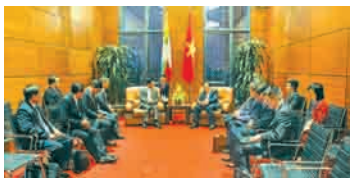
COMPLAINTS TO ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION GIVEN HIGH PRIORITY P-2 (NATIONAL)

NATIONAL
VP U Henry Van Thio attends GMS-6 in Hanoi, Viet Nam
PAGE-3



NATIONAL
Labour Minister U Thein Swe visits Thailand
PAGE-2

BUSINESS
Individual imports from borders top over Ks37 billion this FY
PAGE-5

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Kun Chaung Reservoir in Pyu Township is constructed with the aim of preventing floods. **PHOTO: MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY**

VP U Myint Swe inspects Kun Chaung reservoir, power station and diversion dam

VICE PRESIDENT U Myint Swe inspected the Kun Chaung reservoir, power station and diversion dam yesterday morning.

U Myint Swe arrived at Kun Chaung reservoir in Pyu Township, Taungoo District, Bago Region, at 8 a.m. and observed the water stored in the reservoir from the briefing hall observation station.

Next, Acting Director General U San Wai of the Department of Hydropower, gave a briefing to the Vice President about the construction of the dam, storage of water, rainfall, amount of water entering the dam, water supplied for irrigation, location and type of dam, construction of the spillway and diversion dam, hydro-electricity generated, the area supplied with irrigation water and the water collected annually, while Electric Power Supply Enterprise Managing Director U Khin Maung Win explained about the location of the power station, electrical power generation status, and the annual production and maintenance of the machinery.

The Vice President noted that one must be prepared for possible natural disasters by continuously monitoring the maintenance programme, prevent deforestation in the water basin area of the dam and provide welfare, education, health and social benefits to the power station staff and their families.

Later, the Vice President inspected the machinery in the power station and observed the generation and distribution of electricity.

The Vice President then visited the Kun Chaung diversion dam project briefing hall in Kyaukdaga Township, where he was briefed about the status of constructing the irrigation water distribution system and the diversion dam by Irrigation and Water Utilization Management Department Deputy Director U Aung Myat Moe.

SEE PAGE-2

Journalists report on repatriation readiness in Maungtaw

A delegation of independent media visited villages in Maungtaw Township, Rakhine State recently, conducting interviews and collecting information on repatriation readiness.

The delegation comprised of journalists from 13 media organisations visited Taung Pyo Letwe Reception Centre, where Deputy Commissioner of Maungtaw District U Ye Htoo explained the readiness for repatriation of returnees and arrangements for providing humanitarian aid to the displaced people when they returned.

At the meeting, journalists asked authorities about arrangements for resettlement, issuing of National Verification Cards and scrutiny as part of the repatriation process. During the trip, the media delegation visited a bridge between Bangladesh and Myanmar and a gate that will be opened for the returnees. They also visited the border and viewed the situation of the people living near the border.

The journalists also visited Inn-din Village and interviewed villagers about the terrorist attacks of last year. The delegation returned to Yangon in the evening.—Kyaw Thu Htet ■

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Visitors flock to Wanet elephant camp in Pyin Oo Lwin

THE newly opened Wanet elephant camp has become a major draw for visitors, especially during weekends, according to residents.

The Myanma Timber Enterprise, operating under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, officially opened the camp on March 30 near Wanet Village in PyinOoLwin Township, Mandalay region. It is situated on 140 acres of Zeebingyi forest reserve. It is part of the government's eco-tourism development plan. The opening of the new elephant camp is aimed at creating a top-class recreation area surrounded with the natural environment. The services offered at the new camp include short trips, elephant rides and the opportunity to feed elephants between 7 am and 6 pm daily. Visitors can also enjoy traditional Myanmar food at cheaper rates within the camp. Visitors can observe elephants and their habitats, the natural surroundings, as well as obtain related information through a booth that has been opened at the camp. The entry fee has been set at Ks1,000 per visitor, while the service charge for an elephant ride is Ks3,000.—Thiha Ko (Mandalay) ■

Visitors enjoy elephant ride at the Wanet Elephant Camp in Pyin Oo Lwin. **PHOTO: THIHA KO (MANDALAY)**

Bridges along Sittway-Punna Gyun-Yathedaung Road in Maungtaw District to be inaugurated soon

BRIDGES along the Sittway-Punnagyun-Yathedaung-Buthidaung Road will be commissioned into service in the near future, according to local authorities.

Deputy Minister for Construction U Kyaw Lynn inspected arrangements for official opening of the bridges yesterday.

During the Maungtaw visit, he also inspected construction of roads and bridges in Maungtaw District yesterday. The deputy minister inspected the condition of Maungtaw-Kyikanpyin-Kyeinchaung-Taung Pyo Letwe Road and completion of Assemble Board Houses at the Taung Pyo Letwe Reception Centre on 30th March.

Afterwards, Deputy Minister U Kyaw Lynn inspected paving along the Taungpyo Let We-Maungtaw Road. Agnumaw-Maungtaw Road is being upgraded with the arrangement of the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine State-UEHRD. —Myanmar News Agency ■

Toddy palm is versatile but people should consider its future

The older toddy palm trunks are now widely used to build houses and stalls in rural and urban areas. In addition, toddy palm trunks are now popular to use for making furniture.

Recently, toddy palm trunks are used for buildings in restaurants, tea shops and hotels in urban areas as well as country style buildings to lure people from urban areas. In rural areas, toddy palm trunks are substituted for bamboo and wood for making pillars and beams.

All parts of a robust toddy palm tree are useful, from the fruit to the root. The toddy palm trees should be at least 70 years old before they are cut down and used for buildings and furniture.

The older toddy palm trunks are harder and more durable than other kinds of hard wood. The plank will not deteriorate or decay for many years if they are not damp, a carpenter from Myin Kin village said.

"A house that is built using older toddy palm trunks can last till his grandson's time," said the carpenter who is in his 60s.

"When the price of wood is high, local people substitute wood with toddy palm trunks by cutting older toddy palms. When the demand of the toddy palm is higher, the price also goes up," a local person from Magway Town said.

Previously, a toddy palm was priced around Ks.15,000, but the price can reach Ks.35,000.

There is a large number of toddy palm groves in some villages near Magway Town such as Oat Phoe, Kan Bya and Zee Gyun villages.

"In Magway Region, villagers use the bottom part of the toddy palm for making chairs. The trunk is used in constructing bridges and buildings. Toddy leaves are used for roofs and walls. The stem of toddy leaves are used for making arm chairs," said U Kyi Khaing, a resident from Thae Yin Daw Village.

Steamed toddy palm trunk parquets, which are manufactured by a factory in the industrial zone in Pakokku Town, are displayed at the MSME Regional Products Exhibition. Entrepreneurs of local small and medium sized enterprises from Magway Region and Chin and Rakhine states participated in the exhibition that was held in Magway on 24 March.

U San Win, production manager of Sein Soe San Company Limited's wood factory in Pakokku industrial zone, said: "I worked in the timber industry for 20 years. Now, I arrived at the central Myanmar and got an idea to manufacture value added products by using discarded toddy palm trunks and roots. I manufactured them to export abroad."

The factory manufactures different varieties of furniture from ash trays, vases, wine goblets and chairs to beds couches, doors and living room furniture.

An ash tray, the smallest product of the factory, is priced Ks.3500. The price for a set of living room furniture goes for more than Ks.9.4 million, he added.

Meanwhile, villagers in Mandalay, Sagaing and Magway regions are using toddy palms to build roadside restaurants and huts.

The use of toddy palm to construct buildings is good for those who can't afford wood. However, cutting down massive toddy palms is not a good sign for environmental conservation.

"Manufacturing furniture made of toddy palm is a good idea. The products made of toddy palm trunk are beautiful.

And substituting wood today with palm trunk is cost effective for people who can't afford a large sum of money to construct buildings. But there is a concern for the ecosystem if we cut down large numbers of toddy palms. We need to protect them from being all cut down," a villager who loves the beauty of toddy palm groves and is worried about the ecosystem.—Myanmar Digital News ■