Union Budget Bill were explained by Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe, Union Minister for Industry U Khin Maung Cho, Union Minister for Construction U Han Zaw, Union Minister U Thein Swe on behalf of Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Ohn Maung, Union Minister for Ethnic Affairs Nai Thet Lwin, Union Attorney General U Tun Tun Oo, Union Auditor General U Maw Than, Deputy Minister for Electricity and Energy Dr. Tun Naing, Deputy Minister for Commerce U Aung Htoo, Deputy Minister for Education U Win Maw Tun, Deputy Minister for Health and Sports Dr. Mya Lay Sein, Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance U Maung Maung Win, Union Civil Service Board member U Win Maw, Nay Pyi Taw Council member U Aung Myin Tun and Central Bank of Myanmar Deputy Governor U Soe Min.

Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe

Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe said 14 policies and 21 aims were set to implement work in the 2018-2019 FY and expenditures requested were for improving work site relations, acquiring full labour rights, setting up a policy to obtain the exact population numbers and indicators and having sufficient number of skilled workers, having a full insurance system and benefits prescribed under the social security law, eradication of forced labour, implementing appropriate job programmes and work processes jointly conducted with the ILO (International Labour Organisation).

In the 2018-2019 FY Union Budget, the ministry is earmarking Ks60,393.04 million as ordinary income, Ks36,841.42 million as expenditure and a capital expenditure of Ks6,024.881 million, totalling Ks42,866.301 million, explained the union minister.

Union Minister for Industry U Khin Maung Cho

Union Minister for Industry U Khin Maung Cho explained that the ministry had 113 factories, of which 57 were operating in cooperation with the private sector. Of the remaining, 24 were temporarily closed and work on them would start only when a policy was set. Some six factories were being proposed, according to the procedure for privatisation commission, to be transferred to the private sector. For the 2018-2019 FY, the industrial sector GDP is estimated to be Ks21,243.239 billion, which is an 11.2 per cent increase.

In the 2018-2019 FY Union Budget Bill, the Ministry of Industry has set Ks87.737 billion as ordinary income, capital income (foreign aid) at Ks4.553 billion, debt receipt at Ks2.447 billion, totalling Ks94.737 billion. To implement project work included in the 2018-2019 FY National Planning Bill, a total expenditure of Ks429.648 billion was earmarked, consisting of ordinary expenditure of Ks166.637 billion, capital expenditure of Ks141.884 billion and debt receipt of Ks121.127 billion. The capital expenditure of Ks141.884 billion includes Ks120.905 billion for new and ongoing projects and Ks20.979 billion for head office/factories, explained the union minister.

Union Minister for Construction U Han Zaw

In his explanation, Union Minister for Construction U Han Zaw said the project work to be completed in the 2018-2019 FY are two new roads in Rakhine State, upgrading of roads in Sagaing, Kachin, Rakhine and Sagaing-Kachin (Shwebo-Myitkyina), upgrading of roads pledged during Hluttaw meetings and 10 roads proposed by Hluttaw representatives, international linking of three union roads, upgrade of six union roads and 23 other union roads, construction of 27 bridges pledged during Hluttaw meetings and other bridges, five ongoing projects in Yangon Region, major repair of a state guesthouse, two water-related work for housing projects in Mandalay and Ayeyawady regions, repair of districts connecting roads, and upgrading of rural roads in Sagaing, Bago, Yangon and Ayeyawady regions damaged by natural disasters.

The Ministry of Construction's total income earmarked for the 2018-2019 FY is Ks507.335 billion consisting of ordinary income at Ks70.886 billion, capital income at Ks35.63 billion and debt receipt of Ks400.819 billion. A total of Ks847.059 billion consisting of Ks112.320 billion as ordinary expenditure and Ks734.739 billion as capital expenditure is allocated, explained the union minister.

Union Minister U Thein Swe on behalf of Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement

Union Minister U Thein Swe on behalf of Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement explained that for the 2018-2019 FY, ordinary income of Ks5,807.072 million, capital income of Ks11,090 million, ordinary expenditure of Ks80,705.305 million and capital expenditure of Ks23,397.237 million, totalling Ks104,102.542 million was submitted. Capital income totalling Ks 11,090 million is made up of the Indian government's aid at Ks6,800 million and Japanese government's aid at Ks4,290 million for Rakhine State. The expenditures requested will be used for social protection work for people who are old, mitigating damages and losses caused by natural disasters all over the country, preparation to respond to natural disasters and rehabilitation and saving the lives of natural disaster-affected people, said the union minister.

Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Ohn Maung

Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Ohn Maung explained that for the 2018-2019 FY, ordinary expenditure of Ks5,969.598 million was allocated, including foreign aid of Ks3005.234 million, and total ordinary expenditure of Ks8,974.832 million was earmarked. The Ministry of Planning and Finance has permitted a new title of increasing travel work and development expenditure in the Hotels and Tourism Ministry's expenditure. An amount of Ks1,248.4 million was included under this title. For the 2018-2019 FY, the ministry earmarked a total income of Ks22,546.113 million and a total expenditure of Ks9,196.827 million, resulting in a surplus of Ks13,349.286 million, said the union minister.

Union Minister for Ethnic Affairs Nai Thet Lwin

In his explanation, Union Minister for Ethnic Affairs Nai Thet Lwin said for the 2018-2019 FY, the ministry requested ordinary expenditure of Ks3,107.507 million and capital expenditure of Ks1,758.47 million, totalling Ks4,865.977 million. The ordinary expenditure of Ks3,107.507 million includes Ks935.731 million for printing pre-primary and KG picture storybooks of ethnic nationals for 66 ethnic national races. A capital expenditure of Ks1,504.970 million to construct departmental office buildings in Chin State, Rakhine State and Sagaing Region was included in the capital expenditure of Ks1,758.47 million, explained the union minister.

Deputy Minister for Health and Sports Dr. Mya Lay Sein

Deputy Minister for Health and Sports Dr. Mya Lay Sein explained that a total of Ks1,150.785 billion was allocated for the 2018-2019 FY budget. Of this, the state allocation was Ks955.883 billion and foreign allocation was Ks159.392 billion in aid and Ks35.51 billion in loans.

An amount of Ks1,150.785 billion includes ordinary expenditure of Ks737.251 billion and capital expenditure of Ks413.534 billion. Ordinary expenditure comprises 38.25 per cent for salaries, 0.73 per cent for travel, 41.87 per cent for purchases, 7.11 per cent for maintenance and repairs, 11.6 per cent for education and social welfare, 0.02 per cent for entertainment, 0.1 per cent for interest and 0.32 per cent for support. In the 41.87 per cent for purchases, 25.57 per cent has been set aside for the purchase of medicines. The Ks285.26 billion allocated for construction includes 59 per cent for staff housing and 41 per cent for hospital/building/sports ground, explained the deputy minister.

The fourth-day meeting of the 9th regular session of the 2nd Pyidaungsu Hluttaw is scheduled for 31 July, it is learnt.—Thura Zaw, Han Lin Naing ■

State Counsellor visits flood-stricken areas in Kayin, Mon states

FROM PAGE-1

The State Counsellor later held a meeting with the Kayin State Chief Minister and her state cabinet at the meeting hall of the Kayin State government building. The State Counsellor said the changes in the weather are causing floods, an occurrence that was uncommon in the past. The State Counsellor said these changes that have not been seen before will soon become the norm, and it will require the cooperation of the Union and states and regions to uncover the reasons behind these floods. If the causes are due to dwindling rivers, then river expansion projects to widen the channels must be carried out. Immediate repairs must also be made to damaged bridges for the people's transportation. The State Counsellor said after talking with people seeking shelter in flood relief centres, it was found there were possibilities for giving talks on health education and nutrition, giving training classes for vocational skills, and setting rules to prevent flooding, drain blockages, and careless littering.

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi meeting with local residents sheltering at the temporary flood relief centre opened at the indoor stadium in Hpa-an, Kayin State. **PHOTO: MNA**

The State Counsellor instructed the Kayin State government to cooperate with the Union Government to convert Kayin State's natural advantages to attract business opportunities, promote the establishment of basic industries producing agricultural porduce, and constructing buildings to house vocational training classes.

The State Counsellor and entourage then left Hpa-an and returned to Mawlamyine Airport.

In the airport's lobby, the State Counsellor provided financial support of Ks100 million from the National Disaster Management Committee's funds to Mon State Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan for Mon State's Disaster Management Committee.

The State Counsellor departed from Mawlamyine by Myanmar National Airlines flight and arrived in Nay Pyi Taw in the evening.

Union Ministers Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe and Lt-Gen Ye Aung, who accompanied the State Counsellor, also visited temporary flood relief centres in Basic Education High Schools 1 and 3 in Hpa-an and gave words of encouragement to the people there and provided humanitarian aid.

There are currently eleven flood relief centres opened in Hpa-an, providing shelter to 6,160 people from 1,182 households. The Kayin State Government has provided each centre with Ks2 million, ten bags of rice, and ten bottles of cooking oil each containing ten viss (36 lbs). The state government is providing lunch and dinner to flood-stricken local residents and the State Disaster Management Committee has received Ks100 million from the National Disaster Management Committee's fund.

The Ministry of Border Affairs has also provided flood relief centres in Hpa-an with 250 dozen exercise books and over Ks25.4 million for people seeking shelter in rescue centres.—Myanmar News Agency ■

Media delegation visits Taung Pyo Letwe reception centre

A VISITING media delegation collected information on the process of issuing National Verification Cards and Electronic Identification Cards to returnees at the Taung Pyo Letwe reception centre in Maungtaw District yesterday.

"We have arranged to issue NV cards and EID cards to returnees," said U Ko Ko Thaw, Director from the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population. Issuing EID cards will be done on a trial basis in Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay and Yangon.

The Taung Pyo Letwe reception centre opened on 23 January and is ready to accept returnees.

Before the visit to the centre, the 17-member delegation visited the friendship bridge at the border in Taung Pyo Letwe.

The journalists also witnessed the stockpiling of aid by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement to be delivered to returnees and the preparedness of health care services to be given to them.

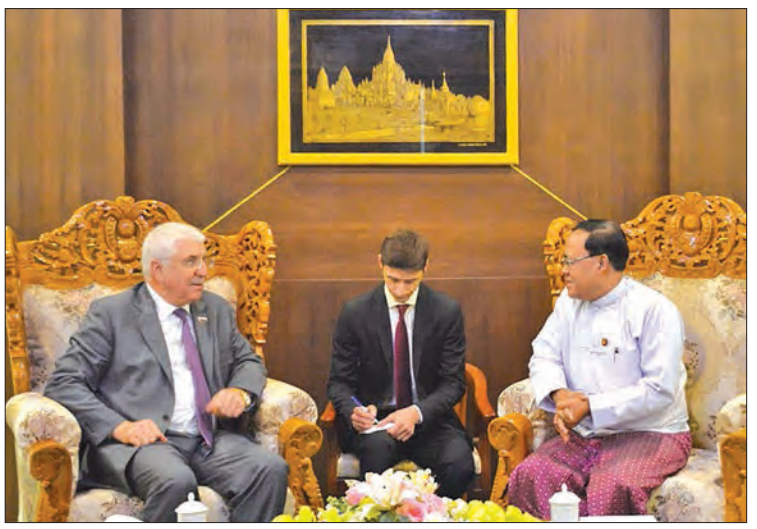
Before returning to Sittway, the media delegation went to the boundary line and met with the displaced people living there.

The delegation arrived back in Yangon yesterday evening.

The 17-member media delegation comprised journalists from Fuji TV, Sky News TV, New York Times, Myanmar News Agency-MNA, MRTV and MITV. —Myint Maung Soe ■

Journalists gathering news at the Taung Pyo Letwe Reception Centre. **PHOTO: MYINT MAUNG SOE**

Union Minister U Kyaw Tin receives Russian Deputy Chairman of the International Affairs Committee



Union Minister U Kyaw Tin meets with Russian Deputy Chairman Mr. Aleksei Chepa in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

U KYAW TIN, Union Minister for International Cooperation of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, received the delegation led by Mr. Aleksei Chepa, Deputy Chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, at 1pm. yesterday, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw. During the meeting, they cordially discussed matters pertaining to the promotion of bilateral relations and cooperation between Myanmar and Russia as well as to the enhancing of friendship, cooperation and exchange of visits between the two Parliaments.—Myanmar News Agency ■

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New school ferry buses parked in Yangon. **PHOTO: PE ZAW**

Trial run for school ferries installed with CCTV app

A NEW ferry service system with a CCTV monitoring application installed is on a trial run as school buses during the 2018-2019 academic year in Yangon, said Yangon Region Transport Authority yesterday.

"The new system with the application would help parents and guardians to monitor their children going to school and returning home in real time through their mobile phones," said U Nan Aung, who is in charge of Yangon school buses.

"We are working towards a goal of providing safe ferry services, which will help parents and guardians not to worry about their children," he added.

The new system ferry service is on a trial run at the TTC -Kamayut and TTC –Yankin routes from 23 to 31 July.

The test run of the service is the first step of the Yangon Region government's plan to provide a new modern ferry service for school children at 22 schools located on major roads and at heavy traffic sites in the municipal area of Yangon.—Zaw Gyi ■

Heroin worth Ks82.5 million seized in Pinlebu

ANTI-DRUG police seized heroin worth Ks82.5 million from a house yard owned by Daw Kyi Aye (alias) Ma Tuit (alias) Ah Hnaung at the side of Pinlebu- Kawlin highway, Mogaung ward, Pinlebu Town, Katha Distruct in Sagaing Region on 26 July.

Acting on a tip off, a combined team comprising officers and staff searched the house and its yard and found 75 soap boxes of heroin, weighing a total of 825 grams and worth Ks82,500,000 from a store room in Daw Kyi Aye's house compound.

Than Tun from Mulae village, Bamauk Township, Ko Zin (alias) Zin Lin Oo from Man Yu Gyi village, Bamauk Township and Khine Soe Oo from Hsin Swe Pout ward, Amarapura Town were also present at the Daw Kyi Aye's house.

Police have filed charges against all suspects under Section 19 (A)/ 21 of the Anti-Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.—Myo Lwin (Pinlebu) ■

Myanmar Career Expo 2018 to be held at Yangon Technological University

THE first Myanmar Career Expo 2018 will be held at the Yangon Technological University on 28 July, according to the event organiser.

"The Myanmar Career Expo 2018 will be held in cooperation with the Yangon Technological University Students' Union, Myanmar Students' Union in the UK and Ireland, and the Myanmar Students' Union in the United States. The expo will be held with the aim of ensuring meetings between university students from Myanmar and foreign countries and local and foreign companies in Myanmar," said Ko Myat Min Thu, chairman of Yangon Technological University Students' Union. At the expo, Myanmar university students will have the chance to apply for jobs in different sectors at local and foreign companies.

"At the expo, careers at local companies, foreign companies and other international companies, which are connected with foreign countries, will be showcased. The companies will offer not only full time jobs but also internships. We will take up such job opportunities to get the necessary job experience. This expo will be organised by Yangon Technological University but is open to all students from Yangon and elsewhere who are interested in attending the expo. Also, those who are looking for jobs can participate in the expo, said Ko Myat Min Thu. At the expo, experts who are successful in various fields such as economics, engineering and NGOs will give educational talks.—Nyein Nyein ■

Mini airport to be constructed in Lalengpi, Chin State

THE Chin State government is planning to construct a mini airport by 2020 in Lalengpi Town, Matupi District, in order to conduct more emergency rescue cases and to reduce the delay in transportation and travelling time in Chin State.

The mini airport will be built in Lalengpi Town, under a programme for building mini airports in remote places by the Mission Aviation Fellowship International (MAF) and Health & Hope Myanmar. The mini airport will not be constructed with the government budget, but it will be constructed depending on the donations collected, according to Chin State government ministry of road and transportation.

The mini airport will be constructed in Lalengpi Town, Matupi District, southern part of Chin State, at a cost of US$2.2 million.

The mini airport project was approved by the Union government in July 2017. The airport will be 800 metres long and is planned to be completed by May 2020.

Upon completion of the mini airport, MAF will start flying three light aircrafts capable of carrying 10 passengers onboard, with approval from the Civil Aviation Department.

MAF is a non-profit organisation and will reduce air ticket fees to two or three times lower than the normal price. MAF conducted ground survey in January this year to construct the mini airport and will start the construction process in November. —Zo Hay Hsar ■

Green gram accounts for 36% of pulse exports in three months

GREEN gram constitutes over 36 per cent of the exports of various pulses over the past three months, and China accounts for 60 per cent of Myanmar's green gram exports, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

The European Union countries also purchase green grams. China prefers the Shwewah variety. The export volume of green grams to India is lower compared with other countries, said U Myo Thu, director of the commerce ministry.

Local consumption of green grams is low. The export of this pulse is recorded at 60 per cent for China's market, 10 per cent for Indonesia, five per cent for Viet Nam, three per cent each for Bangladesh, Japan and the Philippines and two per cent for Malaysia and India.

"We are not worried about the export of green grams to India, as only 150,000-200,000 tons of pulse quota is shipped to India. We have other foreign markets for green grams. But all of our concerns are over mung beans and pigeon peas," said Ko Ye Myint, Win depot owner at Bayintnaung market.

Myanmar's exports of green grams were registered at over 330,000 tons in the 2015-2016 fiscal year, over 400,000 tons in the 2016-2017 FY and over 350,000 tons in the 2017-2018 FY. Green grams are mostly exported to China through border trade channels.

Of the various pulse exports, the export of green grams was over 26 per cent in the 2015-2016 FY, over 28 per cent in the 2016-2017 FY and over 26 per cent in the 2017-2018 FY. According to plantation data, one million tons of green grams are produced from over 300,000 acres of plantations.

They are primarily produced in Sagaing, Magway, Mandalay, Yangon, Bago and Ayeyawady regions and Mon and Kayin states.

China produces value-added snacks and beverages made from green grams. The by-products are utilised as feed stuff. Zar Lin Thu (AMIA) ■

Yedagun offshore natural gas rig. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED BY MOEE**

MOEE invites LPG sale tenders

THE Ministry of Electricity and Energy (MOEE) has invited tenders for the sale of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and those holding licences B and F for import, storage, distribution and sales of LPG are entitled to submit their tenders at the Myanma Petrochemical Enterprise (headquarters) in Nay Pyi Taw. A total of 400 tons—150 tons of propane LPG and 250 tons of Butane LPG—produced by the No.1 Liquefied Petroleum Gas Plant (Minbu), operating under the Myanma Petrochemical Enterprise, will be put out as a tender for sales.

The tender submission deadline is 12pm on 14 August and the tender will open at 2pm on the same day.

The tender form and regulations can be viewed on the official website, www.moee.gov.mm.

Interested parties can obtain further information by calling 067-3411194 during the office hours of the Production Division, Myanma Petrochemical Enterprise. —GNLM ■

Visitors to Ngwehsaung beach increase by 24 per cent in first half of this year

THE number of local and foreign visitors to Ngwehsaung beach rose by 24 per cent in the first half of this year compared with the similar period last year.

A total of 10,655 visitors flocked to Ngwehsaung beach between January and June 2018. The number of locals and tourists was registered at 118,370 in 2016 and 142,676 in 2017, according to an official from Ngwehsaung office of the Hotels and Tourism Ministry.

The number of visitors to Ngwehsaung and Chaungtha beaches is increasing year by year. High-end hotels are also needed along the beaches.

In 2015, only two-storey buildings with a height of 10 metres were allowed on the beaches by the Hotels and Tourism Ministry. But now, in a bid to establish hotels with qualifying international standards and professional services and those that can accommodate more visitors, the ministry has allowed three-storey buildings with a height of 10 metres. Additionally, the existing buildings are also undergoing renovations to upgrade their standards.

According to the statistics of the Directorate of Hotels and Tourism, there are 31 hotels in Ngwehsaung, 29 in Chaungtha and 40 in Ngapali. Five high-end hotels are being constructed on Ngwehsaung beach. In order to facilitate the increasing number of visitors to the beaches every year, during the low season, some hotels have temporarily shut down their operations to carry out renovations, which are slated to be completed in early October. —Aung Win (Pyapon) ■

India increases purchase of petai beans through Tamu border gate

INDIA'S purchase of petai beans have been increasing every year, and over 87 tons were exported to India as of April this year. A kilogram of petai beans fetches Ks600.

The beans are sent to India through the Tamu border gate, said Tamu merchants. Petai beans are grown in Kalay, Tamu, Tiddim, Reedhorda and Naga region upstream of Chindwin River, on a manageable scale, said a merchant from Tamu Town.

The petai beans are exported to India through the Nantphalon market and border trade zone. They are sold at a stable price in the local market. They are exported between November and April and so, some merchants are making outright purchases of some farms, paying deposits, he continued. Petai beans are less consumed in Myanmar but more by people in Indian.

India's Kathe population prefers the beans, as they are said to have medicinal value. Locals come to Nantphalon market to sell the beans. A tree of petai beans can earn Ks150,000-200,000. With systematic treatment, it is perennial, lasting around 21 years, said U Sein Maung Oo, petai beans merchant at Nantphalon market. The export of petai beans was registered at 20 tons in the 2015-2016 fiscal year, over 68 tons in the 2016-2017 FY and over 440 tons in the 2017-2018 FY.—Zar Lin Thu (AMIA) ■

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MIC Chairman U Thaung Tun attends the Myanmar Investment Commission meeting in Yangon yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

MIC convenes meeting (10/2018)

THE Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) meeting (10/2018) was convened in Yangon on 26 July and reviewed investment proposals consistent with the Myanmar Investment Law.

U Thaung Tun, Chairman of MIC and nine members of MIC attended the meeting.

The submission of proposals and endorsement applications from investors and post-permit activities of MIC-permitted companies were discussed in the meeting.

The MIC meeting (10/2018) decided to issue six investment permits and two endorsements in relation to the investment proposals. —Myanmar News Agency ■

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets with Deputy Chairman of Russian Federation State Duma International Affairs Committee Mr. Aleksei Chepa in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**

SG Min Aung Hlaing receives Russian Deputy Chairman of the International Affairs Committee

THE Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, received Deputy Chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the Russia Federation State Duma Mr. Aleksei Chepa yesterday morning at the Bayint Naung Guesthouse in Nay Pyi Taw. At the meeting, matters relating to the status of working for peace in Myanmar, Tatmadaw Hluttaw representatives' visit to the Russian parliament and exchanging experiences to support legislations in the Myanmar Hluttaw, Russia's efforts for peace in Syria, increasing friendship and relations between the armed forces of the two countries were discussed, it is learnt.—Myanmar News Agency ■

Teachers, students conduct study tour to Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Teachers and students from Mandalay Yadanabon University Law Department and from the East Yangon University Law Department, along with visitors brought in by the Hluttaw representatives totalling 414, conducted a study tour to the second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's ninth Regular Session's third-day meeting.

From the start of the second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw meeting till date, a total of 40,355 visitors have conducted study visits. Those who are interested in conducting study tours to the Hluttaw are required to inform in writing three days in advance to the respective directors general of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Office, Pyithu Hluttaw Office and Amyotha Hluttaw Office, it is learnt.
—Myanmar News Agency ■

Law students from University of East Yangon visit Union Attorney General's Office

Law students from the University of East Yangon were welcomed at the Union Attorney General's Office with a ceremony yesterday. The students were led by Department of Law Head Prof. Dr. Thi Thi Lwin. MNA ■

National Disaster Management Committee sends aid to flood-stricken areas in Mon, Kayin states

U SOE AUNG, the secretary of the National Disaster Management Committee who is also the Deputy Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, travelled to flood-stricken areas in Mon and Kayin states on 24 July with his contingent to provide humanitarian aid and meet with villagers sheltering from the floods caused by continuous rain that has been falling since 22 July.

Their first stop was Bilin Township in Mon State, where they met with members of the local Disaster Management Group and local elders and discussed the current state of flooding, losses and damages from the floods, regional humanitarian protection and requirements for reducing natural disasters, providing of life jackets for children wading through streams and creeks to attend school, and the immediate fixing of bridges connecting nearby villages.

Next, they arrived at Pyinthar Flood Relief Centre and Basic Education Middle School 2 Flood Relief Centre and provided seven-day worth of rice, cooking oil, canned fish, instant noodles, soy milk and snacks for children, all worth Ks900,000, to the 1,043 local residents seeking shelter there.

On 25 July, the Deputy Minister and his contingent travelled to Hpa-an in Kayin State and met with Kayin State Chief Minister Daw Nan Khin Htwe Myint and her state government cabinet at the state government building and discussed requirements in region and union-level support. The National Disaster Management Committee then transferred Ks100 million from their funds to the State Disaster Management Committee fund and provided financial aid for purchasing rice for the 16,792 local residents seeking shelter from Hpa-an, Hlaingbwe, Kawkareik and Myawady. Next, they visited local residents seeking shelter in the cyclone shelter and in the indoor stadium in Hpa-an, and provided food for the people in addition to monetary support for mothers and their children.

The Deputy Minister and his contingent then travelled to Hlaingbwe and met with local residents seeking shelter at the cyclone shelter and nursery school and provided humanitarian aid.

In the evening, they travelled to Dhamma Thukha Monastic School in Kyaikdon, Kayin State, and provided monetary support and food supplies to the 101 local residents seeking shelter there.

Next, they travelled to Myawady and met with the township disaster management group and local elders. They discussed the status of flooding in the area and aid received from the ministry, the need for cooperation between the public and other relevant entities in order to properly resist and react to natural disasters, and future plans to provide emergency motorboats, lifejackets for students, and emergency tents.

The Deputy Minister and his contingent then visited the Kyuntaw Zay Flood Relief Centre and met with the 140 local residents seeking shelter there. They gave words of encouragement and provided humanitarian aid to the people and managed the water pumps to pump out water from areas with no natural downflow.

As of today, humanitarian aid provided to flood victims in Kayin State includes Ks100 million from the National Disaster Management Committee funds, Ks29.5 million from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement's emergency funds, Ks360,000 for mother and child support, 50,000 packets of water purifying agents, 50,000 packets of rehydration salts, and five water pumps for removing impurities from wells. Additional humanitarian support will be provided for other flood-stricken areas in Kayin State.—Myanmar News Agency ■

Deputy Minister U Soe Aung provides assistance to locals affected by flooding in Kayin State. **PHOTO: MNA**

Vice President addresses statistics central committee

VICE President U Henry Van Thio, Chairman of the Central Committee for Accurate and High Quality Statistics, addressed the committee's meeting held in the meeting hall of the Ministry of Planning and Finance and yesterday morning.

Vice President U Henry Van Thio delivers the speech at the statistics central committee's meeting 1/2018 in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

Present at the meeting were members of the Central Committee for Accurate and High Quality Statistics Union Ministers U Ohn Win, U Win Khaing, U Khin Maung Cho, Dr. Than Myint and U Soe Win, Deputy Ministers U Tha Oo, ministers of planning and finance of Nay Pyi Taw Council, states and regions, Central Bank of Myanmar Deputy Governor, statisticians, heads of statistical work groups implementing National Strategy for Development of Statistics (NSDS), Permanent Secretaries, Directors General and officials. At the meeting, the Vice President said the statistical committee formed by presidential notification 7/2016 held six meetings, and now the Central Committee for Accurate and High Quality Statistics formed by Union Government notification 74/2018 with Union Ministers related to statistics participating as central committee members has become a more complete committee. It was reformed according to the Statistics Law (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Law 1/2018) enacted by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on 22 January.

Accurate statistics are very important for developed countries as well as developing countries. Only when the quality of the national statistics is good can the policy makers, private businesses and socio-economic researchers obtain facts to set up policies and projects that create a good economic environment. Resources can be effectively divided and monitoring of projects can be conducted. If there is a need to amend policy, better amendments can be conducted. As business persons are investing based on facts, they can properly conduct risk management.

Not having accurate and reliable data results in wrong distribution of resources as well as making wrong policies and decisions affecting much on the socio-economic development of the people. All are urged to emphasise establishing human resources, constructing a network for accurate statistics, with special emphasis placed on cooperation mechanisms and Statistics Literacy to achieve accurate statistics.

The Central Committee is tasked to set up statistical policies and basic regulations. It needs to lead in setting up, implementing and guiding NSDS. Managing, guiding and coordinating census, assessment and other statistical matters for socio-economic development are to be conducted.

The core strategies of the National Strategy for Development of Statistics (NSDS) for drawing up and implementing Statistical Policy Briefs was approved in 2016. The State Counsellor had also advised on the importance of accurate and qualified statistics on the country and to support implementation of NSDS. In working for statistical sector development, ministries need to have horizontal cooperation as well as vertical cooperation. For horizontal cooperation, 10 work groups organised by statistical sector were formed. Relevant work groups are keeping the NSDS Action Plan as a living document and implementing it.

Relevant Union ministers also need to encourage and guide the relevant statistical work groups. Commerce ministers from state and region governments are under the central committee and at the relevant state and region levels they are forming committees for accurate statistics and good administrative records and are starting vertical cooperation.

The President urged committee members to conduct reform works systematically in his New Year message. It is important to have accurate statistics, and since the Statistics Law has been enacted, accuracy of statistics must be effectively conducted.

According to the Statistics Law, the Central Statistical Organization is the statistical authority and also supprorts the work of the committee as its secretariat. The accuracy of statistics is the basis for a country's development and statistics need to be available, trustworthy, solid and on time. Only then can statistics reflect the present economic and social situation. The setting of practical policies that fulfill the requirements of the people could not be done without accurate and qualified statistics. It is important in searching and exposing sectors lagging in development and priority places and regions.

Accurate statistics are required for practical projects and government departments need to cooperate with private sector, research organisations, experts, civil society organisations and news media in improving the country's statistical sector.

Accurate and qualified statistics increase trust between the government and the people and with the international community. The country needs to conduct surveys to develop the statistical sector as in other countries and administrative records of departments must be accurate, complete and include detailed information. The habit and practice considering the detailed and systematic recording of statistics as an unnecessary work need to be changed. Not only government departments, but the people, private business and organisations need to be disseminated with Statistical Literacy.

Our country is a developing country and it is important to use investment in statistics effectively. Committee members and work groups are urged to participate enthusiastically because data can be converted to policy as per the sentence "From Data to Policy" and the result of investment in statistics is huge said the Vice President. Next, Central Committee for Accurate and High Quality Statistics Vice Chairman Union Minister U Soe Win explained and discussed about accurate and high quality statistics. Afterwards, Central Committee for Accurate and High Quality Statistics secretary Central Statistical Organization Director General Dr. Wah Wah Maung explained about completed and future work of the committee and Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department Deputy Director General U Wai Lin Maung explained about the 2018 animal census work.

Union Ministers U Win Khaing, Dr. Than Myint and U Ohn Win, Deputy Minister U Tha Oo, Central Bank of Myanmar Deputy Governor U Soe Thein, Nay Pyi Taw Council member U Tin Tun, states and regions ministers of planning and finance, heads of work groups and officials discussed by relevant sectors on accurate and high quality statistics.

Finally, Chairman of the Central Committee for Accurate and High Quality Statistics Vice President U Henry Van Thio gave comments on the dicussions and provided advice to ensure coordination.—Myanmar News Agency

Union Attorney-General receives International Commission of Jurists Legal Consultant

UNION Attorney-General U Tun Tun Oo received Legal Consultant for the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) Mr. Sean Bain and his delegation at the UAG Office yesterday.

During the meeting, they discussed the implementation of the UAG Office's strategic plans for the rule of law.—MNA ■

Union Attorney-General U Tun Tun Oo meets with ICJ Legal Consultant Mr. Sean Bain in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

27 JULY 2018
THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Save our mangrove forests

COASTAL mangroves are among the most threatened ecosystems on earth. Current estimates indicate that up to 67 per cent of mangroves have been lost to date, and nearly all unprotected mangroves could perish over the next 100 years.

On the day of International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystems which falls on 26 July, we would like to remind our people about what the environmentalists are telling us — that Myanmar's mangrove resources are declining because of the proliferation of fish farms and because the mangrove trees are being used as firewood.

The primary threats to all mangrove species are habitat destruction and removal of mangrove areas for conversion to aquaculture, agriculture, urban and coastal development, and overexploitation. Of these, clear-felling, aquaculture and over-exploitation of fisheries in mangroves are expected to be the greatest threats to mangrove species over the next 10 to 15 years.

The lack of systematic management of coastal ecosystems can lead to deterioration of the ecosystems due to extra extraction of the natural resources and will result in decreasing marine products and environmental services.

On this day, we should be aware that the development work being carried out in coastal areas should be in conformity with the rules drawn for conservation of the coastal areas.

Environmental impact assessments on our coastal areas, which stretch up to 2,832 kilometers, abound with important natural ecosystems in the environs of the Indian Ocean. It is important to draw up plans based on the findings of these assessments.

There are over 500,000 hectares of mangroves along the coast of Myanmar.

According to the 2014 census, half of the population of Myanmar live in coastal areas and are dependent on the coastal ecosystems which serve them in many ways through marine products and environmental services.

The lack of systematic management of coastal ecosystems can lead to deterioration of the ecosystems due to extra extraction of the natural resources and will result in decreasing marine products and environmental services.

Hence, local authorities and local people in the coastal areas are urged to cooperate with each other in carrying out environmental conservation to prevent damage to the ecosystems, which include mangrove forests, coral reefs and marine grasses.

Now is the time to fight back, to protect and preserve our mangrove forests, which have suffered from human activities and the ravages of extreme weather patterns.

One method is mangrove replanting to mitigate the effects of climate change. This stabilises the coastline soil and nurtures a variety of sea life.

It is time that we preserve our mangrove forests.

We have to learn how to protect mangroves and use them in sustainable ways.

When we build infrastructure for sustainable development in coastal areas, we should go through negotiations on behalf of our valuable mangrove forests.

Ordination Festival in the month of Waso

By Maha Saddhamma Jotika Dhaja
Sithu Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt

WASO is the first month of the rainy season. Its astrological name is Kataka (cancer) and its symbol is crab. This year 1380 ME (Myanmar Era), there are two Waso months — the first Waso and the second Waso. So this year is Wahtat year. It is in the second Waso month that all religious and social-cultural festivities take place.

Before Theravada Buddhism arrived and spread across the country, this month was called "Nweta" meaning the month of measuring land for ploughing. Early stone inscriptions of ancient Bagan mention Waso as "Nweta".

After the arrival of Theravada Buddhism and its aids spread, thanks to the joint efforts of King Anawrahta (1044-1077 AD) and Primate Shin Arahan, the month came to acquire "Waso" — Wa vow taking month by Buddhist monks to stay in the residing monastery, during the rain retreat, so as to protect natural environment and not to disturb cultivation at work.

The full moon day of Waso is one of the important days in Buddhist history because it was on this day that four great events of Lord Buddha's life took place. Firstly, it was on the full moon day of Waso Thursday that Prince Siddhartha (the Buddha to be) was conceived in the womb of Queen Maha Maya, the chief Queen of King Suddodana of Kapilavasu kingdom. Secondly, it was on the full moon day of Waso Monday that Prince Siddhartha at the age of 29 years, after seeing the four omens, renounced his mundane life and left his wife, son and palace for the forest to become a recluse. Thirdly, it was on the full moon day of Waso Saturday that Lord Buddha gave his first sermon "Dhammacakya" to the five recluses namely Kondana, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahanam, and Assaji, in the deer park "Midadawunna". Fourthly, it was on the full moon day of Waso that Lord Buddha under the mango tree in Sawutte city showed his miracles to the infidles to subdue them. Myanmar Buddhists observe the Dhammacakya Day on Full moon day of Waso by group-reciting or chanting of Dhammacakya Sutta.

Waso is the month of festivals Waso vow taking festival, Waso robe offering festival, Waso flowers and candles offering festival. But the most important and designated festival of Waso is the ordination festival.

Sangha Order (the body of monks) has to be recruited for the propagation and perpetuation of Buddha Sasana. There are two ways of recruiting new blood — novitiation and ordination. Novices or beginners are recruited from young generation, 5 year or 7 year old up to 19 year old youths. They are Samane in Pali, Koyin in Myanmar. From 19 years plus, males are recruited by ordination. Ordained young monks are called Upazin and elderly monks are called Phonegyi.

Both novitiation and ordination recruitments have historical background traceable to Buddha's life time. At the request of his father King Sudhodana, Lord Buddha came to the city of Kapilavatus. The king held feasts to welcome his son Lord Buddha. At the offering of lunch to Lord Buddha and his disciple monks, his ex-queen Yasodaya and son Rahula were present. Yasodaya told her son of about 7 years, "Rahula, that Lord Buddha is your father; he would not succeed to the throne. It is you who will succeed to the throne. Go to him and ask for patrimony. He has pots of gold. Rahula obeyed by expectedly asking patrimony from Lord Buddha. When Lord Buddha returned to His Vihara monastery, Rahula with his playmates of his age followed suit, expectantly asking for patrimony. When Buddha heard it, he said, "The only patrimony I can give you is my Dhamma. So saying, he novitiated his son Rahula Samane "beginner". All his playmates joined him. They became young recruits in Buddha Sasana.

Waso is the month of festivals Waso vow taking festival, Waso robe offering festival, Waso flowers and candles offering festival. But the most important and designated festival of Waso is the ordination festival.

Regarding the recruitment by ordination when Emperor Asoka became a Buddhist after fighting many wars of unifying his empire, causing untold bloodshed and loss of lives, thanks to the Dhamma Teaching of Ashin Moggaliputtasitha, carried out works of religious and social merits such as 84000 water tanks and water reservoirs, 84000 pagodas, monasteries in keeping with the 84000 bodies of Buddha Dhamma. He also sent out Buddhist mission to 9 places and 9 countries.

One day Asoka asked Moggaliputtasitha whether he, Asoka, deserved to be inheritor of Buddha Dhamma, "No, Your Majesty. Your works deserve you as supporter of Buddha Dhamma. If you want to be inheritor of Dhamma, you become a monk and preach Dhamma or make your children monk and let them preach Dhamma. Then only you deserve to be the inheritor of Dhamma.

When upon Asoka's son Maheinda and daughter Samghamitta asked Asoka to ordain them monks. They took Buddha Sasana to Lankadipa (Sri Lanka) and planted south branch of the Bodi Tree of Bodhagaya, India. After Buddhism declined in India, it flourished in Sri Lanka. Thanks to the support of the people and royal patronage of Buddhist kings of Sri Lanka, Buddhism spread overseas. Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia became Theravada and sub-commentaries were sent to these countries.

Novitiation and ordination can take place any time, any month and in any place. But because the youngest recluse Kondinya became bhikhu ordained monk after hearing and understanding of Lord Buddha's Dhammacakya on the full moon day of waso, Myanmar Buddhists designated Waso month and full moon day of Waso as the month of ordination festival and ordination day.

Parents of novices and monks who have willingly performed novitiation or ordination receive Prefixes "Shin Dakar", "Shin Ama", "Rahan Dakar" and "Rahan Ama" to their names. Myanmar kings honoured them by granting certain tax and hard labour immunity. When they pass away, their bodies are honoured by being carried with two decorative gold umbrella shading.

Myanmar kings held novitiation, ordination and Waso robe offering in the month of Waso without fail. All expenses were paid by the Royal Treasury. That tradition is kept till today in Myanmar.

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Flood Bulletin

(Issued at 13:00 hrs MST on 26-7-2018)

Flood condition of Thanlwin River

According to the (12:30) hrs MST observation today, the water level of Thanlwin River has exceeded by about (3) feet at Hpa-an above its danger level. It may continue to rise about (½) foot during the next (2) days and may remain above its danger level.

Flood condition of Sittoung River

According to the (12:30) hrs MST observation today, the water level of Sittoung River has exceeded by about (4½) feet at Madauk above its danger level and may remain above its danger level during the next (3) days.

Flood condition of Bago River

According to the (12:30) hrs MST observation today, the water level of Bago River has exceeded by about (1½) feet at Bago above its danger level. It may continue to rise about (½) foot during the next (1) day and may remain above its danger level.

Flood condition of Shwegyin River

According to the (12:30) hrs MST observation today, the water level of Shwegyin River has exceeded by about (2½) feet at Shwegyin above its danger level. It may continue to rise about (½) foot during the next (1) day and may remain above its danger level.

Advisory

It is especially advised that the people who have settled near the river banks and low lying areas in Hpa-an, Bago, Shwegyin, and Madauk townships to take precautionary measures.

Flood Warning

(Issued at 13:00 hrs MST on 26-7-2018)

According to the (12:30) hrs MST observation today, the water level of Sittoung River at Taungoo is observed as about (2)feet below its danger level. It may reach its danger level during the next (2) days.

It is especially advised that the people who have settled near the river banks and low lying areas at Taungoo Township, to take precautionary measures.

Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Thursday 26th July, 2018)

BAY INFERENCE: Monsoon is moderate to strong over the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.
FORECAST VALID UNTIL AFTERNOON OF THE 27th JULY, 2018: Rain or thundershowers will be scattered in Lower Sagaing, Mandalay and Magway regions and widespread in the remaining regions and states with regionally heavy falls in Rakhine, Kayin and Mon states and isolated heavy falls in Nay Pyi Taw, Bago and Yangon regions. Degree of certainty is (100%).
STATE OF THE SEA: Squalls with moderate to rough seas are likely at times off and along Myanmar Coasts. Surface wind speed in squalls may reach (35)mph. Wave height will be about (7 -10)feet off and along Myanmar Coasts.

BRICS business forum opens in Johannesburg

JOHANNESBURG — The curtain of the BRICS Business Forum, which is part of the 10th BRICS Summit, was raised in Johannesburg on Wednesday.

According to organizers, about 1,000 delegates, including heads of state, from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa gathered at the Sandton Convention Center for the event.

They deliberated on the current global political economy and its implications for BRICS member countries and the impact of the 4th industrial revolution on inclusive growth and transformation. Issues concerning facilitating intra-BRICS trade and fostering BRIC-Africa partnerships are also on agenda.

Addressing the forum, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said this year marks a decade of BRICS collaboration, during which the BRICS countries have successfully shaped an ambitious agenda for development that recognizes the great potential the countries possess for collective action.

Chinese President Xi Jinping delivers a speech titled "Keeping Abreast of the Trend of the Times to Achieve Common Development" at the BRICS Business Forum in Johannesburg, South Africa on 25 July 2018. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

Intra-BRICS cooperation has been gaining momentum in areas such as finance, agriculture, trade, combating transnational crime, science and technology, health, education, security and academic dialogue, according to Ramaphosa.

He said that the forum provided a platform to harness the benefits of globalization and to confront the challenges it presents. "As South Africa, we have acknowledged that to effectively deal with poverty, unemployment and inequality, we need to significantly increase the level of investment in our economy to lift growth and create jobs."

Ramaphosa said South Africa was seeking to reinforce the strong bonds that the country developed with the BRICS partners by expanding investment into the country.—Xinhua ■

Saudi suspends oil shipments via Bab el-Mandeb strait after Houthi attack

RIYADH — Saudi Arabia announced on Wednesday the suspension of all crude oil shipments through the strait of Bab el-Mandeb, Al Arabiya local news reported.

The decision to seal off the strait was made in response to a Houthi attack on two giant Saudi oil tankers passing through the strait in the Red Sea on Wednesday morning, according to Khalid Al-Falih, Saudi minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources. The attack caused minor damage to one of the two tankers, Al-Falih said, adding that the ban would continue until navigation through the strait could be secured. The Saudi-led Arab coalition intervened in Yemen's conflict in March 2015 to roll back Iran-allied Houthi rebels and reinstate exiled government of President Abdu-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. —Xinhua ■

More than 220 dead in IS attacks on southern Syria

BEIRUT — A string of suicide blasts and raids claimed by the Islamic State group killed more than 220 people in southern Syria on Wednesday, in one of the jihadists' deadliest ever assaults in the country.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the attacks hit several areas of the largely government-held southern province of Sweida, where IS retains a presence in a northeastern desert region.

The bloodshed came almost a week into a Russia-backed regime campaign to oust IS fighters from a holdout in a neighbouring province of the country's south.

IS claimed responsibility for the violence, saying "soldiers of the caliphate" attacked Syrian government positions and security outposts in Sweida city, then detonated explosive belts.

The Britain-based Observatory said four suicide bombers targeted Sweida city while others hit small villages to the north and east and shot residents in their homes.

At least 221 people were killed, including 127 civilians, the Observatory said.

The remaining 94 dead were pro-regime fighters, mostly residents who took up arms to defend their homes, it said.

The overwhelming majority of the dead "were in (Sweida's) northern countryside, where the bodies of civilians executed inside their homes were found," Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

Sweida, whose residents are mostly from the Druze minority, has been relatively insulated from the war that has ravaged the rest of the country since 2011.

"It's the bloodiest death toll in Sweida province since the start of the war" and one of the deadliest ever IS attacks in Syria, the Observatory chief said.

He said regime forces eventually ousted IS from several villages its fighters had seized and put an end to the attacks.

"Some residents who fled the attacks on their villages are returning and finding people dead in their homes," Abdel Rahman said. At least 38 IS fighters were also killed, including the suicide attackers.

A handout picture released by the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) on July 25, 2018 shows a member of the Syrian security forces walking past a truck damaged in a suicide attack in the southern city of Sweida. **PHOTO: AFP**

Abandoned shoes

State media confirmed the attacks had killed and wounded people in Sweida city and villages to the north and east but did not give a specific toll.

"Today's crime shows that countries supporting terrorism are trying to breathe life back into the terrorist organisation to keep it as a card in their hand that they will use to achieve political gains," Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said as he received Russia's envoy to Syria Alexander Lavrentiev.

"These attempts will only succeed in... shedding more innocent blood," he added, in comments carried on his social media accounts. Omar, a resident of Sweida city, told AFP explosions began rocking the city around 5:30 am local time (0230 GMT).

"The blast was sudden and unexpected. Never in its history has Sweida seen such a tough day," he told AFP.

State news agency SANA published images from the city of the attack's aftermath, showing a victim's remains sprawled on a staircase near a damaged wall.

Abandoned shoes lay in the middle of the road among fruit that had spilt out of cartons.

An eyewitness said Sweida's national hospital was "packed".

He said he saw "people bringing in a lot of wounded in their own private cars.. Others were coming to the hospital to ask if loved ones they had lost track of were there".

The UN's humanitarian coordinator in Syria Ali al-Zaatari condemned the "terrorist bombing in Sweida city", saying all civilians should be protected.

Government ally Russia said the IS attacks "confirm the need for energetic and coordinated efforts by the international community to eradicate this universal evil from Syrian territory".

Pro-government forces ousted IS from urban centres in eastern Syria last year, but IS raids in recent months have killed dozens of regime and allied fighters.—AFP ■

Trump postpones Putin visit as Pompeo defends US stance on Russia

WASHINGTON — US President Donald Trump on Wednesday delayed a second summit with Russia's Vladimir Putin, while his top diplomat insisted there was no let up against Moscow following the two leaders' controversial meeting in Helsinki.

Facing mounting calls to release the details of Trump's closed-door talks with Putin, the US administration stepped up its damage control operation, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo going before Congress to defend his boss.

The US president himself, under fire for plans to invite Putin to the White House in the fall, opted to delay until 2019 — pushing the talks back until Robert Mueller has completed his probe into Moscow's election interference, according to National Security Advisor John Bolton.

And Pompeo went on the offensive to stress steps Trump has taken to show resolve against the Kremlin, stepping into a white-hot spotlight during a three-hour grilling by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The top diplomat said he would back bipartisan efforts in Congress to slap new sanctions on Russia in response to their meddling in the 2016 US election, and as a deterrent against meddling this year or in 2020.

"I personally made clear to the Russians that there will be severe consequences for interference in our democratic processes," he said in his opening statement.

US President Donald Trump (L) and Russia's President Vladimir Putin shake hands before a joint press conference after their summit in Helsinki. **PHOTO:AFP**

But Pompeo remained frustratingly vague about perhaps the biggest question of all: what transpired in the private meeting between Trump and Putin?

Pompeo reaffirmed as official policy that the United States "rejects Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea" — an issue on which Trump had appeared to waver. And with the US president accused — including by members of his own Republican Party — of casting doubt on the alliance's founding principle of mutual defense, Pompeo sought to smooth ruffled feathers.

"NATO will remain an indispensable pillar of American national security," he said. "We know weakness provokes our enemies, but strength and cohesion protect us."

On the North Korea front, Pompeo also struck a resolute tone, warning that Washington will not let nuclear negotiations drag on with no success, amid criticism that Trump's June Singapore summit with Kim Jong Un has so far yielded few results.

"We are engaged in patient diplomacy, but we will not let this drag out to no end," Pompeo said. But while he insisted that North Koreans "understand precisely our definition of denuclearization and have agreed to denuclearize," Pompeo also confirmed in the hearing that Pyongyang continues to make nuclear fissile material.

And he said he believes North Korea remains the most urgent national security threat to the United States.

'Submissive and deferential'

Lawmakers — and America's allies around the world -- have been eager to learn the details of Trump's one-on-one July 16 meeting with Putin, including whether Trump made any secret promises to Putin or as-yet-undisclosed verbal agreements. Republicans and Democrats alike have described Trump's performance as a betrayal of US interests and too conciliatory towards the Russian leader.

The hearing quickly turned testy as lawmakers sought details on what exactly transpired in the Finnish capital. "I don't think that's unfair to know," Senator Robert Menendez, the panel's top Democrat, told Pompeo. "Did he tell Putin that he'll release or ultimately relax sanctions?"

"Senator, what you need to conduct your role, your appropriate role, I will provide you today," a steely Pompeo shot back, without answering the question.—AFP ■

Brazil to have more elders than children by 2040

RIO DE JANEIRO — Brazil's population is gradually aging and the country is expected to have more elders than children by 2040, local statistics agency said on Wednesday.

According to Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the share of people older than 65 in Brazil will rise from the current 9.2 per cent to 17.4 per cent in 2040. At the same time, the share of children up to 14 years old, which is currently 21.3 per cent, will fall to 16.8 per cent by 2040.

By 2060, the share of elders in Brazil is expected to reach 25.5 per cent, over a quarter of the entire population, while the share of children up to 14 is expected to have fallen to 14.7 per cent.

This is the result of lengthening lifespan and a fall of fertility rate in Brazil. Fertility rate in Brazil is currently at 1.77 children per woman and is expected to fall to 1.66 children per woman by 2060.

Life expectancy is currently 72.7 years for men and 79.8 years for women, and is projected to rise to 77.9 years for men and 84.2 years for women by 2060.

The median age of the Brazilian population, which is now 32.6 years of age, is expected to surpass 40 years by 2037 and reach 45.6 years by 2060. —Xinhua ■

Police say no conclusion reached on link between Toronto shooter, ISIS

TORONTO — Toronto police Wednesday said there was no evidence showing that the shooting in Toronto Sunday night was connected to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The suspected shooter, 29-year-old Faisal Hussain, is a Toronto resident. He shot and killed two people and injured 13 others in Toronto's Greektown neighborhood Sunday night.

The ISIS, through the group's AMAQ news agency, had claimed responsibility for the Toronto shooting, but did not provide any evidence to support the claim.

Police officers gather at the crime scene in Toronto, Canada, on 23 July 2018 . **PHOTO:XINHUA**

"At this stage, we have no evidence to support these claims," said Toronto police Chief Mark Saunders at a press conference.

"We will continue to explore every investigative avenue including interviewing those who knew Mr. Hussain, reviewing his online activity, and looking into his experiences with mental health," he added.

Meanwhile, Toronto Mayor John Tory cautioned against drawing any conclusions from information circulating on social media. "I would just like to stress that people should rely on the information that is going to be forthcoming over time, including today, from the Toronto Police Service about this," he told reporters. The gun used by Hussain has been traced to the United States and US authorities are helping narrow down its origin, according to CBC Wednesday.

A source said that Hussain attended high school at Toronto's Marc Garneau Collegiate Institute and Victoria Park Collegiate Institute and was apprehended twice by police while he was under age 18, according to CBC.

A police source said investigators recovered a firearm and a computer from Hussain's apartment in the Thorncliffe Park neighborhood where he lived with his mother, father and brother. His neighbors and friends described him as quiet but mild-mannered and always polite. Hussain did not have a criminal record and his prior contact with police did not involve a risk to public safety, according to Toronto police spokesman Meaghan Gray.—Xinhua ■

Rescuers search fire-devastated Greek areas as toll hits 81

ATHENS (GREECE)—At least 81 people died in huge wildfires around Athens, Greek authorities have said, as rescuers scoured scorched homes and burned-out cars for victims of one of the world's deadliest fire outbreaks.

Scores of locals and holidaymakers fled to the sea to try to escape the flames as they tore through towns and villages near the capital stoked by 100-kilometre-per-hour wind gusts, devouring woodland and hundreds of buildings.

Greek media have described the disaster as a "national tragedy", while Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras cut short a visit to Bosnia and announced three days of national mourning.

A young Irishman on honeymoon was among those who died, the British embassy in Greece confirmed.

According to British media, Brian O'Callaghan-Westropp had been on honeymoon in the coastal village of Mati when his car was caught in the wildfires.

Although his new wife Zoe managed to escape to a nearby beach, she was taken to hospital with burns, the reports said.

Fire service spokeswoman Stavroula Maliri said Wednesday that 81 people were now known to have died. The toll surpasses the 77 people killed in the previous deadliest fires in Greece, on the southern island of Evia in 2007.

The world's most deadly forest fires. **PHOTO: AFP**

Apart from the Irishman, the victims included three other tourists -- a Polish mother and her son, as well as a Belgian national whose teenage daughter survived the blaze.

Maliri said firefighters continued to search for bodies after receiving numerous calls reporting people missing.

It is possible that some of those unaccounted for "will be among the victims", Maliri said.

She added that relatives of those missing had been asked to provide DNA samples to help authorities identify bodies.

When the fires broke out on Monday evening, terrified residents and tourists were overtaken by the flames in homes, on foot or in their cars. AFP photographers saw the burnt bodies of people and dogs.

'Wall of flame'

Survivors have given harrowing accounts of fleeing the fast-moving blaze with only the clothes on their backs, as flames engulfed whole towns.

"My husband said we had to leave with our seven-year-old grandson," Kiriaki Alexiadou, a resident of the devastated village of Mati, told AFP.

"We ran to the car as the pine cones were burning on the trees."

Choking back the tears on Wednesday, she pointed to the charred skeleton of a house next to hers.

"The policewoman who lived there, her husband and their two children left on foot towards the sea but they were trapped by this wall of flame."

The burned bodies of 26 people, including small children, were discovered at a villa in Mati, 40 kilometres (25 miles) northeast of Athens, rescuers said.

At least six people died trying to escape the flames into the sea, where some 715 people were evacuated by boat, the government said.

"There was at least 300 of us. The worst thing was the smoke, it hurt to breathe," said Mati resident Sabi Kissov.

Rescue teams on Wednesday were going house to house to search for missing people in the village.

Rain forecast

Volunteers were also doing the rounds to provide food to those whose houses survived relatively unscathed but which have experienced sporadic power cuts since the fire struck.

"In 40 years here we've seen several fires each year" in the hills where Monday's blaze broke out said resident Andreas Matsios. "But we never imagined they would ever reach Mati."

Rain is forecast for the coming days, which will help efforts to douse the flames after temperatures topped 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) on Monday.

But another blaze was threatening houses near the seaside town of Kineta, 25 kilometres west of Athens.

Dozens of firefighters were battling the flames around Kineta aided by helicopters and planes dropping thousands of gallons of water.

Some 187 people were hospitalised after Monday's fires, with 71 still being treated on Wednesday, including almost a dozen children, most of whom were in a "serious condition", the fire services said.

'Armageddon'

Shock was giving way to public anger Wednesday, with several media questioning how such a devastating blaze could have hit a country well used to wildfires.

The opposition Te Nea daily criticised the government's "inability to protext its citizens just a few kilometres from Athens".

The front page of the *Ethnos* newspaper showed a charred Greek flag with the headline: "Armageddon."

Tsipras chaired a meeting of his emergency management committee on Wednesday though no statement was issued.

The European Union activated its Civil Protection Mechanism after Greece sought help. Several countries said they were sending aircraft to help fight the flames.

"Today is a day of great sorrow for the Greek people and for all of Europe," The EU's humanitarian crisis manager Christos Stylianides said on Twitter.

The wildfires come as record temperatures in northern Europe have also seen blazes cause widespread damage in recent days.—AFP ■

Gas giant Linde reports strong Q2 ahead of mega-merger

FRANKFURT AM MAIN — German industrial gases giant Linde on Tuesday reported strong performance in the second quarter, adding that preparations for a hoped-for massive merger with American rival Praxair were in "full swing".

Munich-based Linde said net profits attributable to shareholders reached 429 million euros ($501 million) between April and June, up 53 percent year-on-year.

Operating, or underlying profit as measured by EBIT grew 31 percent, to 623 million euros, on the back of revenues up 1.0 percent at 4.5 billion euros.

Preferring to highlight turnover up 4.7 percent in currency-adjusted terms over the first six months, chief executive Aldo Belloni hailed "encouraging growth in revenue" helping put the group "on the right track" ahead of the Praxair merger.

Revenues and profits at the group's flagship gases division sagged in the second quarter, but were more than made up for by growth at the engineering division, which builds ready-to-use industrial plants.

Looking to its proposed merger with Praxair, Linde said that "the merger control and regulatory processes are in full swing".

Hoping to earn competition authorities' favour for the tie-up, it said earlier this month it had agreed to sell off much of its business in the Americas for $3.3 billion if the deal goes ahead.

Meanwhile, Praxair has promised to offload European businesses worth $5.9 billion on the same terms.

The two groups hope to secure approval and complete the merger — worth around $65 billion — in the second half of the year.

Over the full year, Linde alone expects revenues up to 4.0 percent higher than the 17.1 billion euros achieved in 2017, while shooting for operating profit adjusted for currency effects up to 5.0 percent higher.—AFP ■

Munich-based Linde said net profits attributable to shareholders reached 429 million euros ($501 million) between April and June, up 53 percent year-on-year. **PHOTO: AFP**

Rains hamper search for survivors after Laos dam collapse

ATTAPEU (Laos) — Rescuers battled fresh rains Thursday to reach scores of people still missing after a dam collapse in southern Laos that unleashed a torrent of water, washing away whole villages and killing at least 26 people.

The search for survivors has been hampered by monsoon weather in the remote southern corner of Laos where the Xe-Namnoy dam collapsed on Monday.

Panicked residents took flight, taking refuge on rooftops or making their way to evacuation centres where some said they were given just a few hours' warning of the looming disaster.

Boats and helicopters were dispatched to find people still trapped by the widespread flooding that has left at least 131 missing, with road access cut completely in many areas.

Vietnam dispatched military and medical personnel to support rescue efforts and Thailand said it was sending close to $150,000 in aid.

China's foreign ministry also said it was "willing to promptly provide active support and assistance to the Laos disaster relief work".

Around a dozen Chinese rescuers in helmets and life jackets joined rescuers in Sanamxai town Thursday near the dam site, according to an AFP reporter at the scene.

State media said more than 3,000 people were left homeless by the deluge, many squeezing into makeshift shelters where they recounted the terrifying scramble to escape the swirling brown floodwaters.

Tran Van Bien, 47, from Ban May village near the dam collapse said he was told to evacuate just two hours before the dam burst on Monday evening, running to a neighbour's house with his family as his home quickly filled with water.

"We were on the roof of that house the whole night, cold and scared. At 4:00 am a wooden boat passed and we decided to send my wife and my kid out," he told AFP from a nearby village where he eventually found dry land.

Villagers take to rooftops to escape floodwaters in Attapeu province in Laos. **PHOTO: AFP**

"My wife tied our child to her body, saying if they died, they would die together rather than being alone."

'Insufficient warning'

The $1.2 billion dollar Xe-Namnoy dam, a joint venture between Laos and Korean companies, was still under construction in southern Attepeu province when it collapsed after heavy rains pounded the area earlier this week.

Two South Korean companies involved in the project's construction said damage was reported a day before the auxiliary "Saddle D" dam collapsed.

However a timeline from operator Korea Western Power Co. obtained by AFP said 11 centimetres of subsidence was spotted at the dam's centre as early as Friday.

"It remains unclear what caused the dam to subside in some places and develop cracks. But all of these happened under heavy rains," a Korea Western Power spokesman told AFP.

The 410 MW project is one of more than 50 hydropower plans underway in Laos, which has billed itself as the "Battery of Asia" in its ambitious bid to become a major power exporter in the region.

It has said it wants to double its power generation capacity to 28,000 MW by 2020 and has opened its doors to foreign investors -- mainly from China, Thailand and Vietnam -- to build dams on its vast river network.

But the projects have come under fire by rights groups who say local communities are forcibly displaced and lose key access to river waters for farming and fishing.

"Many of the people affected by the current dam collapse have already suffered other impacts due to dam construction. This tragedy has compounded their suffering," International Rivers said in a statement Thursday.

"Communities were not given sufficient advanced warning to ensure their safety and that of their families.

This event raises major questions about dam standards and dam safety in Laos."—AFP ■

Japanese firm opens Sri Lanka's first solar panel plant

NEW DELHI — A Sri Lankan unit of Japan's renewable energy producer and plant engineering firm reK Co. has begun operating the first solar panel factory in the South Asian island country, aiming to meet demand in the domestic and overseas markets.

JSF Corp., its wholly owned local subsidiary, says it has invested 5 billion rupees ($31.3 million) in the plant in the western province of Katunayake to produce solar panels, inverters and light-emitting diode lighting solutions under the Sakura Solar brand. The local unit, whose name is an acronym of Japan-Sri Lanka friendship, said the factory "will serve as a cornerstone of the government's program aiming to infuse solar energy capacity of 200,000 kilowatts into the national grid by 2020," according to a company statement.

"With Sakura Solar, we are reinventing Sri Lanka's position on renewable energy," Pushpasiri Liyanage, director and CEO of the local unit, said in the statement. "There is a wealth of untapped potential on the island and our technology will provide great benefits to the local industry." The factory, located in the Katunayake Export Processing Zone, is capable of producing solar panels equivalent to 200,000 kilowatts a year on average, exporting 80 percent of its output to Europe, the Middle East, the United States and other regions, according to the subsidiary.—Kyodo News ■

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V STC COLUMBUS VOY. NO. (-)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V STC COLUMBUS VOY. NO. (-) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 26-7-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of MSTL-4 where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S SAO THUY CONSTRUCTION AND DESINGN JSC.

Phone No: 2301928

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V UNI AMPLE VOY. NO. (0251-459)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V UNI AMPLE VOY. NO. (0251-459) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 27-7-2018 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.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S EVERGREEN SHIPPING LINES

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V KUO HSIUNG VOY. NO. (1088 S/N)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V KUO HSIUNG VOY. NO. (1088 S/N)) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 27-7-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.W.P.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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

Phone No: 2301185

Petition urges 'fat-shaming' Netflix series to be scrapped

LOS ANGELES — "Insatiable," a new series on streaming service Netflix, is accused of mocking overweight people, and a petition demanding its withdrawal had garnered more than 125,000 signatures by Tuesday.

The series, which features Alyssa Milano and Debby Ryan and will be on Netflix from August 10, features an overweight teenager who is ridiculed by her classmates. After losing weight, she seeks revenge.

The petition states that the series encourages young women to value "their worth on their bodies," and "perpetuates not only the toxicity of diet culture, but the objectification of women's bodies."

"We still have time to stop this series from being released, and causing a devastation of self-doubt in the minds of young girls who will think that to be happy and be worthy, they need to lose weight," it says.

Debby Ryan defended the series on her Instagram account.

"As someone who cares deeply about the way our bodies, especially women's, are shamed and policed in society, I was so excited to work on Insatiable because it's a show that addresses and confronts those ideas through satire," wrote Ryan. She spoke of "twelve years into my own struggles with body image, struggles that took me in and out of terrible places I never want to go again."

"The redemption is in identifying the bullies and saying 'this is not OK,'" Ryan said.

Her character "undergoes a physical transformation, but doesn't make her happy. We're not in the business of fat shaming. We're out to turn a sharp eye on broken, harmful systems that equate thinness with worth."

Netflix did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The streaming giant has already been the subject of controversy in recent months for the series "13 Reasons Why," accused of encouraging suicide in adolescents.—AFP ■

Alyssa Milano stars in Netflix "Insatiable," which critics accuse of bodyshaming overweight people. **PHOTO: AFP**

Disney invests in bear market with 'Christopher Robin'

LOS ANGELES — "Sometimes the smallest things take the most room in your heart," a wise little bear once remarked -- and Jim Cummings has put his heart and soul into playing Winnie the Pooh for three decades.

The 65-year-old American voice actor has been playing the Disney character based on the stories of English novelist A.A. Milne since "The New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh" in 1988.

After more than a dozen movies and various other television and video game appearances, Cummings plays Pooh and his bouncy feline friend Tigger in their first live-action outing, the upcoming "Christopher Robin."

"These guys are extremely special. Everybody says, 'Who's your favorite? Who's your all-time favorite?' First of all, I don't have 'a' favorite but, if I had two, it would be Pooh and Tigger," Cummings said.

"They're kind of in their own class, their own category. They're on their own shelf and everybody else isn't."

Disney's history with A.A. Milne's characters dates back to 1966 when the studio released the animated short "Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree," featuring the character Christopher Robin, based on the author's son.

In the new live action adventure, the young boy who embarked on countless adventures in the Hundred Acre Wood with his band of spirited and lovable stuffed animals, has grown up and lost his way.

Rabbit, Winnie The Pooh, Eeyore and Tigger pose for photos as Winnie The Pooh receives a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on 11 April 2006. **PHOTO: AFP**

'Stealth celebrity'

It is up to his childhood friends to venture into the world of humans and help Christopher Robin remember the loving and playful boy who is still inside.

Starring Ewan McGregor ("Fargo") and Hayley Atwell ("Agent Carter") as Christopher Robin and his wife Evelyn, Marc Forster's version of the fuzzy, ursine joy bundle hits US theaters on Friday of next week.

Born and raised in Youngstown, Ohio, Cummings spent Saturday mornings as a child riveted to the television, mimicking his favorite cartoon characters and dreaming that one day he would voice them himself.

The recipient of two Daytime Emmy nominations for his television work, his many movie credits include "Shrek," "Who Framed Roger Rabbit" -- and most of the Disney animated movies you can think of.

Cummings has appeared in almost 400 roles -- from family favorites like Sonic the Hedgehog, Captain Caveman and the Tasmanian Devil to Marvel characters Iron Man, Ghost and Thanos -- but he enjoys relative anonymity.

"When I was a kid I wanted to be facially famous. I joke around and say, 'Well anybody could win an Oscar or an Emmy if they use their face,' Cummings laughs.—AFP ■

'Hamilton' to be celebrated at Kennedy Center Honors

WASHINGTON — The groundbreaking musical "Hamilton" will be celebrated this year at the Kennedy Center Honors, one of America's top celebrations of the arts -- the first time a work rather than an individual or group is recognized.

The Kennedy Center, the performing arts complex in Washington that serves as a living monument to slain president John F. Kennedy, announced Wednesday that it will also honor leading composer Philip Glass, pop superstar Cher, country crooner Reba McEntire and jazz saxophonist Wayne Shorter on December 2.

The Kennedy Center Honors traditionally take place in the presence of the president but Donald Trump, despised by many cultural and entertainment figures, skipped the gala evening last year.

The 2018 edition looks unlikely to be any different as both "Hamilton" creator Lin-Manuel Miranda and Cher are vociferous critics of Trump.

"Hamilton," a production of which recently opened at the Kennedy Center, is still one of the hottest tickets on Broadway, years after its 2015 premiere.

The musical tells the story of Alexander Hamilton and fellow founding fathers of the United States -- but through the lens of modern, multiethnic America, with rap and hip-hop numbers mixed in with more traditional show tunes.

The Kennedy Center said in a statement that it was recognizing the "trailblazing creators of a transformative work that defies category."

"This year's slate of honorees represents the pinnacle of our nation's originality and the rich mosaic of diverse perspectives and art forms that has come to define who we are as a people," Kennedy Center president Deborah Rutter said.

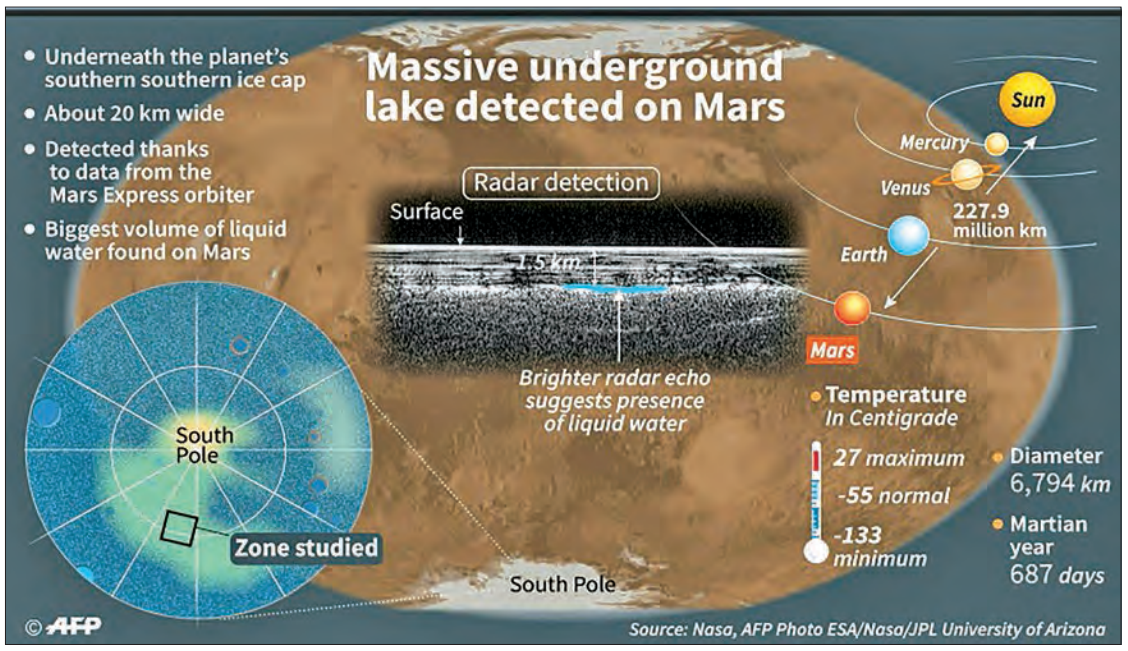
The 81-year-old Glass, generally considered the foremost living US composer, earlier this year made his performance debut at the Kennedy Center, testing himself by appearing as a pianist.

Cher, 72, is the former half of folk duo Sonny and Cher, who has transformed herself into a concert-packing pop performer and Oscar-winning actress.

She holds the record for the longest gap between number-one songs on the US chart at nearly 25 years, and is currently starring in a sequel to the Abba film musical "Mamma Mia!" Shorter, 84, performed with Miles Davis and went on to become a leading bandleader and improviser on both soprano and tenor saxophone, including with his group Weather Report.

McEntire became a top country star in the 1980s, originally with a sound that blended pop and gradually with a more traditional sound.—AFP ■

Liquid water lake discovered on Mars



A fact file about the huge liquid-water lake discovered under the surface of Mars. **PHOTO: AFP**

TAMPA — A massive underground lake has been detected for the first time on Mars, raising hopes that more water — and maybe even life — exists there, international astronomers said Wednesday.

Located under a layer of Martian ice, the lake is about 12 miles (20 kilometers) wide, said the report in the US journal *Science*. It is the largest body of liquid water ever found on the Red Planet.

"Water is there. We have no more doubt," co-author Enrico Flamini, the Italian space agency's Mars Express mission manager, told a press conference.

Mars is now cold, barren and dry but it used to be warm and wet. It was home to plenty of liquid water and lakes at least 3.6 billion years ago.

Scientists are eager to find signs of contemporary water, because such discoveries are key to unlocking the mystery of whether life ever formed on Mars in its ancient past, and whether it might persist today.

"This is a stunning result that suggests water on Mars is not a temporary trickle like previous discoveries but a persistent body of water that provides the conditions for life for extended periods of time," said Alan Duffy, an associate professor at Swinburne University in Australia, who was not involved in the study.

Being able to access water sources could also help humans survive on a future crewed mission to Earth's neighboring planet, with NASA aiming to send explorers in the 2030s.

This particular lake, however, would be neither swimmable nor drinkable, and it lies almost a mile deep (1.6 kilometers) beneath the icy surface in a harsh and frigid environment.

Whether microbial forms of life could lie within is a matter of debate. Some experts are skeptical of the possibility since the lake is so cold and briny, mixed with a heavy dose of dissolved Martian salts and minerals.

The temperature is likely below the freezing point of pure water, but the lake can remain liquid due to the presence of magnesium, calcium and sodium.

"This is a discovery of extraordinary significance, and is bound to heighten speculation about the presence of living organisms on the Red Planet," said Fred Watson of the Australian Astronomical Observatory.

"Caution needs to be exercised, however, as the concentration of salts needed to keep the water liquid could be fatal for any microbial life similar to Earth's," added Watson, who was not involved in the research.

Radar detection

The discovery was made using a radar instrument on board the European Space Agency's Mars Express orbiter, which launched in 2003.

The tool is called the Mars Advanced Radar for Subsurface and Ionosphere Sounding (MARSIS), and was designed to find subsurface water by sending radar pulses that penetrate the surface and ice caps.

MARSIS "then measures how the radio waves propagate and reflect back to the spacecraft," said the study.

These reflections "provide scientists with information about what lies beneath the surface."

A team of researchers led by Roberto Orosei of the National Institute for Astrophysics in Bologna, Italy, surveyed a region called Planum Australe, located in the southern ice cap of Mars, from May 2012 until December 2015. A total of 29 sets of radar samplings showed a "very sharp change in its associated radar signal," allowing scientists to map the outlines of the lake.

"The radar profile of this area is similar to that of lakes of liquid water found beneath the Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets on Earth, suggesting that there is a subglacial lake at this location on Mars," said the report.

Researchers said they are not sure how far down it goes, but that it may be around three feet (one meter) deep. —AFP ■

Slow fluid drainage in brain linked to Alzheimer

WASHINGTON — Scientists at Virginia Tech and the University of Virginia revealed one underlying mechanism of brain aging and age-related Alzheimer's.

A study published on Wednesday in the journal *Nature* reported that meningeal lymphatic vessels in the brain might play a key role in keeping a healthy fluid balance in brains, offering a new therapeutic target.

Researchers have found that these vessels drain fluid from the central nervous system into the cervical lymph nodes and the dysfunction of that drainage aggravates cognitive decline, causing Alzheimer's disease pathology.

"Our results showed that someday this method could be used as a potential treatment to help alleviate the effects not only of Alzheimer's, but also other age-related cognitive ailments," said Virginia Tech's Jennifer Munson, a study co-author.

When the researchers treated healthy aged mice with a molecule that increased meningeal lymphatic vessel size and fluid flow within those vessels, the mice showed improved performance on learning and memory tasks.

"As you age, the fluid movement in your brain slows, sometimes to a pace that's half of what it was when you were younger," said Munson.

"We discovered that the proteins responsible for Alzheimer's actually do get drained through these lymphatic vessels in the brain along with other cellular debris, so any decrease in flow is going to affect that protein build-up."

The researchers engineered a hydrogel that can swell those lymphatic vessels, and as a result, the bulk flow of fluid in the brain actually increased, rendering a positive effect on cognitive abilities.

They expected to use similar hydrogels in future studies as a noninvasive method to alter flow in the brain. — Xinhua ■

Graphic depicting sections of human brain **PHOTO: XINHUA**

Scientists seek end to 'unscientific' HIV laws

AMSTERDAM — AIDS experts called Wednesday for an end to laws that can see HIV-positive people jailed for exposing others to the virus, saying the approach was "unscientific" and worsening the killer epidemic.

At least 68 countries have legislation that criminalises HIV "non-disclosure", exposure, or transmission, two dozen scientists wrote in a "consensus statement" released at the 22nd International AIDS Conference in Amsterdam. The document, simultaneously published in the *Journal of the International AIDS Society* (IAS), was signed by HIV co-discoverer Francoise Barre-Sinoussi and IAS president Linda-Gail Bekker, among others. "These laws are ineffective and unwarranted," Bekker told journalists in the Dutch capital. "Rather than reducing HIV infection or protecting anyone, these ill-conceived laws most likely make the epidemic worse by driving people... away from the information and services and indeed into hiding," she said. The statement is meant to serve as a synthesis of up-to-date scientific evidence of how HIV can, and cannot, be transmitted. It concludes that jailing people for exposing others to the virus cannot be backed by science. To begin with, the immune system-wrecking virus that causes AIDS "is not easily transmitted from one person to another," the experts say.

It cannot be passed on if a condom was correctly used and did not break during sex, while people in whom the virus is suppressed thanks to anti-retroviral therapy, can most likely not pass it on. HIV-negative people who use the same drugs as a preventive measure also have a lower chance of getting HIV. But even if none of these conditions are met, the chances of infection from a single sexual contact, though possible, are "low", the experts concurred.—AFP ■

Myanmar U-16 men's football team to play at AFF U-16 Championship

THE U-16 men's football team of Myanmar leaves for Surabaya City, Indonesia, today, to play at ASEAN Football Federation -(AFF) U-16 Championship 2018.

The (AFF) U-16 Championship is an annual international youth association football championship organized by the ASEAN Football Federation for men's under-16 national teams of Southeast Asia.

A total of 11 teams, dividing into two groups, will play in the tournament, with players born on or after 1 January 2003 eligible to participate.

Group A is comprised of six teams — the host Indonesia, Viet Nam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Timor-Leste and the Philippines, whereas there are five teams in Group B — Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Laos.

During the group stage, Myanmar team will play against Timor-Leste on 29 July, Indonesia on 31 July, the Philippines on 2 August, Cambodia on 4 August and Viet Nam on 6 August.

The matches of the group stage will be played from 29 July .

The semi-finals will be played on 7 August, whereas the final and third place matches on 11 August.

Each match will be 80 minutes duration, consisting of two halves of 40 minutes. All the matches will be played in the cities of Gresik and Sidoarjo in Indonesia. — GNLM ■

Liverpool's Klopp appeals for calm as excitement mounts over signings

LONDON — Jurgen Klopp has warned Liverpool to stay focused and not get carried away by celebrating their success in the transfer window as they plot a Premier League title challenge.

The club have spent £174 million ($229 million) on midfielders Naby Keita and Fabinho, winger Xherdan Shaqiri and, perhaps most crucially, Brazil goalkeeper Alisson.

But while fans are relishing the prospect of a genuine title push, Klopp is focusing on the final two weeks of pre-season.

"For me these last two weeks are the most important two weeks of the whole pre-season," he told LFC TV.

"My job is not to be excited. I realise the mood is really positive. We played a (Champions League) final — we did not win it but it was still positive."

Klopp warned against complacency, adding: "We need to be ready for the big challenges, the big goals. We have to be this angry, aggressive, greedy team full of desire that wants to win each game.

"All the other teams have quality as well so we need to be ready for fights, not celebrating signings and stuff."

Klopp, whose side finished fourth in the Premier League last season, has been impressed by Daniel Sturridge's pre-season form and is prepared to give the striker another chance.

Last summer the Reds were prepared to offload the 28-year-old as his poor injury record had made him unreliable and largely unusable.

Sturridge went to West Brom on loan in January but was injured early on and managed just six appearances.

With 12 months left on his contract it appeared Sturridge's Anfield career was over but he has looked sharp in friendlies and Klopp, who became frustrated by the player's unavailability last season, is prepared to hand him a lifeline.

"We're not in doubt — and nobody was ever in doubt — about his quality," he said. "In this moment he looks really good to be honest. That's cool - really cool for him and cool for us."

Sturridge could be in line to start the Premier League campaign at home to West Ham on 12 August, with Roberto Firmino and new goalkeeper and fellow Brazil international Alisson only rejoining the squad at next week's training camp in France.

Liverpool are currently taking part in the International Champions Cup in the United States. —AFP ■

Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool are taking part in the International Champions Cup in the United States. **PHOTO: AFP**

Pavard celebrates his magnificent goal against Argentina. **PHOTO:AFP**

France's Pavard wins World Cup goal of the tournament

PARIS — France right-back Benjamin Pavard has won the 2018 World Cup goal of the tournament award for his stunning strike against Argentina, FIFA announced on Wednesday.

The 22-year-old Stuttgart defender ran onto a left-wing cross from Lucas Hernandez and sent a right-footed half-volley spinning into the top corner to level eventual champions France's last-16 tie with Argentina at 2-2 in the 57th minute.

France went on to win the game 4-3 before beating Croatia in the final on 15 July.

Pavard's effort won a public vote to be named the best of the 169 goals scored in the tournament, seeing off competition from Colombian midfielder Juan Quintero's free-kick against Japan and Luka Modric's goal in Croatia's group-stage thumping of Argentina. —AFP ■

Sergio Marchionne, the 'visionary' who reignited Ferrari's F1 dreams

PARIS — Sergio Marchionne, the emblematic head of FIAT Chrysler who helped reignite mighty Ferrari as a Formula 1 superpower, was described as a "colossal visionary" on Wednesday as the sport mourned his death.

Marchionne took over as chief in September 2014 from Luca di Montezemolo when it had been seven years since Kimi Raikkonen had delivered the 15th — and still most recent — of their world driver's titles.

Three years later, they were back knocking on the door with Sebastian Vettel finshing runner-up to Lewis Hamilton.

"Sergio achieved a colossal amount for the automotive industry and motor sport worldwide," said ex-Ferrari principal Jean Todt, now the president of FIA, motor sport's international federation.

"He dedicated himself fully to turn around the FIAT-Chrysler group and put all his energy to bring Ferrari back to the top.

"He was an endearing, upstanding and brave man, an unconventional and visionary leader."

Ferrari tweeted on Wednesday: "All of us at Ferrari feel privileged to have worked alongside a courageous leader like Sergio Marchionne, a man of enormous humanity and intelligence.

"In this moment of sadness, we join with his family in remembering him with immense affection."

Those thoughts were also echoed by Toto Wolff, the team boss of Hamilton's outfit Mercedes.

"This is a sad day for all of us in @F1. We have a lost a huge supporter of our sport, a fierce competitor, an ally and a friend," Wolff tweeted.

"Our heartfelt sympathies are with Sergio's family and all at @ScuderiaFerrari at this difficult time." —AFP ■