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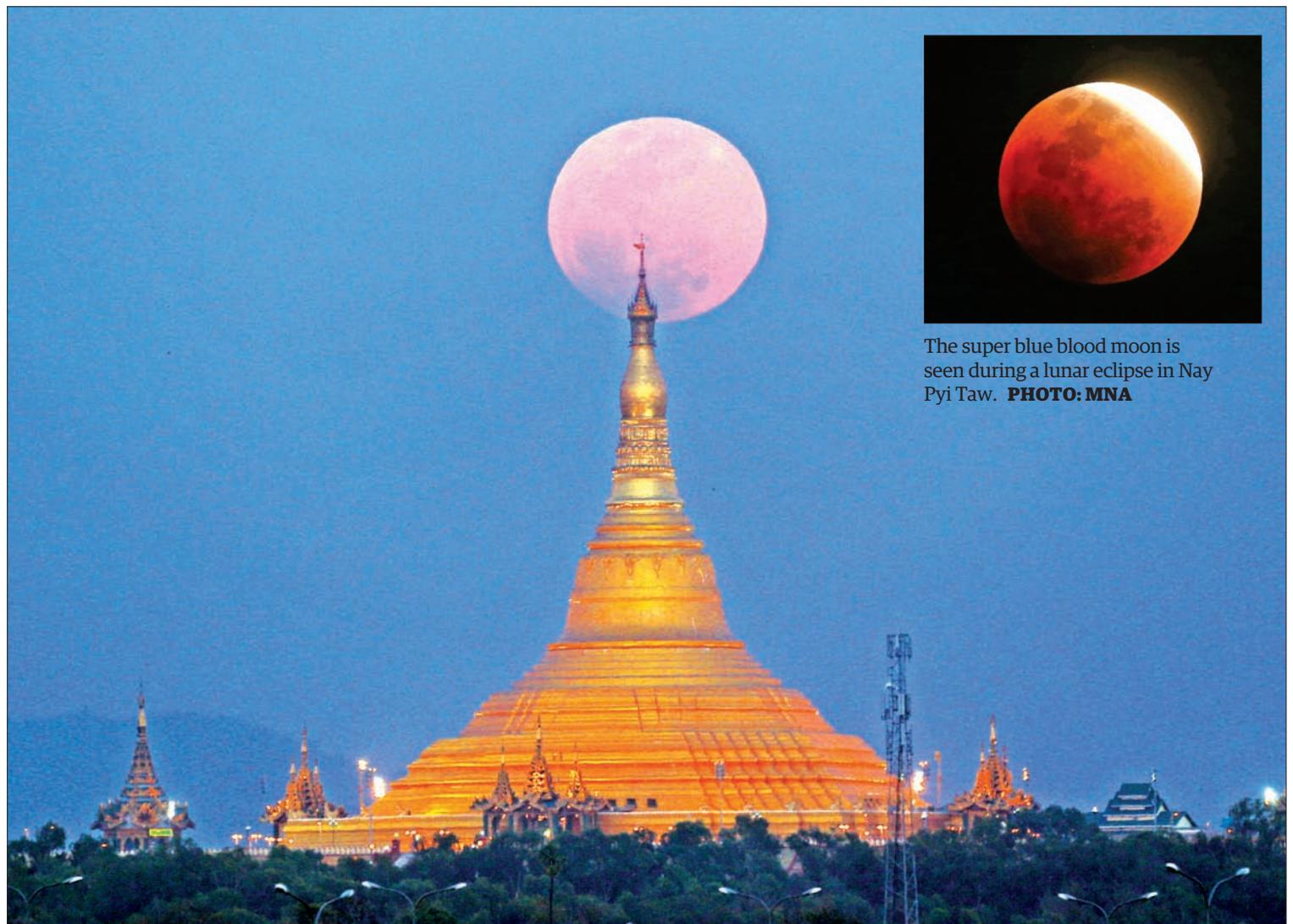
The 'Super Blue Blood Moon' and lunar eclipse

THE moon put on a rare cosmic show yesterday. It was the first time in many years a blue moon has synced up with a supermoon and a total lunar eclipse.

The triple cosmic whammy all fell on the same night yesterday for the first time since March 31, 1866. The phenomena could be seen in Myanmar at moonrise last night.

A blue moon is the second full moon in a calendar month. A super moon is when the moon is unusually close to Earth, making it bigger and brighter, and a blood moon is the moment during an eclipse when the moon appears red.

The rare treat was best visible from Australia, Asia and parts of Russia. It was not visible from western Europe, Africa or South America—GNLM ■



The super blue blood moon is seen during a lunar eclipse in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**

A full moon seen behind the Uppatasanti Pagoda before the lunar eclipse in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: AUNG SHINE OO**

CBM has no plan to revise interest rates

THE Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) has no plans to reduce the current interest rates on bank deposits, loans and government treasury bonds, said U Soe Min, Deputy Governor of CBM, at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw yesterday.

He made the remark in his

answer to a query by MP Dr. Thet Thet Khaing about whether the interest rate of the government treasury bonds is rising due to a rate set by the Central Bank of Myanmar.

U Soe Min said businesses have the opportunity to negotiate with banks to reduce interest

rates for borrowings under 13 per cent.

Deputy Governor U Soe Min said that a budget deficiency in the Union Government was funded by selling treasury bonds to the Central Bank of Myanmar, and that weakened the social policy to control the inflation rate.

He said the interest rate set by the Government and by the Central Bank for the Treasury Bill and Treasury Bond Auction are different.

He said the interest rate for the Government Treasury Bond for the 2016-2017 Financial Year was 7 per cent for 3 months, 8.4

per cent for 6 months, and 8.8 per cent for one year.

The Central Bank's aim for the fiscal policy is to stabilise the domestic market and the inflation rate. He said the interest rate is important for a stable fiscal policy.

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'BANK OF THE YEAR IN MYANMAR 2017'

Awarded by Financial Times (The Banker)

CBM has no plan to revise interest rates

FROM PAGE-1

Currently, Myanmar's inflation rate has stabilised at 4.47pc. That's down from 6.8pc in 2016-17 and 10pc in 2015-16. According to forecasts made by the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO), inflation in 2018-19 could rise to 5.5pc.

At the yesterday meeting, the Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw announced that the Hluttaw has approved new appointments for minister level positions in various regions. Dr. Saw Nyo Win is appointed as the Bago Region Minister for Natural Resources, Forestry and Environmental Conservation, Daw Nyunt Nyunt Htay is appointed as the Bago Region Min-

ister for Development Affairs and Social Welfare, and U Tin Maung Win is appointed as the Ayeyawady Region Minister for Agriculture, Livestock, Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation.

Next, U Steven from Kengtung Constituency read the Bill for amending the Drugs and Psychotropic Drugs Law sent back from the President's Office. Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than announced for MPs interested in discussing the Bill to sign their names in a list.

Next, the Speaker sought approval for the Myanmar Hluttaw Bill that has two separate views from the two Hluttaws. —Myanmar News Agency ■



Pyidaungsu Hluttaw being convened in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA



Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint shakes hands with US Ambassador. PHOTO: MNA

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint receives US Ambassador to Myanmar

PYITHU Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint received the US Ambassador to Myanmar Mr. Scot Marciel at the Hluttaw building of the Pyithu Hluttaw in Nay Pyi Taw, yesterday afternoon.

During the meeting, they discussed cooperation between

Myanmar and the United States, as well as the law-making affairs of the Hluttaw.

Deputy Speaker U T Khun Myat and other responsible officials from the Pyithu Hluttaw attended the meeting. —Myanmar News Agency ■

NLD members led by Kawlin Pyithu Hluttaw representative visit NRPC

NATIONAL League for Democracy (NLD) members, led by the Pyithu Hluttaw representative of Kawlin, visited the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning.

They observed the implementation of the peace process by the centre.

During the visit, officials from the department explained that the government aimed to implement the peace process through three branches: judicial, legislative and executive bodies.

A Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement is the centre's main aim and negotiations are underway to sign the agreement with armed ethnic races, as the current peace process is of paramount importance in the country.

Pyithu Hluttaw representative U Myo Zaw Aung explained

about the trip.

Later, they watched a video on the implementation of the peace process by the NRPC.

Next, they asked questions and received responses from the concerned officials. —Myanmar News Agency ■



National League for Democracy members visit the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) and observe the implementation of the peace process by the centre in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

Union Minister for Information attends conference on film industry

UNION Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint attended the conference on development of the Myanmar Motion Picture Association at 1 p.m. yesterday at the meeting hall of Ministry's office in Nay Pyi Taw.

The Patron of the Myanmar Motion Picture Association U Aung Lwin, Chairman of Myanmar Motion Picture Association U Zin Wine, Consultant of Forever Group Co., Ltd U Thein Tun Aung and Director-General of

Information and Public Relations Department U Ye Naing discussed matters relating to the difficulties, challenges and development of Myanmar Motion Picture Association.

In attendance at the con-

ference were the Deputy Minister for Information U Aung Hla Tun, Permanent Secretary, Directors-General, Managing Director, Officials, Patrons, Chairman, Vice Chairman and Secretaries of the Myanmar

Motion Picture Association, Advisors and officials from Forever Group Co. Union Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint made reviews of the discussions and concluded the meeting. —Myanmar News Agency ■

Reception to mark Australian National Day Held

UNION ministers attended a reception to mark the Australian National Day at the Hilton Hotel in Nay Pyi Taw at 6:30 p.m. yesterday.

The ceremony was opened with the singing of the national anthems of Myanmar and Australia. Nicholas Coppel, Australia's Ambassador to Myanmar, and Union Minister for Education Dr. Myo Thein Gyi extended their greetings at the reception.

Besides Dr. Myo Thein Gyi, Chairman of the Union Elec-

tion Commission U Hla Thein; Union Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint; Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe; Union Minister for International Cooperation U Kyaw Tin; Lt-Gen Min Naung; Commander of Nay Pyi Taw Command; Deputy Minister for Information U Aung Hla Tun; Hluttaw representatives; permanent secretaries; officials from government offices and invited guests also attended the reception.—Myanmar News Agency ■



Union Ministers and Australian Ambassador HE Mr Nicholas Coppel attend reception to mark Australian National Day in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**

Republic of the Union of Myanmar Office of the President Order 13/2018

15th Waxing of Tabodwe, 1379 ME
31st January, 2018

Resignation of member of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union approved

In accordance with the provisions stated in article 331 of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Section 28 (b) of Constitutional Tribunal Law of the Union, U Nyi Nyi, member of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union has been permitted to resign from the position of his own volition with effect from 31 January 2018.

*Sd/ Htin Kyaw
President*

Republic of the Union of Myanmar



Union Minister Dr Pe Myint holds talks with Australian Ambassador Mr Nicholas Coppel yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

Union Minister for Information receives Australian Ambassador to Myanmar

UNION Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint received Australian Ambassador to Myanmar HE Mr Nicholas Coppel in the guest hall of the ministry's office, yesterday afternoon.

During the meeting, they

exchanged views on media affairs.

Also attending the meeting were Deputy Minister for Information U Aung Hla Tun and other responsible officials.

—Myanmar News Agency ■

Former MraukU administrator stabbed to death

AN official who worked as an administrator in MraukU Township was stabbed to death in his car on Tuesday, according to local authorities.

U Bo Bo Min Theik was found dead with several stab wounds to his body, including two on his chest, 12 on his back and one cut on his left eyebrow.

Local police were informed on Tuesday evening that a car had crashed between mile posts No. 169/0 and 169/1 on Yangon-Sittway Road near Thayet Cho Village, between Yongu and Aungpyupin villages, some seven miles north of Punnagyun, Rakhine State, and a body was also reportedly found nearby.

Local police inspected the site and found the dead man under the car. This would be only the first of a number of mysterious occurrences in the apparent murder case.

After examining the documents in his bag, police confirmed that the victim was U Bo Bo Min Theik, who was the former head of the MraukU Township General Administration Department. U Bo Bo Min Theik left his position in MraukU on 19 January to become the Assistant Director of the Rakhine State General Administration Department.

U Bo Bo Min Theik's body was sent to Punnagyun Township Hospital at 7.15 pm on Tuesday. Earlier in the day, the car was intentionally set on fire by two unknown men. Firemen extinguished the blaze at 7.25 pm.

U Bo Bo Min Theik had arrived in MraukU on 25 January

for interrogation as part of an ongoing investigation into the deaths of seven people fatally shot during rioting earlier this month. After being questioned, U Bo Bo Mon Thiek left to return to Sittway at 2 pm on Tuesday.

According to police sources, the vehicle he was driving was reported stolen from its owner, U Kyaw Myint, 48. Along with U Bo Bo Min Theik, U Kyaw Myint's two sons and another man were also allegedly present in the car at the time of the accident. Their whereabouts could not be determined.

According to witnesses, there were four men in the car, including U Bo Bo Min Theik. U Bo Bo Min Theik reportedly died in the car, which became involved in an accident, while the other three men fled on foot towards a nearby mountain range.

Shortly after the accident, two men arrived on a motorbike and set the car on fire.

A case has been registered under Section 302/440/114 of the Penal Code at the Ponnagyun Myoma police station, and police continue to actively investigate the case.—Myanmar News Agency



Photos show CR-V vehicle and scene of an accident. **PHOTO: MNA**

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A tower to overlook Haka Township's scenery to be accomplished

A tower that is being constructed to overlook Haka Township's scenery, at the View Point Resort; it will be completed before the 70th Anniversary Chin National Day according to the Chin State Municipal Office.

"The tower is 36 feet high and 18 feet wide and the cost of the tower is estimated at around Ks. 70 million. Now cash donations by local residents is over Ks. 50 million and it is necessary to reach the estimated amount of donations in order to complete construction of the tower. So donors around the country will be invited to donate as much money as they can and their names will be inscribed on a plaque at the base of the tower" said the Director of Chin State Municipal Office.

"When we can take in the view from the tower, we can see all the beauty and scenery of Hakha Township as well as the beauty of Falam and Tiddim townships. It is better to have this tower in the View Point Resort because the resort is very popular with visitors. I think it will be even more interesting



A panoramic view of Haka, the capital of Chin State. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

for visitors because the resort plans to sell traditional instruments and costumes of the Chin ethnic people and the resort will also display clothing and biographies of the iconic ethnic people" said a visitor.

The tower is situated on

the side of the Gangaw Road at the entrance of Haka Township. The resort was equipped with railings, and has arranged seating and stairs, Construction for the tower started in 2017.

Haka Township has beau-

tiful scenery and many tourists visit the area so many hotels are being constructed to make accommodations convenient for visitors. Moreover, the tower's construction hopes to boost the regional tourism.—Myanmar Digital News ■

Myanmar-Bangladesh Border Guard Regiment-level flag hoisting ceremony held

The Myanmar-Bangladesh Border Guard Regiment-level flag hoisting ceremony was held near the friendship bridge on the border at noon yesterday.

During the ceremony, the Bangladeshi side was led by Commanding Officer Monzurul Hassan Khan of the Border Guards Bangladesh No. 34, while the Myanmar side was led by Police Commanding Officer Lt Colonel Saw Zeyar.

During the meeting, Police Lt Colonel Saw Zeyar of Myanmar

told the Bangladeshi side that Myanmar is ready for the repatriation of returnees from Bangladesh.

Monzurul Hassan Khan said the authorities in Bangladesh were collecting lists of returnees, and when they are ready, they will proceed with the process of repatriation.

Following the meeting, Police Lt Colonel Saw Zeyar demonstrated the camps' readiness to accept returnees from Bangladesh.—Rakhine State IPRD



Local melon farmers face competition from Chinese cultivators

LOCAL watermelon and musk melon farmers are facing stiff competition because Chinese growers have entered the country and started cultivating the fruit, according to watermelon farmers from the Sagaing Region.

"Watermelons and musk melons, which are cultivated in

Myanmar, are exported mainly to China. Now, Chinese growers are growing the fruit in Myanmar after taking the land on lease.

They are also using their own growing methods. As a result, the rental prices of land have increased. Therefore, it has negatively affected the local

farmers who have rented the land to grow the fruit," said U Daung Shwe, a local cultivator from Monywa.

The Chinese growers had rented the land at the rate of Ks700,000 per acre to grow the fruit. The local farmers also paid the same amount as rent. However, the Chinese growers

are selling some of the fruit directly to China through the Muse border gate. Local farmers, on the other hand, have to sell their fruit to local traders, he added.

The cultivation of watermelon and musk melon costs Ks3.5 million per acre.—Maung Wazi Ya (AMIA) ■

Write for us

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

Myanmar earns over \$535m in fishery exports

MYANMAR's foreign income from fishery exports reached more than US\$535 million from 1 April to 19 January in the current fiscal year (FY), which increased by \$97 million compared with the same period last FY.

The export volume of fishery products was more than 38,000 tons, according to Myanmar Fisheries Federation.

Despite an increase in the export volume and value, Myanmar's fishery exports cannot keep up with the neighbouring countries.

The Myanmar Fishery Federation is making concerted efforts to increase the earnings from fishery exports by developing fish farming lakes that meet international standards and by adopting advanced fishing methods.

Fishery products, including prawns, crabs, squid, eels, shrimp, dried shrimp and dried fish, were exported to Thailand through the Kawthoung and Myeik border trade gates and to China through the Muse gate. —GNLM ■



A worker selects fish at the Nyaungtan Jetty in Yangon. PHOTO: GNLM/PHOE KHWAR

Exporters concerned about slip in US dollar exchange rate

By May Thet Hnin

EXPORTERS in the country are worried that the exchange rate of the kyat against the US dollar will dip below Ks1,300.

"Businessmen are watching the foreign exchange market closely. It will negatively affect the exporters if the exchange rate slips below Ks1,300," said Daw Toe Nanda Tin, vice president of Myanmar Processor and Exporter Association.

The majority of exporters imported raw materials at an exchange rate of Ks1,360 per dollar. However, the rate declined to Ks1,320 when they exported their products. There is a gap of Ks40 per dollar in the export versus import exchange rates.

The downward trend in



the kyat-dollar exchange rate started from the second week of January. Previously, a dollar fetched some Ks1,356. Currently, the rate has dropped to Ks1,320.

The Central Bank of Myanmar scaled down the US dollar exchange rate from Ks1,340 to

Ks1,330 within six days.

U Ye Myint Maung, president of Myanmar Food and Exporters Association, said the export businesses will thrive only if the rate is stable in the foreign exchange (FX) market.

"We cannot do anything as the rate is down due to the

depreciation of the dollar in the global market," he added.

In 2008, exporters were battered by the drop in the exchange rate by some Ks300.

The exchange rate was on the rise throughout 2017 and hit an all-time record of Ks1,380 per dollar. The inflation rate, interest rate, terms of trade, country's current account and deficits, political stability, as well as economic performance, contribute to the ups and downs in the dollar price. Currently, foreign currencies have appreciated slightly against the US dollar in the global FX market. International business websites mention that the dollar depreciation is attributed to the high global gold price and the drop in the stock market. ■

Myanmar fruits, vegetables penetrate Russian market

Myanmar exports fruits and vegetables to Russia by air, which is a convenient mode of transport, according to a report in the Myawady Daily. Myanmar mostly exports avocado, mangoes, watermelons, musk melons, coffee, a variety of fruits and vegetables and other value-added products to Russia.

"When we export to Russia, we get a good price. We usually export a variety of fruits and vegetables—up to one ton of each product per consignment. The reason why Russia is interested in fruits and vegetables from Myanmar is that the fruits are of good quality and size," said Daw Le Le Oo, director of Myanmar Shwe Fruit Company.

"We started penetrating the Russian market with one ton of the Sein Ta Lone (Diamond Solitaire) mango variety. We have already exported avocados to Russia more than 20 times. However, we still have to meet several requirements while exporting fruits and vegetables. We have already requested the agricultural department to provide us with assistance. We do not want to lose our market in Russia," she added.

Besides these, Myanmar exports value-added products, such as dry tofu, dry mango and mango paste, to Russia. Russia has bought as many products from Myanmar as it can export. —GNLM ■

Bilateral trade between Singapore, Myanmar reaches US\$2 billion in eight months

Bilateral trade between Singapore and Myanmar has reached US\$2.38 billion, with an estimated export value of \$685 million and import value of over \$1.7 billion.

Among the regional countries, Singapore is placed second

in bilateral trade after neighbouring country Thailand.

Fruit, vegetables, rice, green grams and other pulses, ginger and flowers are exported to Singapore, while capital goods, raw industrial materials such as petroleum products

and chemicals, and consumer products are imported into Myanmar. Bilateral trade earned some \$2.96 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2016-2017, \$3.69 billion in FY 2015-16, \$4.89 billion in FY 2014-2015, \$3.6 billion in FY 2013-2014, \$2.82 billion in FY 2012-2013

and \$3 billion in FY 2011-2012. In addition, Singapore is the main investor, bringing \$1.71 billion in capital into the country as of the end of November in the current fiscal year, according to the statistics of the Myanmar Investment Commission.—Mon Mon

Viet Nam lists US-based Vietnamese group as ‘terrorist’ organization

HANOI — Viet Nam listed a US-based group still loyal to the now defunct state of South Vietnam as a terrorist organization on Tuesday, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) said.

The California-based Provisional Government of Viet Nam, led by US citizen Dao Minh Quan, established groups inside Viet Nam to “execute acts of terrorism and sabotage, and assassinate officials”, the ministry said in a statement.

Quan was a “former lieutenant” of the US-backed Republic of

Viet Nam, the statement said, referring to the now defunct state, also known as South Vietnam, which once ruled the southern half of the country until the Viet Nam War ended in 1975.

Quan did not immediately respond to a request for comment. A US Embassy spokesman in Hanoi said the organization is not designated as a terrorist group by the US State Department.

Despite sweeping economic reform in Viet Nam, and increasing openness toward social change, including gay, lesbian

and transgender rights, the ruling Communist Party retains tight media censorship and does not tolerate criticism.

Earlier this month, Viet Nam jailed four men for flying the flag of South Viet Nam. The flag, a bright yellow rectangle with three thin horizontal stripes, is used by political activists in Viet Nam who oppose the Communist-controlled government in Hanoi.

A video on a website the MPS said was operated by Quan’s group showed a convoy of cars moving through a US town, some

of which were flying the flag of South Vietnam. The website describes Quan as the “Prime Minister” of the Provisional Government of Viet Nam.

In late December, a Vietnamese court jailed 15 people for their part in an alleged April bomb plot by Quan’s group at Tan Son Nhat airport, the transport hub which serves Ho Chi Minh City — formerly known as Saigon, the capital of South Viet Nam.

Fifteen people acted on instructions from an overseas group which had used social

media to spread propaganda and recruit its members, local media said, citing the court indictment.

Viet Nam, one of the top 10 countries for Facebook users by numbers, has called for tougher internet controls and set up a military cyber unit to fight “wrong” views online.

The group “planted fuel bombs in the car park and at the arrival hall at Tan Son Nhat International Airport” in April, 2017,” Tuesday’s MPS statement said.—Reuters ■



in
Picture

Jiangxi: Tea plantation in snow

Aerial photo taken on 31 January 2018 shows snow-covered tea plantation at Lugang Village of Yongfeng County in Jian, east China’s Jiangxi Province, on 31 January 2018. PHOTO: XINHUA

Hackers disperse stolen cryptocurrency to about 20 digital addresses

TOKYO — The hackers who stole roughly \$530 million in cryptocurrency from Tokyo-based exchange Coincheck last week have dispersed the stolen NEM coins to around 20 digital addresses in an apparent attempt to avoid being traced, Kyodo News confirmed on Wednesday.

According to online records seen by Kyodo News, the NEM coins, stolen in the largest-ever theft of cryptocurrency by hackers, were first transferred to a single unidentified address in the early hours of Friday before being dispersed to nine addresses.

Some of the coins were

moved again between 10:30 pm and 11 pm on Tuesday, this time a total of 11 times in increments of 100 (roughly \$75) to 10 different addresses, according to the NEM blockchain ledger, an online record of such transactions.

The Singapore-based NEM.io Foundation, which is helping Coincheck to trace the stolen coins, said it had also confirmed the latest movements.

The foundation says it has “tagged” the stolen coins as tainted assets, making them easily identifiable if traded through a regulated exchange.—Kyodo News ■

Fewer killings in Philippine drug war make US “cautiously optimistic” — official

MANILA — The US government is “cautiously optimistic” on Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s war on drugs after it saw a decline in “extrajudicial killings,” a US senior narcotics official said.

Washington has shifted away millions of dollars in funding for law enforcement from a drug control programme of the Philippine National Police since the bloody anti-narcotics campaign started in July 2016.

But there are positive signs and the United States remains supportive of the Philippines’ effort to battle illicit drugs, said James Walsh, a deputy assistant state secretary in the international narcotics and law enforce-

ment bureau. “I would describe the United States as being cautiously optimistic,” Walsh told a telephonic news conference late on Tuesday. “Many folks have been tracking the extrajudicial killings in the Philippines and the trends are going down, so there is some encouragement that we are seeing in some of our human rights training working.”

Nearly 4,000 people have been killed in shootouts with the police in raids and sting operations since Duterte came to power in July 2016, government data shows. But human rights groups put the figure higher, accusing police of executing drug users and peddlers in cold blood.

On Wednesday, Duterte’s

spokesman, Harry Roque, said there were no “extrajudicial killings” in the war on drugs.

But he welcomed the comments as a reflection of Washington’s growing appreciation of the campaign’s benefits.

“These efforts are anchored on respect for human rights, cognizant of our obligation to protect our people’s right to life and to live in peace and security,” Roque said in a statement.

Police resumed their anti-drug campaign on Monday with visits to the homes of users and dealers to convince them to surrender, and police chief Ronald dela Rosa offered an assurance it would be free of violence.—Reuters ■

Seaplane that crashed in Sydney killing Compass Group exec was off course investigator

SYDNEY — A seaplane that crashed in Sydney on New Year’s Eve killing six people, including the chief executive of British catering company Compass Group Plc, was off course but the cause of the crash remains undetermined, Australian investigators said on Wednesday.

Richard Cousins, 58, his two sons, his fiancée and her daughter, and the pilot were killed when the plane hit the water shortly after takeoff on 31 December.

In its preliminary report, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) said the plane was approximately 1 km (0.6 miles) off the standard course before the pilot turned the plane sharply

right. Shortly afterwards, the plane nose-dived into the Hawkesbury River, north of Sydney. “One of the key lines of enquiry for us is to try and work out exactly what was happening during that time, firstly why the pilot turned and then whether it was an attempt to turn around or a planned turn,” Nat Nagy, executive director of the ATSB, told reporters in Sydney. The ATSB said there was no evidence of a collision or bird strike and there was no sign of any problem with the controls of the plane. Nagy said the ATSB will announce its findings should it determine the cause of the crash, but warned it may remain unsolved.—Reuters ■

China puts finishing touches to two-year smog crackdown plan

BEIJING — China is drawing up plans for tougher curbs on smog during the two years to 2020, an environment ministry official said on Wednesday, after a five-year crackdown on pollution helped it attain air quality targets last month.

“A three-year battle plan in the war to protect blue skies” is being hammered out by officials of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, said spokesman Liu Youbin, and incorporates tougher curbs on major industrial regions.

Key areas facing such restrictions are the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei zone in the country’s north and the Yangtze and Pearl River deltas further south.

The new three-year plan is expected to be completed in the first half of the year, Liu told reporters.

“It will continue to make Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei its key focus, but it will also focus on other major regions like the Yangtze river delta, the northeast and Chengdu-Chongqing,” he added.

China’s previous action plan for 2013 to 2017 spurred action

by the smog-prone Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region to cut concentrations of hazardous particles known as PM2.5 by more than 25 per cent.

The Yangtze and Pearl river delta regions, which include Shanghai and Guangzhou respectively, were pushed to make cuts of 20 per cent and 15 per cent.

Despite near-record PM2.5 readings in January and February last year, China managed to reach all its 2013-2017 air quality targets by the end of 2017, following efforts to curb coal use and cut output from polluting factories in 28 northern cities in winter.

With the campaign set to end in March, China wants to subject firms to more permanent scrutiny, so as to avert any possible backsliding after 2017 targets were met.

Beijing has already sought to impose new special emissions curbs on major industrial sectors in the north.

Liu said China would continue to battle scattered coal-burning sources, a major source of



Devices for collecting samples of Beijing’s air are installed on the rooftop of the air quality forecast and warning center in Beijing, China on 11 May, 2015. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

uncontrolled pollution in provinces like Hebei, and would promote clean energy heating.

This week media reports said Hebei was forced to suspend plans to convert large numbers of coal-fired heating boilers to natural gas after winter supply shortages left thousands of homes without heat.

However, Liu denied the reports, telling reporters the Hebei government would continue to pay close attention to its coal-to-gas conversion efforts.

Beijing could adjust priorities this year and focus on vehicle pollution, Yu Jianhua, chief engineer of the capital’s environmental protection bureau, told a separate briefing on Wednesday.

Beijing will keep up the toughest emissions curbs on industrial firms this year, not only to cut pollution but also spur industries to relocate, Yu added.

Car emissions contribute about 40 per cent of air pollution in Beijing, the government estimates.

Liu Zhiqian, head of the ministry’s monitoring office, said China’s average PM2.5 readings from 1-28 January were 64 micrograms per cubic metre, down a fifth on the year.

Concentrations in Beijing fell 70.5 per cent to 36 micrograms per cubic metre, close to the state standard of 35 micrograms. But average readings in the Yangtze and Pearl river deltas rose over the month, he said, without giving details. — Reuters ■

Thailand charges eight activists as public frustration at junta grows

BANGKOK — Thailand on Wednesday charged eight activists of a civil rights group with violating the military government’s ban on public gatherings, after it kicked off a cross-country march on 20 January in a rare display of public discontent.

Since military rule began in Thailand in 2014, demonstrations have become a rarity, partly because of orders by the junta banning the public assembly of five or more people.

The eight charged on Wednesday, who belong to the People Go Network of activists and academics, which organized the anti-junta “We Walk” march lasting until 17 February, have denied the charge.

“We think in the past three years, the junta hasn’t been genuine and hasn’t listened to the people,” said the group’s coordinator, Supaporn Malailoy.

“So we march with our

friends, with the civil liberties we have.” Responding to the comment, junta spokesman Winthai Suvarree said, “That is just the personal opinion of some people who are already prejudiced.”

The eight are to report to a state prosecutor on 26 February, who will decide whether to take the case to court, the Thai Lawyers for Human Rights group said. Wednesday’s prosecution was an “infringement of fundamental rights and freedoms,” 52 civil rights groups said.

“The royal police of Thailand and the government have done some wrongs in violation of these fundamental values, principles and human rights,” they said in a joint statement.

“These actions need to be condemned.”

The ban on public gatherings was inconsistent with Thailand’s international human rights obligations, the Interna-

tional Commission of Jurists said. “Thailand should immediately end the criminal proceedings,” said Kingsley Abbott, its senior international legal adviser. The 450-km (280-mile) march from Bangkok, the capital, to the northeastern province of Khon Kaen, has drawn participants from civil rights groups concerned about healthcare, alternative farming, natural resources and freedom of expression.

It aims to spotlight growing public frustration with the junta, which has delayed a promised return to democracy, reined in free speech, cracked down on dissent, and pursued projects despite opposition from rights groups and local communities.

Democracy activists were among more than 100 people who gathered on Saturday to protest against the military government and show support for the People Go Network.—Reuters ■

Sensitive Australian gov’t documents found in sold filing cabinets

SYDNEY — The Australian government launched an “urgent investigation” on Wednesday after hundreds of top-secret and highly classified documents were found in two filing cabinets that had been sold at a secondhand furniture store in the nation’s capital.

The Australian Broadcasting Corp. obtained the documents and has begun reporting their contents in recent days, describing the discovery as “one of the biggest breaches of Cabinet security in Australian history.”

The secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in a statement declined to comment further while the investigation into the so-called “Cabinet Files” is underway.

According to the ABC, the filing cabinets -- heavy with pa-

perwork from five separate governments spanning the prime ministership of John Howard to that of Tony Abbott -- were sold in Canberra for an especially low price because they were locked and their keys had been lost.

Months later, the buyer drilled out the locks, revealing thousands of pages of sensitive information.

Under normal circumstances, Cabinet records are not released for at least 20 years.

The ABC reported that the ex-government furniture sale was not restricted to Australians. “Had (the buyers) been inclined, there was nothing stopping them (from) handing the contents to a foreign agent or government,” the report said.—Kyodo News ■

The role of state-run media in an emerging democracy

HERE has been considerable discussion over whether state-run media should be allowed in Myanmar. Myanmar has experienced the consequences of the wrong administrative system for decades. Today's generation is left with a legacy of problems that we must now tackle. Different approaches to a problem produce diverse opinions. Showing respect for diverse views and thoughts, the elected government has a responsibility to clarify to the people these diverse views so that the people can understand the realistic situation of their country.

Nationwide distribution is hobbled by transportation bottlenecks. Most private daily newspapers print in Yangon and face difficulties distributing newspapers to other big cities in a timely manner.

Hence, we should take a better distribution system into consideration to develop the private print media industry. The range of problems facing the dailies includes not only greater competition but also the cost of newsprint, printing, and electricity.

Assisting the private media industry to be able to use modern machinery for printing and buying publications for libraries nationwide should also be considered.

When we approach the issue of the future of state-run print media and the issue of the development of the private print media industry, the answer should reflect the realistic situation of the country.

The role of state-run media could be seen as the sine qua non in the Rakhine issue, in which some foreign countries' interference, some international media's bias, and some international media's ignorance of the true situation were evident. In this situation, state-run media is necessary for the country and its people.

Recently, some have said that tax exemption should be granted to private print media so that it can develop. But how the commercial tax has caused a burden on the private media, which are currently struggling to survive, needs to be reviewed.

Commercial taxes from local print media in the 2016-2017 fiscal year totaled more than Ks600 million. It is questionable that granting commercial tax exemption is a correct decision at a time when the country is facing a budget deficiency. At the same time, we should seek other ways that can develop the private media industry, which is facing crippling distribution problems, rising costs and decreasing circulation.

Last week's auspicious news should spur other groups to sign NCA

Maung Thaug Win (Ex-diplomat)

THE news last week that two more ethnic armed groups, the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Lahu Democratic Union (LDU) would sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was met with near-universal praise. Now is the time for other armed groups to join in moving further forward in the process towards a lasting peace, officials and citizens said.

The following are reactions from diplomats, private citizens, military leaders, the State Counsellor and others in praising the actions of the NMSP and the LDU and urging other groups to follow their lead.

"It was heartening to watch the reactions which appeared on social media on 23 January, 2018, that people were anxious to see this auspicious news on television. I also watched this news in detail on the evening television programmes. As a Myanmar national, I feel full of vigour to hear this kind of news at the right moment. The peace process is, of course, now gaining momentum. By the time I watched this news programme, I felt like writing an article due to burning desire which can further foster the peace process of our country".

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

After State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi received delegations from the NMSP and LDU, both of whom agreed to sign the NCA, at the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) in Yangon, she expressed her delight at the progress made towards peace.

"In order to gain enduring peace in our country, I believe we can proceed step by step, which is of paramount importance for all of us, and every single step we are retracing now is not only for ourselves but also for our new generations to come".

The delegation from the New Mon State Party was led by its Chairman Nai Htaw Mon, and the delegation from the Lahu



State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi poses for documentary photo together with delegations of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Lahu Democratic Union and officials on 23 January 2018. PHOTO: MNA

If all ethnic armed groups signed the NCA, displaced persons could live peacefully in their own homes. For the children, they would be able to pursue their studies without any difficulties. Smooth and efficient transportation systems would be possible, making for faster shipping of goods that will make commodity prices fall. All this will result in higher living standards for local residents.

Democratic Union was led by its Chairman Kyar Khun Sar.

Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing

Likewise, Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing received New Mon State Party (NMSP) Chairman Nai Htaw Mon and Lahu Democratic Union (LDU) Chairman Kyar Khun Sar separately in Bayint Naung Hall in Nay Pyi Taw, on 23 January, 2018.

"Armed conflicts have started since the time of our independence, and successive governments tried to bring peace throughout the ages. As for our Tatmadaw, we are ready and willing to work hand-in-hand with all the armed ethnic races in order to cooperate together. I would like

to urge all of them to cooperate with us without any doubt so that we can build an enduring peace process which is based on mutual-respect." said Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

After the NMSP and LDU sign the NCA, there will be a total of 10 ethnic groups who have become signatories. This is indeed auspicious news, because this gives us hope after years of strife and many fits and starts in the peace process. It is an appropriate time to see how far we have come in hopes of inspiring others to continue the current progress.

Unity is strength

Judging from the internal conflicts of our country, few can deny that the cause of conflicts has arisen mainly on account of the wedge that was driven by

the colonialists between those who hold different political ideas. Whatever political beliefs one may hold, the union can be thrown into complete disarray because of disunity. As the saying goes, "United we stand, divided we fall". As long as all our regions and states are united, our union can stand tall among the countries of the world in dignity.

An endeavour for peace

With the aim of building a perpetual peace, the former government had invited armed ethnic groups to set up a framework from which they could hold discussions from basic level to union level at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. Efforts were being made to reach agreement from this peace-making process.

In order to sign the NCA,

top-level Peace Talks were held on 9 November, 2013 in Hlaing Zar, Kachin State, and another peace summit was also held in Law Khee Lar, Kayin State on 2 June, 2015.

Negotiations were made with the Union Peace-Making Central Committee (UPCC) and ethnic-armed group and several discussions were held to sign the NCA.

During the final stages of drafting the NCA, agreements were made on seven chapters, including 33 paragraphs and 86 sub-paragraphs.

After reviewing the final parts of the agreements, preliminary agreements were made on 31 March, 2017. As a result, the NCA was made and finalised in August, 2015.

The Union Government, the Hluttaw, Tatmadaw and ethnic-armed groups signed the NCA on 15 October, 2015.

All-inclusive signing

If all ethnic armed groups signed NCA, displaced persons could live peacefully in their own homes. For the children, they would be able to pursue their studies without any difficulties. Smooth and efficient transportation systems would be possible,

making for faster shipping of goods that will make commodity prices fall. All this will result in higher living standards for local residents.

Fruits of peace

The situation now has changed in the right direction because ceasefire agreements between the government and ethnic-armed races have been made across the country. It is heartening to see that people can enjoy the fruits of peace and stability and the benefits of earning a peaceful living. Especially in these areas, infrastructures such as roads, bridges, schools, hospitals and telecommunications offices have been built and local people can now travel freely from one place to another. Everyone can witness that their ways of life and living standard have increase dramatically.

Find a way to sign the ceasefire agreement

It is sorrowful to see that some ethnic armed races from the north and north-east parts of Myanmar haven't signed the ceasefire agreement with the government. Consequently, these areas still remain underdeveloped and innocent children and elderly persons have had to move to IDP camps for their food and shelter. It is high time for the ethnic-armed races to find a win-win solution with the government; thereby a fruitful result will come out so as to bring peace and development in the regions.

All in all, people who are peace lovers aspire to see the NCA, which is their ultimate goal in their lives. It is incumbent upon the ethnic armed races to find a solution with the government and Tatmadaw by peaceful and sincere means so that we can build perpetual peace. It is cause for rejoice to know that the New Mon State Party and Lahu Democratic Union will sign the NCA very soon, and all the citizens are looking forward to this auspicious news which can usher in all the blessings to all the nationals.

(Translated by Win Ko Ko Aung)

Need of Developing Employability Skills in Young Minds of Myanmar for their Sustainable Career Growth and making the nation Emerging Knowledge Economy

Dr G R Sinha
Professor, Myanmar Institute of Information Technology Mandalay
Adjunct Professor, IIT Bangalore India

THE term "Employability Skill" has become buzz word for last few years and therefore it becomes pertinent to get exposed to what this Employability Skill all about. Actually, Employability Skill is not a name of Single Skill, rather it represents a Set of Skills for two important purposes. Of course, the set of skills that help the young minds or students in getting employed or placed, but even more important is whether the candidate enjoys the career in sustainable manner where he or she is placed. Employability Skills not only ensure the job or employment but continuous and successful career growth. We need to understand what types of skills are required in young minds to become successful professional; or entrepreneur; or even any profession one can choose. There are two important skill sets one is required to have; namely technical skills or aptitude; and non-technical aptitude. Employability skill covers both the technical as well as non-technical skills.

In Myanmar, young minds and graduates are striving to excel in their academics so as to compete at international level. Very good thing that could be seen in the great nation is Employment and Skill Development Law, which exists for skill development matters and employment exclusively. Technical and Vocational Education, and Training (TVET) attempted several initiatives for skill development right from grass root level to schools and vocational training centers. With given strength of the pro-active initiatives; keenly interested students for learning; and brilliant potential for skill development and its subsequent benefit, this article attempts to just provide an overview of what the Employability skill is; what exactly is its importance in general and for Myanmar students in particular; and suggested plan of subsequent lectures that would highlight how to develop the skills under employability skill in young students so that they could be ignited for their self-growth and sustainable development of fast developing nation, Myanmar.

This is first part of article highlighting overview and importance of the Employability Skill. As we discussed that this skill includes set of skills, one obvious question comes in our mind that what other skills are and why these skills are required if students are good in academics. It has been reported by several giant IT sectors and human resource (HR) agencies that most of young graduates lack of employability skills. This is why they do not survive in throat cutting competitions all across the globe.

If we analyze the Employability Skill then find that a student can get job just on the basis of good academic or technical skill but what does ensure that he or she becomes successful professional in the organization of working. We need to understand the difference between Success and Competence. One gets a job, this is Success; but if he or she enjoys continuous and sustainable career growth in the organization; this is due to his/her competence. So, Employability not only helps in achieving Success but it ensures being Competent enough to deal with any situation that arises in industries or organizations where the candidate is working.

See, human capital that is youth has to be ignited and to be converted as young competent minds so that ultimately they can contribute in making the nation as Knowledge Economy. In coming years, the countries with great knowledge economy would only rule the world economically, educationally, financially and so on.

SEE PAGE-10



Union Minister Dr Pe Myint delivers the opening speech at coordination meeting to host the 19th meeting of the ASEAN Sub-Committee of Information. **PHOTO: MNA**

Myanmar to host ASEAN SCI meeting from 5 to 8 March

THE Ministry of Information held a coordination meeting in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday to host the 19th meeting of the ASEAN Sub-Committee of Information (19th SCI).

The meeting was opened with an address by Union Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint.

It was also attended by Deputy Minister for Information U Aung Hla Tun, Directors General and Managing Director of the departments and enterprises operating under the Ministry of Information, and representatives of the Yangon Regional Government.

Also present were representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs; Home Affairs; Religious Affairs and Culture; Transport and Communications; Labour, Immigration and Population; Health and

Sports; Planning and Finance; and Hotels and Tourism, as well as other invited guests.

Leaders of the ASEAN had announced the Bali Concord-II declaration on 7 October 2003 to establish the ASEAN community by 2020.

The ASEAN charter was signed in Singapore on 20 November 2007.

The SCI meeting is held to review resolutions related to the information sector in ASEAN summits and other meetings, present new project proposals for the next fiscal year, negotiate for the ASEAN Cultural Fund, make financial rules and select a host country for the next meeting.

The 19th meeting will be held from 5 to 8 March at the Sky Star Hotel in Yangon.

During the coordination meeting, Director-General of

the Myanma Radio and Television (MRTV) U Myint Htwe reported on the preparations for hosting the 19th SCI meeting.

Director of MRTV U Zeyar reported on the preparations and establishment of the leading committee, work committee and sub-committees for hosting the meeting successfully.

The participants at the meeting also discussed accommodation, transport, communication, security, the opening ceremony and medical coverage for the delegates from the ASEAN countries.

Deputy Minister U Aung Hla Tun also discussed preparations for transport and food for the delegates.

The coordination meeting came to an end with concluding remarks by Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint.—Myanmar News Agency ■

Need of Developing Employability Skills in Young Minds of Myanmar . . .

FROM PAGE-9

The list of set of skills that come under Employability Skill may not be limited but here are few of major skills that need to be inculcated or developed in young minds:

- Technical and Analytical Skill
- Critical Thinking
- Communication Skill (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking)
- Planning and Team Work
- IT and Computing Skill
- Adaptability and Leadership Skill
- Presentation Skill
- Decision Making

- Lateral Thinking or “Out-of-Box” Thinking
- Problem based Learning
- Collaboration Skill
- Project based Learning
- Skill to make Effective Use of Social Media
- Lifelong Learning Skill
- Ethical and Human Values
- Many more.....

The above includes few major skills as a part of Employability Skill. The subsequent parts of this article would highlight and stress upon How Each One of the above Skills could be developed in Pragmatic ways. (Please do write for feedback to me at drgrsinha@ieec.org, ganeshsinha@acm.org, gr_sinha@miit.edu.mm)

Foreign Heads of State send felicitations to President U Htin Kyaw

The following are messages of felicitations from Foreign Heads of State / Government sent to President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar U Htin Kyaw, on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

From Mr. Roch Marc Christian Kabore, President of Burkina Faso, Sir President,

The celebration of the national day of your country on January 4th 2018 gives me the pleasant opportunity to address you, on behalf of the People of Burkina Faso and my personal name, my warm congratulations.

I express to you and to your People, the wishes of health, peace, prosperity and continuous progress.

In reassuring you of my constant availability to work with you to continued strengthening of friendship and cooperation between our two countries, please, accept, Sir President, the assurances of my highest consideration.

From Mr. Rodrigo Roa Duterte President of the Philippines Excellency,

Please accept my warm felicitations to Your Excellency and the people of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar on your 70th Anniversary of Independence.

It is my hope that our common desire for the development of our countries will continue to bind our nations to work closely to achieve greater peace, progress and prosperity for our peoples.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm the Philippines’ commitment to further strengthen engagement with Myanmar in various aspects to move our bilateral relations forward.

Please accept, Excellency, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.

Foreign Head of State sends felicitations to State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

The following is message of felicitations from Foreign Head of State / Government sent to State Counsellor and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

From Mr. Walid Al-Moualem Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Government of the Syrian Arab Republic Excellency,

I have the pleasure to present to your Excellency, my truthful congratulations on the occasion of the National day of your country, and I avail this opportunity to express my wishes of good health and happiness for you personally, more progress and prosperity to your friendly people.

Please accept, Your Excellency, my highest consideration.

MYANMAR GAZETTE

Head of Service Organization appointed

The President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has appointed Daw Tin Nwe Soe, Deputy Director-General, Office of the Supreme Court of the Union, as Director-General of the Office of the Union Judiciary Supervision on probation from the date she assumes charge of her duties.

Trump pushes hardline immigration policies even as he urges unity

WASHINGTON — US President Donald Trump urged lawmakers on Tuesday to work toward bipartisan compromises, but pushed a hard line on immigration, insisting on a border wall and other concessions from Democrats as part of any deal to protect the children of illegal immigrants.

Trump, in his first State of the Union speech, gave no ground on the contentious issue of whether to shield young immigrants known as “Dreamers” from deportation.

Aiming to keep conservative supporters happy as he looks to November congressional elections, Trump stood by a set of principles opposed by Democrats, including the border wall with Mexico and new restrictions on how many family members that legal immigrants can bring into the United States.

“Tonight, I call upon all of us to set aside our differences, to seek out common ground, and to summon the unity we need to deliver for the people we were elected to serve,” Trump said in his address.

Trump used the hour-and-20-minute speech, given annually by presidents to Congress, to try to overcome doubts about his presidency at a time when he is battling a probe into his campaign’s alleged ties with Russia and suffering low job approval ratings.

Trump made no mention of the federal probe into whether his campaign colluded with Russia in the 2016 presidential election, a controversy that is dogging his presidency. Trump



US President Donald Trump waves as he arrives to deliver his first State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress inside the House Chamber on Capitol Hill in Washington, US on 30 January, 2018.

PHOTO: REUTERS

has denied collusion and has called the probe a “witch hunt.”

The speech was short on details about Trump’s policy proposals.

But his sober, measured approach was welcomed by the public. A CNN/SSRS snap poll said 48 per cent of those surveyed had a “very positive” response to the speech and 22 per cent “somewhat positive.”

There was little sign of unity inside the House of Representatives chamber where Trump spoke. Republican lawmakers cheered wildly at the president’s applause lines. Democrats often sat in their seats silently and many booed when he laid out his

immigration proposals.

DENOUNCES NORTH KOREAN LEADERSHIP

Turning to foreign policy late in the speech, Trump denounced the “depraved character” of North Korea’s leadership and said Pyongyang’s “reckless pursuit of nuclear missiles could very soon threaten our homeland.”

“We are waging a campaign of maximum pressure to prevent that from happening,” he said. In a surprise moment, he singled out a North Korea defector in the crowd, Ji Seong-ho, as an example of what he called the re-

clusive country’s brutal nature.

Trump also said he had signed an order to keep open the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for foreign terrorism suspects. Former Democratic President Barack Obama had vowed to close the prison, which has been condemned by human rights groups, but was unable to shut it down completely.

Whether Trump would follow through on his appeal for bipartisan harmony was far from clear. Trump’s past attempts at a unifying message have been undermined by his later rancorous tweets and divisive statements that angered Democrats and frequently annoyed lawmakers in

his own Republican Party.

The unity plea will first be put to the test in his drive for a compromise on protecting 1.8 million Dreamers — people brought illegally to the country as children — who face a 5 March deadline on whether they can begin to be deported.

Republicans welcomed Trump’s immigration proposals, with US Senator James Lankford of Oklahoma saying Trump tried to strike a middle ground.

“My Democratic colleagues can say he didn’t move enough, but you can’t deny he moved a lot. There are people in his core base who think he has moved way too far.”

But Senator Patrick Leahy, a Vermont Democrat and the longest-serving senator, said Trump’s words about unity, after a year of “divisive actions, petty insults and disgraceful race-baiting ... ring hollow.”

Trump said he was “extending an open hand” for an immigration deal and that he would provide Dreamers a pathway to citizenship over 10 to 12 years in exchange for funding the border wall, which he promised during his campaign, and restrictions on legal immigration.

He called his plan a “down-the-middle compromise,” but some Democrats hissed when he said he wanted to rein in “chain migration,” the ability of legal immigrants to bring a wide-ranging number of family members into the country.

“Let’s come together, set politics aside and finally get the job done,” Trump said. —Reuters ■

France’s Macron warns Turkey over Syrian operation — Le Figaro interview

PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron warned Turkey that its operation against Kurdish militias in northern Syria should not become an excuse to invade the country and said he wanted Ankara to coordinate its action with its allies.

Turkey last week launched an air and ground offensive in northwest Syria, targeting the Kurdish YPG militia in the Afrin region. That has opened a new front in the seven-year-old civil war and strained ties with

Turkey’s NATO allies.

“If it turns out that this operation takes a turn other than to fight a potential terrorist threat to the Turkish border and becomes an invasion operation, (then) this becomes a real problem for us,” Macron said in an interview with Le Figaro newspaper published on Wednesday.

Turkey considers the YPG a terrorist organisation and an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has waged a

three-decade-long insurgency in Turkey’s largely Kurdish southeast.

The United States and France have armed and trained YPG-led militia in the fight against Islamic State in Syria.

Macron said he would bring the issue up again with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and that the nature of the operation meant there should be discussions between Europeans, but also more widely among allies.—Reuters ■

Earthquake kills child, injures dozens in Pakistan

KABUL — A 6.1 magnitude earthquake struck northeast Afghanistan on Wednesday, shaking large parts of the region and killing a child and injuring several people in neighbouring Pakistan, officials said.

The quake, which rattled buildings in the Afghan capital and was also felt in parts of India, struck 270 km (167 miles) north-east of Kabul in the Hindu Kush mountains, at a depth of 180 km, the European Mediterranean Seismological Centre said.

A baby girl was killed and 10 people were injured when roofs

of mud-walled houses collapsed in the southwestern Pakistani province of Baluchistan, a district deputy chief, Shabbir Meghal, said.

There were no immediate reports of any serious damage or casualties in Afghanistan.

Large parts of the region are seismically active because a tectonic plate, known as the Indian plate, is pushing north into the Eurasian plate.

A 7.6-magnitude quake in northern Pakistan in October 2005 killed about 75,000 people.—Reuters ■



Russia's Defence Ministry has accepted new Kalashnikov AK-12 and AK-15 assault rifles for service. **PHOTO: TASS**

Advanced Kalashnikov assault rifles accepted for service in Russian troops

MOSCOW — Russia's Defence Ministry has accepted new Kalashnikov AK-12 and AK-15 assault rifles for service, the press office of the Kalashnikov firearms manufacturer told TASS on Monday.

"A decision has been made on the AK-12 and the AK-15. The submachine guns have been recom-

mended as armament in the ground forces, the Airborne Force and marine infantry," the Kalashnikov press office said.

Last year, Kalashnikov Group CEO Alexei Krivoruchko told TASS that the trials of the latest AK-12 assault rifle had been completed.

The chief executive

noted at the time that the firearms manufacturer was ready to start serial deliveries in 2018. The assault rifles are intended to make part of the Ratanik 'soldier of the future' combat gear. It comprises several dozen elements, including nine pieces of armament, as was reported earlier.—Tass ■



EIA Study of M9 East Appraisal and Exploration Drilling in Block M9 by PTTEPI

PTTEP International Limited (PTTEPI) plans to conduct an appraisal and exploration drilling campaign in the eastern part of Offshore Block M9 with objective to confirm (or deny) and to indicate the presence of hydrocarbon reservoirs, and serve the development of the existing Zawtika gas field. The proposed appraisal and exploration drilling will be up to 12 wells which will begin in Q2 2018.

Regarding the Scoping Report which was submitted to Environmental Conservation Department (ECD), PTTEPI and Artelia Eau & Environment (Artelia) are currently undertaking an EIA Study which includes associated stakeholder engagement. The EIA will be conducted in accordance with the Myanmar EIA Procedure (2015).

More information about the proposed activity can be found on PTTEPI's website as follows: www.pttep.com

Questions and comments can also be submitted to PTTEPI in writing by contacting the following email address: TinNilarSoe@pttep.com



EIA Study of M11 Exploration Drilling in Block M11 by PTTEPI

PTTEP International Limited (PTTEPI) plans to conduct an exploration drilling campaign in the Offshore Block M11 with objective to confirm (or deny) the presence of hydrocarbon reservoirs. The proposed exploration drilling will be one well which will begin in Q4 2018.

Regarding the Scoping Report which was submitted to Environmental Conservation Department (ECD), PTTEPI and Artelia Eau & Environment (Artelia) are currently undertaking an EIA Study which includes associated stakeholder engagement. The EIA will be conducted in accordance with the Myanmar EIA Procedure (2015).

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Brazil's Lula leads presidential poll despite upheld conviction

SAO PAULO — Former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva leads in the first presidential poll published since an appeals court upheld his conviction on corruption charges, a decision which is likely to knock him out of contention for the October election. The Datafolha survey published on Wednesday in the Folha de S Paulo newspaper shows that if Lula cannot run, right-wing candidate Jair Bolsonaro would take the lead and make it to the second round. The poll showed that Bolsonaro would lose badly in a second-round

vote to environmentalist and two-time presidential hopeful Marina Silva, and be in a second-round dead heat with likely center-right candidate Geraldo Alckmin, the governor of Sao Paulo state. If Lula is not allowed to run by the courts, a record 32 per cent of Brazilians polled by Datafolha said they would vote for no one in the presidential race. Showing widespread contempt for a political class engulfed by kickback scandals since 2014, while Lula leads in the polls, he also has by far the highest rejection rate among voters, at 40 per cent.

LULA RUNS

The survey showed that Lula, as the former president is known, would receive 34 per cent of the first-round vote if he can run, compared with 16 per cent for right-wing candidate Jair Bolsonaro and 8 per cent for Marina Silva.

The poll also indicated that Lula would beat all other likely candidates in a second-round runoff race, required if no single candidate wins a majority of the vote in the first round.

If Lula does not run, Bolsonaro would get 18 per cent of first-round vote while Marina Silva would

get 13 per cent and Gomes 10 per cent. TV presenter Luciano Huck and Alckmin would each get 8 per cent of the votes without Lula.

The Datafolha interviews were conducted on 29-30 January, a few days after three appellate court judges voted to uphold Lula's convictions on taking bribes and money laundering. Lula, Brazil's first working-class leader, held office from 2003 to 2010. He remains free pending future appeals. Datafolha interviewed 2,826 people across Brazil. The margin of error is two percentage points.—Reuters ■

German industrial workers start 24-hour strikes in row over pay, hours

FRANKFURT — Industrial workers in Germany started 24-hour strikes overnight, affecting companies including automotive supplier ZF Friedrichshafen and lighting company Zumtobel, amid a dispute over wages and working hours. Powerful German union IG Metall has called for full-day walkouts through Friday, firing a last warning shot before it ballots for extended industrial action that could be crippling to companies reliant on a well-oiled supply chain of car parts and other components.

Emboldened by the fastest economic growth in six years and record low unemployment, the union is demanding an 8 per cent pay rise over 27 months for 3.9 million metals and engineering workers across Europe's largest economy.

The union has also asked for workers to be given the right to reduce their weekly hours to 28 from 35 to care for children, elderly or sick relatives, and return to full time after two years. This is IG Metall's first major push for shorter hours since workers staged sev-

en weeks of strikes in 1984 to help secure a cut of the working week to 35 hours from 40 hours. Employers have offered a 6.8 per cent increase but rejected the demand for shorter hours unless they can also increase workers' hours when necessary. Across Germany, around 260 companies are expected to be hit by walkouts lasting 24 hours each this week in support of IG Metall's demands. Workers at printing press maker Heidelberger Druckmaschinen in Heidelberg are among those downing their tools on

Wednesday, as are staff at Kion's Still brand of forklift trucks in Hamburg and at valve maker Gestra in Bremen. Workers at automotive supplier Robert Bosch in Stuttgart are due to go on strike later on Wednesday, to be followed by Mercedes-Benz maker Daimler and sportscar firm Porsche on Friday.

Both the union and the employers have left the door open to resuming talks after the planned strikes end on Friday but each said they demanded more willingness to make concessions.—Reuters ■

China's Li says ties with Britain will remain unchanged through Brexit

BEIJING — China's relations with Britain will not change because of changes in British-EU relations, Premier Li Keqiang said on Wednesday.

Speaking after meeting visiting British Prime Minister Theresa May in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, Li said the two discussed upholding free trade and that China would become more open to agri-

cultural products.

Britain's May says committed to deepening relationship with China

British Prime Minister Theresa May said on Wednesday in Beijing that she is committed to deepening Britain's relationship with China in light of Brexit and would explore all options for a future trade relationship.

May made the com-

ments speaking alongside Chinese Premier Li Keqiang during a three-day state visit to China where she is accompanied by business people from sectors where Britain feels it can capitalize on China's growing middle class consumers. The two countries have also agreed to lift a ban on British beef exports to China in six months, May said.—Reuters ■



British Prime Minister Theresa May speaks during a joint press conference with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China on 31 January, 2018.
PHOTO: REUTERS

India boosts maritime reach with Seychelles pact to build naval facilities

NEW DELHI/PORT VICTORIA — India has signed a 20-year pact with the Seychelles to build an airstrip and a jetty for its navy in the island chain, the two countries said, as the South Asian nation steps up a contest with China for influence in the Indian Ocean.

China last year inaugurated its first overseas military base in Djibouti, near one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, deepening Indian insecurities and pushing it to gain a foothold in the region.

The agreement signed in the Seychelles' capital of Victoria last

weekend provides for India to develop the airstrip and jetty on the Assumption islands, near another shipping route.

"India is helping us free of charge, and the facilities and activities will entirely be at the control of Seychelles and will be conducted as per the laws of Seychelles," Barry Faure, its secretary of state for foreign affairs, told Reuters.

But nothing had been leased to India and the new facilities would help Seychelles better control its exclusive economic zone of 1.3 million square kilometres, Faure added.—Reuters ■

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The Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Dated 1st February 2018

hh@kcyangon.com

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V MERKUR TIDE VOY. NO. ()

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V MERKUR TIDE VOY. NO. () are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 1-2-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of MITT 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 MCC TRANSPORT
(S'PORE) PTE LTD**

Phone No: 2301185

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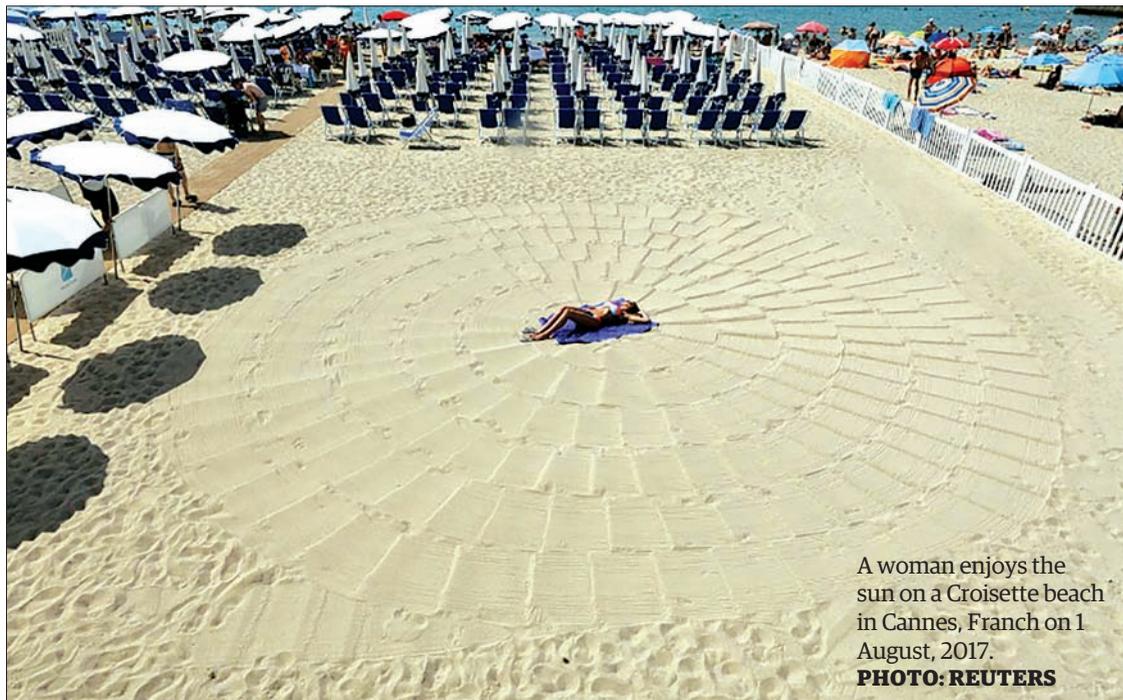
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A woman enjoys the sun on a Croisette beach in Cannes, France on 1 August, 2017.
PHOTO: REUTERS

U2 defeats lawsuit claiming it stole part of 'Achtung Baby' song

NEW YORK — A US judge on Tuesday dismissed a lawsuit accusing U2 of lifting part of a British songwriter's work for a song on the Irish rock band's 1991 blockbuster album "Achtung Baby."

US District Judge Denise Cote in Manhattan rejected Paul Rose's claim that U2 willfully copied from a 13-second guitar riff near the start of his 1989 instrumental "Nae Slappin," to create a 12-second segment featuring a guitar solo for its song "The Fly."

Rose, who lives in New York, claimed that U2 copied from his song "virtually note-for-note," and also used a tambourine and the same drum, percussion and bass line with-

out permission.

But the judge said the riff was not a "sufficiently substantial" portion of "Nae Slappin," a 3-1/2-minute composition that "demonstrates the plaintiff's impressive guitar skills," to be a protectable "fragment" of the work.

She also said that even if the riff were protectable, a reasonable jury could not find that U2 copied it.

Rose had been seeking at least \$5 million in damages from U2 lead singer Bono; bandmates The Edge, Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen Jr; and UMG Recordings Inc, a Vivendi SA unit that releases records under U2's label Island Records.—Reuters ■



Irish group U2 receive an award at the 2017 MTV Europe Music Awards at Wembley Arena in London, Britain on 12 November, 2017. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

Life's a beach: Cannes ships in sand for film festival

CANNES, France — Every year the French Riviera town of Cannes rolls out the red carpet to A-list celebrities at the world's most glamorous film festival. Now it wants to roll out a bigger beach too.

The Mediterranean resort is shipping in 80,000 cubic metres of white sand — enough to fill 32 Olympic swimming pools — to widen the beach along a 1.4 kilometre (0.9 mile) stretch of seafront beside the famed "Croisette" promenade.

From Brigitte Bardot in the 1950s to Nicole Kidman and Leon-

ardo DiCaprio in more recent years, the Croisette's fine sands, glitzy hotels and gourmet restaurants have hosted film's biggest stars during the annual festival. By the time of this year's event in May, the expanded stretch of sand should be in place and for private beach managers means more room to make money.

"We had a strip of sand which was about 20 metres wide, now we'll get an extra 10 to 12 metres," said Bruno Richard, manager of the privately owned Long Beach, where a sunlounger costs 25 euros (\$31) for the day.

More than half the sand is arriving by boat from a quarry in the neighbouring Var region. Mixed with sea water, the sand is pumped via a floating pipe onto the beach, where bulldozers shape the new waterfront.

Locals are divided over the development. While some applaud a bigger public beach, others fret it may be a waste of tax payers' money.

"What worries me is whether the sea will just take it all back. It cost the town a lot of money," said resident Gerard Rollandin.—Reuters ■

'Black Panther' stars on importance of African culture in Marvel film

LOS ANGELES — The stars of "Black Panther" dressed in their finest African-inspired royal attire and spoke about the importance of representing a black superhero story on screen at the premiere of the new film from Walt Disney Co's Marvel Entertainment.

Chadwick Boseman, who plays T'Challa, the titular hero and king of fictional African nation Wakanda, led his co-stars including Lupita Nyong'o, Daniel Kaluuya, Michael B Jordan, Danai Gurira and Angela Bassett, on the purple carpet on Monday.

"Something like Marvel has a way of really affecting popular culture, and to have that popular culture informed with things that are of African origin and people knowing they are of African origin ... is powerful," Nyong'o, who plays warrior Nakia, told

Reuters.

"Hopefully it changes the general idea of what being an African is. Too often times we see Africa as a place that is wanting and here it's a place that you

want to go," she said.

The Oscar-winning actress matched the purple carpet in an amethyst-hued Versace gown with gold-detailed shoulders and belt. Gurira wore a bright

pink Viktor & Rolf dress with a dramatic shoulder ruffle, and Bassett opted for a golden yellow Naeem Khan fringe jumpsuit.

The men also served up colorful looks. Boseman rocked

a gilded print Emporio Armani suit, actor Donald Glover opted for a tangerine Dolce & Gabbana suit, and the film's director, Ryan Coogler, added a printed scarf to his black Ikire Jones suit, a Philadelphia label that draws from West African influences.

"Black Panther," out in theaters on 16 February, earned rave early reactions from attendees at the premiere, including "Guardians of the Galaxy" director James Gunn, who praised the film as an "extraordinary work."

"It's just filled with so much talent, so much beauty, the aesthetic of it is so pleasing and so black and Afro-centric and African and modern and worldly and futuristic. You know, it's got a lot of swag. This movie is on fire," said Bassett, who plays T'Challa's mother.—Reuters ■



A general view of the entrance for the premiere of "Black Panther" in Los Angeles, California, US on 29 January, 2018. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

Beirut guide gives walking tours of city's history and his own

BEIRUT — Tour guide Ronnie Chatah, 36, is once again doing what he loves after a four-year hiatus — telling the stories that have shaped Beirut's history from ancient to modern times.

Chatah put the walking tours on hold in late 2013 after the assassination of his father Mohammad Chatah, a former minister and diplomat. He was worried he would not be able to give an impartial view of the city, he said.

"My father is buried in what is probably the most climactic part of the tour," he said, referring to Martyrs' Square, a pock-marked statue in the epicenter, where many Lebanese have rallied in times of political crisis since World War I.

"It is not easy to look at your father's burial site and just ignore the emotions."

But reviving the tour has had a surprising effect.

"I have not had a better therapy session," said Chatah, who first launched the tours in 2009.

Now for four hours every other Sunday, people follow Chatah as he explains some of the most complicated aspects of Lebanon's capital.



Tour guide Ronnie Chatah, 36, gives the tour brochures to visitors in Beirut, Lebanon on 28 January, 2018. PHOTO: REUTERS

He explains that the local currency is pegged to the US dollar and about how since the civil war political power is shared between Lebanon's 18 different religious sects. He also explains why so many abandoned heritage buildings have been seemingly

left to disintegrate.

Standing outside what was once the Holiday Inn hotel, Chatah recounts how the building that once exemplified Beirut's Seventies glamor became an icon of the 1975-1990 civil war only a few weeks after it opened. It be-

came the military headquarters of whichever militant faction was winning the war in Beirut over the next 15 years.

For him, the building — with its grey exterior, huge gaping holes and revolving balcony — is the best reflection of how the Leb-

anese have yet to make peace.

"We don't reflect properly and I think that is our problem. Maybe that is part of our story too, that we are constantly avoiding the deeper issues, and hence a country that still cannot stand properly on its own two feet," he said. The tour allows visitors to discover parts of the city that have either ceased to exist or cordoned off by security because of close proximity to government buildings or politicians' residences. This includes what used to be the old Jewish neighbourhood, once home to a small community that is now all but gone save for a restored synagogue.

"I thought I knew the area but I was surprised to find out about ... a neighbourhood that I never knew existed," Sarah Hara-keh, 24, a teacher said.

Chatah said he had been planning to resume the walks for just a couple of months, but now there are tours scheduled for the rest of the year. "That is the persuasion of this city, you keep coming back, and even when you know it is not good for you," he said. —Reuters ■

Wings of joy: Kabul's bird market brings comfort to war-weary Afghans

KABUL — For some Afghans weighed down by decades of war and struggle, a little comfort and distraction can be found in the company of birds.

The war seems a long way off in the Ka Faroshi bird market in the heart of Kabul's old city, a narrow lane with a few alleys off it, packed with small, mud-walled shops festooned with bird cages.

Customers, most of them men, but some blue burqa-clad women too, squeeze down the crowded street, stopping to inspect birds on display, haggle with shopkeepers and buy bird seed and other supplies.

Fighting cocks and partridges squawk in bell-shaped wicker cages, while finches, larks and canaries of all varieties hop about

in cages, and pigeons coo in small aviaries made of wire.

"In Afghanistan, it's a passion to keep birds," said Rafullah Ahmadi, who sells fighting cocks at the market.

"Some people love to keep fighting cocks, some love to have partridges and some love to have other kinds of birds. It's a custom in Afghanistan."

Most of the birds come from Afghanistan, caught in the wild or raised. Some are imported from neighboring countries, such as Iran and Pakistan, but traders said business was down, with few birds being imported these days.

Ahmadi said the best fighting cocks come from northern Afghanistan. The most expensive ones can bring up to 1 million afghanis (\$14,000). But the favourite of many Afghans is the chukar partridge, an elegant reddish-grey bird with a black band across its eyes and around its throat, a red beak, and black stripes on its side.

The partridges are bred for fighting. "My passion is partridges, I've been keeping partridges for about 60 years," said Abdul Khetab, 80, another market trader. "I'm first in Kabul in partridge fighting." Another trader, Mohammad Zahir Tanha, said birds helped bring relief from the stress of life in the Afghan capital, recently hit by a spate of bloody militant attacks. "I have a mental problem and doctors advised me to keep birds," Tanha said in his shop, stacked with cages. —Reuters ■



Canary cages hang inside a shop, for sale, at Ka Faroshi bird market in Kabul, Afghanistan on 18 January, 2018. PHOTO: REUTERS

China to stage production of "Thais" in February, with Placido Domingo performing

BEIJING — A Chinese production of Jules Massenet's opera "Thais" will make its debut on 2 February, according to the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA). P Spanish tenor Placido Domingo will perform in the opera, which will be staged at the NCPA in Beijing until 6 February, according to the NCPA.

The opera tells the story of a young monk, Athanael, who saves the beautiful Thais from hedonism, while the monk becomes degenerate and sinks into carnal desire for Thais.

Composed by Jules Massenet, the opera was adapted from the novel by the same name, which helped Anatole France win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1921. —Xinhua ■

Yangon and Ayeyawady play to a draw in U-19 MNL match

THE U-19 teams from Yangon United and Ayeyawady United played to a 1-1 tie yesterday in a Myanmar National League match at Salin stadium in Yangon.

With both teams comprised of young, energetic players, the ball went to and fro with speedy play.

The opening goal occurred early for Ayeyawady, when Nay Don Khant scored at the 6-minute mark.

The equalising goal was scored just as quickly by Yangon United's brilliant player Hlwan Moe Oo, who scored in the restart just after the opening goal.

The players from Yangon made further attempts to score, but Ayeyawady's defence was strong and was able to thwart further goal scoring.

The struggle for more goals continued in the second half, with strikers from both teams making sweaty efforts to break the draw.

But Yangon and Ayeyawady were equal on this day in stami-



Youth players from Yangon United and Ayeyawady United vie for the ball in yesterday's U-19 MNL match at Salin Stadium in Yangon. **PHOTO:MNL**

na, skill and defence.

The Yangon United U-19

team will next play against

Yadanarbon U-19 at Padon-

mar stadium on 7 February.

—KyawZin Lin ■

Myanmar Futsal team departs for AFC Futsal Championships

THE Myanmar National Futsal Team departed for Chinese Taipei yesterday morning from Yangon International Airport to compete in the AFC Futsal Championship 2018.

This is the 15th edition of the AFC Futsal Championship, the biennial international competition organised by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) for the men's national teams of Asia. The competition will take place in Chinese Taipei, also known as Taiwan, which was appointed by the AFC to host the event from 1 to 11 February. Sixteen teams including Myanmar will play in the tournament.

The teams will be divided into four groups each consisting of four teams.

Myanmar is in Group C with Asian Futsal powers Iran, Iraq and China. Myanmar will play against Iran on Friday, Iraq on Sunday and China on Tuesday. The top two teams of each group will advance to the quarterfinals.—KyawZin Lin ■

Palace covet attacking cover after Sako injury

LONDON — Crystal Palace will look to sign an attacking player before the transfer window closes later on Wednesday after midfielder Bakary Sako picked up an injury in their 1-1 draw at West Ham United, manager Roy Hodgson said.

Sako is facing an extended spell on the sidelines after limping off with an ankle injury before halftime on Tuesday and Hodgson revealed that the Malian international's chances of a quick recovery appeared unlikely.

"My medical staff... don't think it's very good at all," the former England manager said. "We don't really have the luxury of losing a forward player because we are so short in that area."

"It makes it a little bit more imperative that we bring some players in because otherwise we'll have a very thin squad, especially in the



Crystal Palace's Bakary Sako reacts after a foul by West Ham United's Pablo Zabaleta.

PHOTO: REUTERS

forward areas."

Hodgson has signed two players so far, with centre

back Jaroslav Jach joining on a three-year deal and Sweden under-21 midfielder Erdal Rakip

coming in on loan from Benfica until the end of the season. — Reuters ■

Allardyce takes aim at deadline day fixtures

LONDON — Everton manager Sam Allardyce has called for the Premier League to avoid scheduling games on transfer deadline day as it puts clubs under too much pressure.

Everton host Leicester City on Wednesday, one of six games on the schedule, and Allardyce said speculation about players coming and going before the transfer window closed was a distraction.

"I'm a manager and I want the best possible opportunities to function correctly," he said.

"I have enough pressure in the game as it is at the moment without heaping more on top of me, which is exactly what this does, on every manager in the Premier League.—Reuters ■