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Progress on ICOE recommendations for Rakhine reviewed in Sittway

THE Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement held a meeting with the Rakhine State government and local representatives yesterday morning on the implementation of key recommendations made by the Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICOE) for Rakhine issue.

The meeting held at the regional guest house in Sittway Township was attended by Union Minister Dr Win Myat Aye, Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu, Deputy Minister U Soe Aung, local cabinet members, departmental officials and local representatives.

In his opening remark, the Union Minister explained the tasks of his office for implementing recommendations of ICOE in the areas of social cohesion; providing necessary assistance in collaboration with international donors to Rakhine, Muslim and other ethnic minorities who were displaced by the 2017 conflict; accelerating its implementation of the 'National Strategy on Resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Closure of IDP Camps, resulting in the successful reintegration of the IDP's into society; re-examining the processes involved in the issuance of the National Verification Card (NVC) and its consequences through effective implementation and coordination of the ministries; ensuring equitable access to the delivery of education, health and all other essential services; removing



Union Minister Dr Win Myat Aye holds the meeting with Rakhine authorities and communities over implementation of recommendations by ICOE. **PHOTO: MNA**

various restrictions that interrupt the freedom of movement; and reviewing implementation and evaluation of each recommendation.

He highlighted the importance of peace and stability to carry out these tasks, while the government is negotiating with Bangladesh, ASEAN member countries, international organizations and UN agencies for

repatriation, resettlement and development of IDPs.

He also advised to prioritize a resettlement plan for the internally displaced persons who did not flee to the other country at the seven villages in Maung-taw Township.

Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu explained the works of his government and called for cooperation of local

people in the resettlement programme for long-term development.

Deputy Minister U Soe Aung reported the status on formation of a national-level committee for closure of IDPs and the cash-for-work programme for the locals at the seven villages.

The locals from these villages asked about the assistance

for infrastructural development, school buildings, fishing gears and other needs for their livelihoods.

The Union and regional government officials also held talks with representatives of the IDPs for systematic closure of four camps and resettlement programmes.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

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News release on COVID-19 virus at 8:00 pm on 9 March: MoHS

1. The Ministry of Health and Sports is closely monitoring the COVID-19 outbreak and spread in China and 101 countries around the world at the international gateways, at the community-based and public hospitals-based as well as in cooperation with the private hospitals.

2. In this regard,

(a) A one-year-two-month-old boy, who is residing in Myothit Township, Magway Region, suffered a fever, abnormal breathing, and inability of drinking milk on 6 March. So his family sent him to Magway General Hospital on 8 March. He is now put in a quarantined ward, with his mother. The laboratory test is also underway. His father has reportedly arrived in Myanmar from China on 29 February 2020.

(b) A 32-year-old woman, who is residing in Aungmyethazan Township, Mandalay Region. She has suffered a fever, cough, and shortness of breath since a month ago. Her cough produced blood two weeks ago. So she went to the Mandalay General Hospital. Although she had no close contact with the suspected patients and no background history of travelling to infectious regions during the last 14 days, owing to severe respiratory symptoms, she is now under treatment at the quarantined ward. The laboratory test is underway.

(c) A 44-year-old male from Nyaungthonepin village, Htantabin township in Yangon Region, has suffered a fever, cough, sore throat, and shortness of breath since 8 March. He went to the Yangon General Hospital on that same day. Although he had no close contact with the suspected patients and no background history of travelling to infectious regions during the last 14 days, owing to severe respiratory symptoms he was put under quarantine. He was laboratory-tested negative for COVID-19 on 9 March.

(d) A 34-year-old pregnant woman, who is residing in Bago, Bago Region, arrived back in Myanmar from Malaysia on 9 March. She has suffered a fever since 8 March. When she was screened at the Yangon International Airport she was found to have a fever on 9 March. She was referred to the Waibargi Specialist Hospital. She is now under quarantine for a further laboratory test.

(e) A 43-year-old man, who is residing in Kyauktaga township in Bago Region, has suffered a fever and cough for the last three weeks. He went to Kyauktaga Township Hospital. He is now put under quarantine and laboratory test is underway. He has reportedly arrived in Myanmar from Thailand on 26 February and had no severe respiratory problems.

(f) A 39-year-old male, who is living in Pauk Township, Magway Region, started suffering a fever and cough since 8 March. He went to the Pakokku General Hospital. He was put under quarantine on 9 March. Laboratory test is underway. He was reportedly working at the Thailand-Malaysia border and arrived back to Pakokku through Myawady checkpoint, on 8 March.

(g) A 23-year-old man, who is residing in Pindaya Township, Shan State (South), arrived back to Pindaya through Muse checkpoint on 9 March. He had a fever and went to the Pindaya General Hospital. He is now under quarantine and treatment for a further laboratory test.

3. According to the laboratory results from the National Health Laboratory:

(a) A 26-year-old American man, who is under quarantine and treatment at the Waibargi Specialist Hospital ...

(b) An 18-year-old female, who has been studying in Bangkok and is under quarantine and treatment at

the Hpa-an Township Hospital ...

(c) A 25-year-old male doctor, who is under quarantine and treatment at the Kandawnadi Hospital ...

(d) A 24-year-old pregnant female, who is under quarantine and treatment at the Insein General Hospital ...

(e) A 52-year-old Korean man, who is under quarantine and treatment at the Waibargi Specialist Hospital ...

(f) A 38-year-old female, who is under quarantine and treatment at the Kandawnadi Hospital ...

(g) A 44-year-old male, who is under quarantine and treatment at the Yangon General Hospital ...

A total of 7, they all have tested negative for the COVID-19.

4. Eleven (11) patients are now under quarantine and treatment at respective hospitals as of 9 March at 6:00 pm.

5. Two Myanmar citizens were on board the flight from South Korea and arrived in Myanmar on 8 March. They have been found to have no fever and any other severe respiratory symptoms as well as no close contact with the laboratory-tested-positive patients. However, they came back from Degu in South Korea where there are many cases of infectious virus COVID-19 and are put under hospital quarantine at the South Okkalapa Women and Children Hospital for 14 days.

6. Even though there are no laboratory-test-confirmed cases in Myanmar as of 9 March, control and prevention measures are being undertaken with maximized momentum. Owing to the soaring outbreak and spread of COVID-19 virus in China and 101 countries around the world, the public is instructed to strictly follow the MoHS's health information guidelines. —MoHS

(Translated by Aungthu Ya)

MoALI strives for sustainable development in agro-based sectors

DEPUTY MINISTER U Hla Kyaw of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation highlighted that the ministry has been striving the sustainable development in agriculture, livestock and villages, and village-tracts. Rice and agro-based products should be developed in maximized momentum.

He spoke at the meeting held on 7 March in Pettan Village of Zalun Township, Hinthada District, Ayeyawady Region to hand over 150-acre farmlands to farmers for the development of mechanized agriculture with Union fund in 2019-2020 financial year.

He further said that climate conditions and its consequent natural disasters have caused losses in farmlands so efforts are being made to affect production volume. Dams are also being built to develop farmland water systems. The ministry is coordinating with concerned departments in fulfilling the regional needs for use of the agro-based machinery.

It is a successful result of



Deputy Minister U Hla Kyaw, officials, and attendees pose for a group photo at the ceremony to hand over 150-acre farmlands to farmers for development of mechanized agriculture in Pettan village of Zalun township, Hinthada District, Ayeyawady Region on 7 March. **PHOTO: MNA**

the local farmers from Tayokyoe and Tingote villages in Pettan village-tract. They have developed 150-acre mechanized farming. This event is to hand over it to the farmers. The State is supporting them and they also need to col-

laborate and strive for sustainable mechanized agriculture and growth of production, he added.

Next, Ayeyawady Region Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Environment U Tin Aung Win, Director-General U

Soe Hlaing of the Agricultural Mechanization Department and Zalun constituency member of parliament U Aung Min explained the issues in connection with the all-round development of mechanized farmlands and its

socio-economic benefits to farmers. They also presented certificates of honour to volunteers in developing 150-acre mechanized agriculture.

The deputy minister and party inspected the booths showcasing agriculture, livestock, villages and mechanized farming. They also watched the booths of private companies displaying the farming implements, farming machinery, chemical fertilizers, insecticides, and pesticides.

150-acre mechanized farmland is located beside of the Pettan-Taguntine-Mahatha-Sinmyaysar village road in Zalun township. The development work started in December 2019 and finished in March 2020. It is now ready for all-weather – monsoon, winter and summer – cropping with the aid of machines.

The deputy minister then looked around the construction of the KG school building and ICB-3 solar system for a home in Ywathit Village in Zalun Township. —MNA

(Translated by Aungthu Ya)

MoHS bolsters defence mechanism to prevent COVID-19

THE Ministry of Health and Sports held its 31/2020 coordination meeting yesterday afternoon on prevention of COVID-19 with a wide range of measures and public participations.

Union Minister Dr Myint Htwe talked on responsibilities of people in coordination with health officials for preventing the disease without getting into a panic about it.

He also advised not to share or create fake news and rumours on social media, instead to get reliable information from official sources, including the Ministry of Health and Sports.

The WHO has confirmed over 100,000 cases of COVID-19 in the world on 7 March, and it also pushed for accelerating efforts on containment of the disease, identifying the patients, quarantine processes, readiness of health facilities and training courses for the health workers.

The MoHS has arranged for designated hospitals, while the possibility of virus spread has decreased due to a decline in the arrival of foreign visitors.

Myanmar will suspend inbound flights from the South Korea from 9 March to 24 April, and the MoHS has requested the relevant ministry to reduce or cancel three outbound flights to the East Asian nation as the average death rate in these cases has reached 3.4 per cent.

Elder people and patients with chronic diseases



Union Minister Dr Myint Htwe hears reports at the coordination meeting yesterday afternoon on prevention of COVID-19. PHOTO: MNA

are most vulnerable to the mortality, and that awareness programmes are more important at the homes for the aged, youth camps and some training schools.

The Union Minister also pointed out the rapid spread of COVID-19 in the United States, the South Korea, Italy and Iran, and that Myanmar health workers are being alert

to the disease in the round-the-clock surveillance in line with guidelines of the Clinical Management Committee and the Infection Prevention and Control Committee since the disease was first identified in China on 5 January.

He added the ministry adopted future plans and emergency response programmes through the public health, ep-

idemiology, social, economic, travel and trade sectors not to waste the cost and time, while the natural history of disease is still unknown.

The MoHS officials are coordinating with the WHO and global health organizations in monitoring the disease as it is a challenging issue for the health-care sector of the country.

The meeting also discussed

daily update situations and their reports, spread of the disease in foreign countries, public awareness programmes of the ministry, video conferencing of health officials on the disease in the respective areas, control measures among communities and accumulation of medicines to control the disease—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Myanmar Scout Association meets for work plans

THE Myanmar Scout Association held a meeting last week to discuss its ongoing activities and future plans.

The meeting held at the YMCA hall in Yangon was attended by its Chief Commissioner Dr Tin Nyo, Deputy Chief U Thar Sein, senior members, officials from Region/State education offices and Rover Scout leaders from the universities.

They discussed the possible involvement of education officers in support teams of regional MSAs headed by chief ministers

of local governments, establishing the shops and offices of the association and raising funds for these offices.

The attendees also made discussions on forming scout associations at schools, classifications of cub scout, scout and rover scout, creating badges for ranking, skill levels, possible conducting basic scout leadership course with the assistance of Asia-Pacific Scout Region and training courses for the trainers.

— Myanmar Scout Association
(Translated by Aung Khin)



Myanmar Scout Association holds the meeting over its work plans. PHOTO: MSA

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Devotees, locals gather around Mann Shwe Settaw Pagoda festival on Full Moon of Tabaung

Mann Shwe Settaw Pagoda is crowded with people yesterday. **PHOTO: KYAW SOE WIN**

DEVOTEES, locals, and civil service personnel gathered around the Mann Shwe Settaw Pagoda festival on the Full Moon Day of Tabaung and during holidays.

"I'm a school teacher in Yenangyoung town. My family came here during the three-day holiday. I haven't experienced

this trip on the full moon day of Tabaung. I've presented 'early soon' and fruits to the Buddha. I'm very much delighted at the crowded people here. I'm very happy as I've got a chance to take shower in Mann Creek," said Daw Moe Moe Aung.

U Aung Kyaw Lin from up-

per Minhla said: "We've made a pilgrimage during the three-day holiday, with our neighbours. Families are coming here together as our school children have their summer holidays. Today is the full moon day of Tabaung with crowded festivities around the Mann Shwe Settaw Pagoda."

The Mann Shwe Settaw Pagoda Festival is from the 5th waxing day of Tabodwe (February) to the first day of Myanmar New Year in April and festivities are held for 80 days. —U Kyaw Soe Win (District IPRD)

(Translated by Aung Thu Ya)

Narcotic drugs seized in townships in Shan, Kachin states

A combined team including anti-narcotic squad searched a car driven by Maung Maung Lwin (a) Myint Zaw Lwin accompanied with Sai Hsan Paung and Sai Sein Win on the Ywangan-Kyaukse road near Ingon Village in Ywangan Township on 8 March and seized 217 kilo of ICE, 1,678,000 stimulant tablets and a hand phone from them.

Similarly, a local anti-narcotic squad in Muse seized 15,000 stimulant tablets and a hand phone from Yan Chain Lon (a) Ar Lon who drove a car on Pansai (Kyu Kok)-Muse road near Nam Hwel Village, Muse Township on the same day.

Police in Pinlaung Township arrested Kyar Thein after discovering on his car 501 kilo of raw opium on Pinlaung-Phekon road near Sintaung Vil-

lage, Pinlaung Township on 8 March.

Similarly, police in Phakant Township searched Ma Lwan Naw on Nant Hmaw-Wheykha road near Hsaiaung Village, Phakant Township and arrested her together with 6,000 stimulant tablets. Myanmar Police Force have opened lawsuits against them under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law, according to Myanmar Police Force.

Similarly, Tatmadaw columns seized 3,000 stimulant tablets hidden in a hole near Minehtalan Village in Monghsat Township on 5 March; 10,000 stimulant tablets hidden in bush near Maekyut Village, Monghsat Township on 7 March morning; 22,000 stimulant tablets hidden in a hole near Minehtalan Village,

Monghsat Township on 7 March afternoon; 100,000 stimulant tablets and 8 kilo of ICE hidden in a hole at the side of Monghsat-Mongtun road in Monghsat Township, 7 March evening; and

2,300 stimulant tablets at the side of a road near Maekyoke 2 Village in Monghsat Township on 8 March, according to Myanmar Police Force. — MNA

(Translated by TTN)

Suspects Maung Maung Lwin (a) Myint Zaw Lwin, Sai Hsan Paung and Sai Sein Win seen together with seized stimulant tablets, ICE and a vehicle. **PHOTO: MPF**

COVID-19: 16 factories shut down due to shortfall in raw materials

SIXTEEN factories have closed in Myanmar due to a disruption in supply of raw materials on account of the coronavirus outbreak, according to a press conference, held on 8 March at the Sky Hotel in Hlinethaya Township, where 12 workers' groups shared their concerns on COVID-19.

The closure of garment factories has led to mass layoffs, affecting more than 7,000 workers, according to the press conference.

The 12 workers' groups answered questions at the press conference. They called for the formation of an inspection group to look into the shortage of raw materials, and asked the authorities to govern volatile commodity prices, authorize the inspection group, and provide guidelines on preparations for a possible virus outbreak.



Labour organizations hold press Conference on factories closure after COVID-19 outbreak at the Sky Hotel in Hlinethaya, Yangon yesterday. PHOTO: MYINT MAUNG

"Workers engaged in the garment industry are facing unemployment on account of COVID-19. We are concerned that the outcasts for labour rights would be

laid off. We accept factory closures due to lack of raw materials. But, we need to scrutinize factories to see if they are really facing a shortage of raw materials or not.

The inspection team should include both government officials and workers' groups," said the general secretary of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar

(CTUM).

"The sudden closure of some factories has raised suspicions, and some have been found resuming their business in other places. Factories need to be inspected to check whether they have been affected by COVID-19, or they just want to terminate workers," he said.

China is the top investor in Myanmar's garment industry, which includes more than 260 factories. There are 92 factories owned by Myanmar citizens, 20 Japanese factories, and more than 60 Korean factories in the country, according to the press conference.

At present, factories have started cutting working hours due to lack of raw materials. The closure of 16 factories has resulted in the termination of about 6,000-7,000 workers. —Myint Maung

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Domestic gold price declines tracking USD drop

By Nyein Nyein

WITH the US dollar depreciating against the Kyat, the price of the yellow metal in the domestic market has extended its drop to touch K1.18 million per tical, said U Ohn Myaing, General Secretary of the Myanmar Gold Entrepreneurs Association (MGEA).

"The dollar exchange rate has been weakening since 25 December, sliding below K1,500 per dollar. It fell below K1,350 on 9 March," he said.

"The domestic gold price is likely to keep falling despite an increase in global gold prices, if

the Kyat gains against the US dollar in the local forex market," he said.

"The global gold price is not that high. But, the dollar exchange rate has been sliding," he added.

The domestic gold price is positively related to global gold prices. It hit an all-time record of K1.3 million per tical (0.578 ounces, or 0.016 kilograms) in early September last year, when global gold prices reached a peak, crossing US\$1,550 per ounce.

At present, the global gold prices have touched a high of \$1,660 per ounce. But, the price of

gold in the domestic market is pegged at just K1.18 million per tical. The trade has been regular, according to the MGEA.

With global gold prices on the uptick, domestic prices hit fresh highs last year, reaching K1,000,000 per tical between 17 January and 21 February, crossing K1,100,000 (22 June to 7 August), climbing to 1,200,000 (7 August-4 September), and then reaching a fresh peak of K1,300,000 on 5 September.

According to gold traders, in the month of November in the 2019-2020 financial year, the price moved in the range of 1,219,400 (2 November) and K1,173,000 (28 November). In December, the price reached the lowest level of K1,170,800 (3 December) and the highest level of K1,197,800 (28 December). In January, the lowest price was K1,191,600 (2 January) and the highest was K1,232,700 (8 January). Last month, the gold price touched the lowest level of K1,214,100 on 5 February and the highest level of K1,234,200 on 28 February, according to gold traders.

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)



Gold jewellery displayed at a shop in downtown Yangon. PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR

Weak dollar exchange rate affects beans market

MYANMAR beans growers and exporters have taken a hit due to the Kyat gaining against the US dollar and Indian traders quoting low prices, according to the Mandalay commodity depot.

The drop in beans prices can be attributed to the depreciation of the dollar against the Kyat and traders offering low prices in spite of India's one-month extension for beans exports, said traders.

"India's mung beans requirement has been increasing, but the traders are offering a low price. Mung beans prices are currently sliding," according to the Myanmar Pulses, Beans, and Sesame Seeds Merchants Association.

The dollar exchange rate has fallen sharply from K1,439 (7 February) to K1,385 (7 March), according to the local forex market.

With the Kyat strengthening against the US dollar, the price of Myanmar mung beans has dropped by K130,000 per ton within two weeks from above K1 million to around K870,000 per ton. The price of pigeon peas has also plunged from K710,000 to K670,000 per ton this week.

While India had earlier set the mung beans quota at 150,000 tons, it increased the quota limit by a further 250,000 tons last year, according to a trade no-

tice issued by India's Directorate General of Foreign Trade.

Following President U Win Myint's visit to India, the March-end deadline for exporting 250,000 tons of mung beans to the neighboring country was extended until the end of April, the association stated.

India recorded low mung beans yield due to erratic weather last year. With the provincial government's approval, mung beans are being purchased above the previous quota limit, which has driven mung beans prices above K1.3 million per ton.

In Myanmar, mung beans are mainly produced in Sagaing, Bago, Ayeyawady, Yangon, and Mandalay region. The association estimates mung bean production will reach 400,000-500,000 tons this year.

Myanmar's mung beans, pigeon peas, and green grams are primarily exported to India. Although Myanmar pulses and beans have penetrated markets in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Malaysia, and Indonesia, the volume of exports to those countries is extremely low.

Myanmar shipped more than 1.6 million tons of different varieties of pulses, worth an estimated US\$1 billion, in the 2018-2019 financial year. — Mon Mon

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Malaysia's new PM appoints Cabinet, rewards supporters



Malaysia's new prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

KUALA LUMPUR—Malaysia's new prime minister, Muhyiddin Yassin appointed his Cabinet on Monday, tapping a banker to be finance minister while rewarding politicians helped him wrestle the reins of government from Mahathir Mohamad, including figures from the scandal-tainted United Malays National Organization.

Muhyiddin, 72, was sworn in to the top job on March 1 after emerging as a dark horse to defeat two of the country's most high-profile politicians, his 94-year-old predecessor Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim, 72, following a week of political intrigue sparked by Mahathir's sudden resignation. Mahathir quit in a failed move to stave off a political coup that eventually led to the collapse

of the four-party Alliance of Hope, barely two years after it stunningly ended the 60-plus-year rule of the UMNO-led National Front coalition in the May 2018 general election.

The Alliance fell after Muhyiddin led his party, Bersatu, out of the pact to join forces with the UMNO-led three-party National Front, the Pan Islamic Party, or PAS, and Gabungan Parti Sarawak, or GPS, a coalition of Sarawak state-based parties. The new coalition is known as the Perikatan Nasional or the National Alliance.

Muhyiddin's Cabinet reflected the composition of this new ruling coalition with Bersatu, though having less seats in the lower house of the Parliament, dominating the list with 10 ministers, excluding the

premier. UMNO, the biggest party with 42 seats in the Parliament, compared with Bersatu's 36, has nine ministers.

Politicians from PAS, GPS and other component parties in the National Front were also represented in the Cabinet that departed from convention by doing away with the deputy prime minister's post.

Instead, Muhyiddin, in his speech that was aired live, said he has appointed four senior ministers "who will assist me in coordinating Cabinet affairs related to economy, security, infrastructure development, and education and social (affairs)."

"With these senior ministers, there is no need for a deputy prime minister to be appointed," he added.

Azmin Ali, formerly

from Anwar's People's Justice Party or PKR, is in charge of economy, while holding the portfolio of international trade and industry. Azmin, together with Muhyiddin, have been branded as "traitors" by both Mahathir and Anwar's supporters after Azmin quit PKR, bringing with him 10 other lawmakers to join Muhyiddin's Bersatu.

The three other senior ministers are UMNO's Ismail Sabri Yaakob, the defense minister, Fadilah Yusof, a GPS leader who heads the Ministry of Works, and Mohd Radzi Md Jidin, the education minister. Veteran UMNO politician Hishamuddin Hussein got the foreign affairs portfolio.

Muhyiddin also tapped outsiders for his Cabinet. — Kyodo News

Bootleg booze kills 27 in Iran after virus 'cure' rumours

TEHRAN (Iran)—Twenty-seven people have died from methanol poisoning in Iran after rumours that drinking alcohol can help cure the novel coronavirus infection, state news agency IRNA reported on Monday. The outbreak of the virus in Islamic republic is one of the deadliest outside of China, where the disease originated.

Twenty have died in the southwestern province of Khuzestan and seven in the northern region of Alborz after consuming bootleg alcohol, IRNA said.

Drinking alcohol is

banned in Iran for everyone except some non-Muslim religious minorities. Local media regularly report on lethal cases of poisoning caused by bootleg liquor.

A spokesman for Jundishapur medical university in Ahvaz, the capital of Khuzestan, said 218 people had been hospitalised there after being poisoned.

The poisonings were caused by "rumours that drinking alcohol can be effective in treating coronavirus," Ali Ehsanpour said.

The deputy prosecutor of Alborz, Mohammad Aghayari, told IRNA the

dead had drunk methanol after being "misled by content online, thinking they were fighting coronavirus and curing it." If ingested in large quantities, methanol can cause blindness, liver damage and death.

Iran has been scrambling to contain the spread of the COVID-19 illness which has hit all of the country's 31 provinces, killing 237 people and infecting 7,161.

According to IRNA, 16 out of 69 confirmed cases have died of coronavirus infection in Khuzestan as of Sunday. —AFP

70 pct of COVID-19 infections in China has recovered: WHO

GENEVA — Of the around 80,000 reported cases of COVID-19 in China, more than 70 percent have recovered and been discharged, the chief of World Health Organization (WHO) said here Monday.

Among the countries with the most cases, China is bringing its epidemic

under control, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a daily briefing.

Tedros stressed that the transmission of coronavirus can be slowed down and infections can be prevented through decisive and early actions. "Countries that continue finding and testing cases

and tracing their contacts not only protect their own people, they can also affect what happens in other countries and globally," said Tedros.

He called on all countries to take a comprehensive blended strategy for controlling their epidemics and pushing this virus back. —Xinhua

Man arrested in Japan for smuggling 240-kg drugs from Canada

TOKYO—The operator of a seafood company in Vancouver was arrested last month in Japan on suspicion of smuggling about 240 kilograms of illegal stimulant drugs from Canada, narcotics control authorities said Monday.

It was one of the largest hauls confiscated by the health ministry's Narcotics Control Department, which believes an international criminal organization was behind the smuggling operation. The street value of the drugs was estimated at 14.4 billion yen (\$140 million).

Yoshiya Tateyama, a 56-year-old Canadian national hailing from Japan's southwestern prefecture



File photo taken on 12 April 2019, in Tokyo shows red lights of police cars. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

of Kagoshima, was first arrested Jan. 27 on suspicion of possessing a bag of illegal stimulants in a short-term lease apartment in Tokyo's Kichijoji area, according to the department.

The department said it served a fresh warrant on Tateyama in February

for allegedly hiding around 240 kg of the drugs, with the help of an unidentified co-conspirator, in a container on a ship in Vancouver. The drugs were shipped on Dec. 30 in 240 zipped plastic bags packed in 20 boxes of frozen shrimp, the department said.—Kyodo News

WHO chief says threat of COVID-19 pandemic very real

GENEVA —Now that the coronavirus has a foothold in so many countries, the threat of a pandemic has become very real, the chief of World Health Organization (WHO) said here Monday, noting it would be the first pandem-

ic in history that could be controlled.

This is an uneven epidemic at the global level, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a daily briefing, reminding that different countries are

in different scenarios, requiring a tailored response.

Tedros called on all countries to take a comprehensive blended strategy for controlling their epidemics and pushing this virus back. —Xinhua



A quarantine officer (foreground) directs passengers arriving from South Korea through quarantine counters at Narita airport on 9 March 2020. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

Battle against virus could last beyond year-end: Japan gov't panel

TOKYO — The battle to contain the new coronavirus could take months or even last beyond year-end, a Japanese government panel of experts on communicable diseases warned Monday.

“It may take several months to half a year, or even last beyond year-end” as the virus may survive warmer weather, unlike influenza, Kazuhiro Tateda, a member of the panel and president of the Japanese Association of Infectious Diseases, told a press conference following their meeting.

The panel denied that infections in Japan with the pneumonia-causing virus are increasing explosively. But it also said it is still too early to relax vigilance.

As many large events have been canceled to prevent further infections, the panel said such restraint must be kept up for an additional 10 days.

Also Monday, Japan implemented tougher border control measures on Monday for travelers from China and South Korea, effectively banning tourists from the two countries through the end of this month as part of measures to prevent a surge in coronavirus infections.

Nearly 3 million visas already issued to Chinese and South Korean nationals, also including residents of Hong Kong and Macau, were invalidated. The step, however, will not invalidate the visas of those from the two countries who are already in Japan.

All arrivals from the two countries, including Japanese and other foreign nationals, will be asked to undergo a 14-day

quarantine on a voluntary basis.

The travel restrictions came as Japan steps up efforts to contain the spread of the virus with less than five months to go to the Tokyo Olympics. But they will likely deal a blow to Japan's economy as visitors from China and South Korea account for about half of all tourists to the country.

South Korea, angered by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's sudden announcement late last week of the travel curbs, began taking reciprocal measures on Monday against Japan as ties between the two countries, already frayed over wartime issues, came under new stress.

“We did not intend for this to have an impact on Japan-South Korea relations,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a press conference. “We'd like to carefully explain (to South Korea) our efforts including measures to strengthen border control and prevent further infections, as well as the domestic situation.”

China, on the other hand, has accepted Japan's new restrictions as appropriate to safeguard public health. But on Monday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said it has decided to temporarily suspend its 15-day visa waiver program for Japanese tourists from Tuesday, as the nation now takes steps to prevent an influx of the new coronavirus from Japan.

The ministry said it has notified the Japanese Embassy in Beijing of the latest decision, adding that Japanese citizens who visit China for business or to meet with their kin will con-

tinue to be exempted from visa requirements. Under Japan's scheme, people entering the country from China and South Korea will be asked to travel to and stay at designated facilities such as hotels at their own expense -- or at their own homes if they live in Japan -- where they will be quarantined for 14 days, and to avoid public transportation and use private cars.

The voluntary quarantine will also apply to those who enter Japan from China or South Korea through connecting flights from another country.

While Chinese and South Korean visitors already in Japan will not have to leave earlier than planned, if they depart the country they will not be able to re-enter using multiple-entry visas while the visa nullification is in force. A visa-waiver program covering 90-day short stays by tourists from South Korea, Hong Kong and Macau has also been suspended, while airlines will limit flights from China and South Korea to two airports — Narita, east of Tokyo, and Kansai in Osaka Prefecture. Of the roughly 3 million visas invalidated, about 2.8 million are for Chinese and about 17,000 for South Koreans, according to the Foreign Ministry. On Monday, flights heading to Japan from Chinese and South Korean airports were scarce. Around 8 am at Narita airport, eight passengers from the first flight to arrive from Seoul had their temperatures checked by officers clad in protective gear. — Kyodo News ■

White House not restricting activities due to virus: spokeswoman

WASHINGTON (United States) — President Donald Trump's spokeswoman on Monday denied reports that White House staff are being forced to restrict activities as a precaution against the coronavirus.

Stephanie Grisham said it was “business as usual” in the White House, despite fears that the COVID-19 epidemic around the world could threaten Trump and other senior officials.

“Reports that the White House has issued formal guidelines to staff instructing them to limit in-person interactions and meetings are completely false,” Grisham said in a statement.

“I want to remind the media once again to be responsible with all reporting,” she said.

The outbreak is spreading increasingly rapidly around the United States, raising questions of a potential impact not just on Washington's political circles but

the growing election campaign.

Trump says he has no plans to cut back on his steady rhythm of large political rallies and he continues to downplay the relative seriousness of the epidemic.

“Last year 37,000 Americans died from the common Flu. It averages between 27,000 and 70,000 per year. Nothing is shut down, life & the economy go on,” Trump tweeted Monday.

“At this moment there are 546 confirmed cases of CoronaVirus, with 22 deaths. Think about that!”

Speculation over how Trump can be protected is growing after it emerged that he shook hands last month at a conference with a conservative activist who separately had contact with an infected person. Trump, however, was never in direct contact with the infected person, the White House said, according to The Washington Post. — AFP ■

Jury hung in case of CIA coder accused of cyberweapon leak

NEW YORK (United States) — A New York federal judge declared a mistrial Monday after a jury failed to convict a former CIA programmer accused of passing the agency's most valuable hacking tools to WikiLeaks, deeply hobbling its online spying operations.

The government had said that Joshua Schulte gave the anti-secrecy group the “Vault 7” collection of hacking tools, malware, viruses, trojans, and “zero day” exploits which comprised the CIA's most valuable tools for tapping into adversaries' computers.

The March 2017 breach was the largest-ever leak of classified information at the US spy agency, allowing hackers in other countries, government and non-government alike, to use the tools for criminal activity, and helping the CIA's targets close vulnerabilities.

But in an embarrassing defeat for the Justice Department, after a four-week trial the jury remained divided on whether there was proof that Schulte had in fact provided the files to WikiLeaks, and failed to convict him on the eight most serious charges in the case.

They did find him guilty on lesser charges of lying to the FBI and contempt of court.

Schulte was arrested in August 2017 and charged initially with multiple counts of possessing child pornography on his computer, with no suggestion that there was any national security issue involved.

Ten months later the Justice Department filed additional charges accusing him of stealing and transmitting classified “national defense information” to give it to WikiLeaks.

Schulte had already left the CIA when WikiLeaks published the information in March 2017, but testimony indicated that investigators quickly focused on him as the prime suspect.

But defense lawyers appeared successful, based on questions submitted by the jurors, in raising doubt over whether the government had proof it was Schulte who stole and transmitted the materials to WikiLeaks.

The judge, Paul Crotty, set a new conference for both sides in the case for 26 March, in which the government could demand a new trial. — AFP

It's time for people to make efforts to prevent, prepare for COVID-19

SINCE 5 January, health authorities in Myanmar have been making efforts for preventing COVID-19 and preparing for quickly responding to an outbreak, in case it happens. After more than two months of efforts by health authorities, public awareness is becoming important day by day in preventing the disease.

The prevention and control of a potential coronavirus infection depends on the people's knowledge and awareness about the disease, individual responsibility of citizens to follow precautions, and following measures when they find suspected cases.

Meanwhile, we must understand that panic among the people

can lead to failure in carrying out effective measures. Under such sensitive circumstances, we would like to urge people not to spread fake news and rumors, nor create them. Or, they would face punishment under law.

Social media users must take responsibility and accountability for the information they spread. People are urged to rely on information from reliable sources, such as official websites, especially from the Ministry of Health and Sports.

As per today's reports, the global number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has surpassed 100,000. As we mark this sombre moment, the World Health Organization (WHO) has reminded all countries and communities that the spread of the virus can be significantly slowed, or even reversed, through the implementation of robust containment and control activities.

Having committed to effectively prevent and respond to any COVID-19 infection, the ministry is ready to provide treatment to suspected patients at designated hospitals.

As far as the number of arrivals from foreign countries is concerned, the prospect for infection would be slowed in our country.

It is worth noting that flights from the Republic of Korea, which has reported a coronavirus outbreak, would be suspended from 9 March to 24 April.

At the same time, Myanma Airways, which is operating three flights per week to the ROK, has been advised by the Ministry of Health and Sports to reduce the flights or suspend them.

Every effort to prevent, contain the virus, and slow its spread would save lives. Such efforts give health systems and all of society much needed time to prepare, and researchers more time to identify effective treatments and develop vaccines.

We will continue our efforts that have been effective in preventing infections and reducing the impact of the virus at every opportunity.

How the coronavirus has hit global sport

AFP looks at the effects on sport of the coronavirus, which by 1100 GMT on Monday had killed over 3,800 people while infecting more than 110,000 in over 100 countries.

FOOTBALL

— In Italy, the hardest-hit European country with 366 deaths from COVID-19, Serie A descended into controversy when Italian sports minister Vincenzo Spadafora called for the league season to be put on hold.

Italian Footballers' Association president Damiano Tommasi tweeted that "stopping football is the most useful thing for our country right now. The teams to cheer are playing in our hospitals, in emergency rooms."

However, five Serie A games — cancelled the previous week — went ahead behind closed doors, including Juventus' top of the table clash with Inter Milan.

— Paris Saint-Germain's Champions League last-16 clash with Borussia Dortmund at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday and Tuesday's Valencia v Atalanta match will be played behind closed doors, as will the Europa League tie featuring Inter Milan against Getafe on Thursday.

— The start of Japan's J-League was postponed till mid-March while China suspended all domestic football and shelved indefinitely the top-flight Super League season.

— Former Danish international Thomas Kahlenberg tested positive for the virus, with 13 members of his former club Brøndby's staff put into quarantine.

— Two women's international friendlies in France on Tuesday between France v Netherlands in Valenciennes and Canada v Brazil in Calais will go ahead behind closed doors.

— German league considering imposing Bundesliga spectator ban

TENNIS

— The prestigious ATP and WTA Indian Wells tournament was cancelled as California health officials declared a public health emergency in the Indian Wells-Palm Springs area after there was a confirmed case of the coronavirus, the first major sports event in the US to be shelved because of the outbreak.

Many players had already arrived with main draw matches having been scheduled to begin Wednesday.

The tournament, which draws

more than 400,000 fans each year, had already offered refunds to anyone who bought tickets but did not want to attend.

RUGBY UNION

— The Six Nations match between Italy and England in Rome on March 14 as well as the Ireland v Italy duel in Dublin on March 7 were postponed.

— Title challengers France's final game against Ireland, also scheduled for March 14, was delayed on Monday.

— Scotland's women's Six Nations match against France on Saturday was postponed after a Scottish player tested positive for the coronavirus.

— Sevens World Series tournaments in Hong Kong on April 3-5 and Singapore the following weekend will now be played in October.

MOTORSPORT

— Bahrain's Formula One Grand Prix on March 20-22 will be held without spectators.

— Formula One's Chinese Grand Prix, which was set for April 19 in Shanghai, has been postponed.

— In motorcycle, the season-opening Qatar MotoGP, which should have taken place over the weekend, was cancelled and the

Thailand MotoGP on March 22 postponed until October 4.

— Formula E postponed indefinitely the Rome E-Prix, which was due to be held on April 4.

— The E-prix in Sanya, China, on March 21 has been cancelled.

BASKETBALL

— LeBron James said he won't play if his Los Angeles Lakers have to hold games behind closed doors due to the outbreak.

The NBA has reportedly told teams to look into strategies on how to play without fans in the arena amid concerns over the spreading virus.

"Nah. It's impossible. If I show up to the arena and there ain't no fans in the crowd, then I ain't playing. This ain't Europe."

CYCLING

— The spring classic Milan-San Remo, scheduled for March 21, was postponed, having only previously been cancelled three times since the inaugural edition in 1907.

— The Strade Bianchi, the first big race of the Italian cycling season set for Saturday, was also cancelled along with the Tirreno-Adriatico.

— The UAE Tour's last two stages were abandoned with rid-

ers and teams subsequently quarantined in their Abu Dhabi hotels. The Gulf state announced eight coronavirus cases linked to the event — four Italians, two Russians, one German and a Colombian.

TOKYO OLYMPICS

— International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach said last week that the nightmare scenario of either cancelling or postponing this year's Tokyo Olympics was not discussed at a key meeting.

"Neither the word cancellation nor postponement was mentioned today during the Executive Board meeting," Bach told reporters in Lausanne.

The Olympics take place from July 24-August 9.

GOLF

— European Tour chiefs postponed the Maybank Championship in Malaysia and the China Open in Shenzhen — both set for April.

— The US LPGA Tour cancelled all three of its lucrative early-season events in Asia with a combined prize purse of more than \$5 million.

ATHLETICS

— The World Indoor Cham-

ionships, scheduled for Nanjing from March 13-15, were postponed until next year.

— World half-marathon championships, due to be held on March 29 in the Polish city of Gdynia, shelved until October 17.

— The Paris Marathon, scheduled for April 5 with 60,000 registered runners, was postponed until October 18.

— The Barcelona Marathon, which was scheduled for March 15 with 17,000 runners, was postponed until October.

ALPINE SKIING

— The World Cup finals, scheduled for Cortina d'Ampezzo in Italy between March 16-22, were cancelled.

BASEBALL

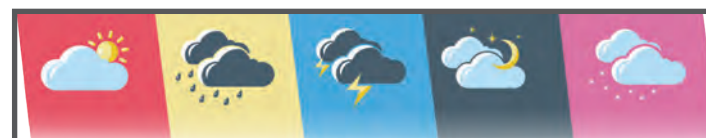
— Japan's domestic baseball season, originally set to open on March 10, was postponed.

ICE HOCKEY

— The Women's World Ice Hockey Championships, set for Halifax and Truro in Nova Scotia for March 31 to April 10, were cancelled.

REFERENCE:

AFP News Updates



Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Monday 9th March, 2020)

BAY INFERENCE: Weather is generally fair over the North Bay and a few cloud over the Andaman Sea and elsewhere over the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL AFTERNOON OF THE 10th March, 2020: Light rain are likely to be isolated in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin State. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Lower Sagaing, Mandalay and Taninthayi regions, Shan, Chin and Rakhine states and generally fair in the remaining Regions and States.

STATE OF THE SEA: Sea will be moderate in Myanmar waters. Wave height will be about (5-8) feet off and along Myanmar Coasts.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of slight increase of day temperatures in Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay, Magway and Bago regions.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 10th March, 2020: Generally fair.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 10th March, 2020: Generally fair.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 10th March, 2020: Generally fair.

Invitation to young writers for Sunday Special

The Global New Light of Myanmar is accepting submissions of poetry, opinion, articles, essays and short stories from young people for its weekly Sunday Next Generation Platform. Interested candidates can send their work to the **Global New Light of Myanmar** at No. 150, Nga Htat Kyee Pagoda Road, Bahan Township, Yangon, in person, or by email to ce@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com with the following information: (1) Sector you wish to be included in (poetry, opinion, etc.), (2) Own name and (if different) your penname, (3) Your level of education, (4) Name of your School/College/University, (5) A written note of declaration that the submitted piece is your original work and has not been submitted to any other news or magazine publishing houses, (6) A color photo of the submitter, (7) Copy of your NRC card, (8) Contact information (email address, mobile number, etc.). — **Editorial Department, The Global New Light of Myanmar**

Finding a common ground

By Maung Maung, President of the Confederation of the Trade Unions Myanmar

ON the 3rd of March 2020, the Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar CTUM, the Myanmar Industries, Crafts and Services Trade Unions Federation MICS TUSF, Agriculture Farmers Federation of Myanmar AFM, the All Myanmar Trade Unions Network AMTUN, We generation Network, the Lets Help Each Other LHEO organization, the Future Light Organization, the Labor Power Group LPG, the Action Labor Rights ALR, Farmer and Labor Action Group FLAG, all came together to share information, evaluate and identify the key elements that would be the basic issues the workers were concerned regarding the present status of the COVID 19 virus and its impact on the population of Myanmar.

We issued a (7) points joint statement based on what we all agreed on.

Social Dialogue towards a Common Ground:

On the 5th of March 2020 there was meeting called by the UMFC- CI where representatives from the Ministry of Labor, Immigration and Manpower, the Ministry of Commerce and Trade, the Ministry of Finance and Industries participated together with and the Chambers of the different Countries participated. It was only a two hours meeting but was very constructive as short but precise exchanges were given on preparations and some possible solutions by the Ministries and the Social Dialogue partners. There were also valuable and practical comments from the international chambers.

All the above were discussed in the situation where even though Myanmar is right besides China, there was no reported directed



PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR

death yet from the CORVID 19 virus.

This evening the Ministry of Health has reported of four deaths in (Hmawbi- Yangon region, Mandalay region, Northern Shan, Rakhine state) from those that were monitored when found with symptoms of the COVID 19

virus. And it was confirmed by the MOH that the deaths are not due to the COVID 19 virus.

Now all of us have to prepare for work stoppages within the CMP and SME factories not only due to the reduction of raw material from China but also of the possibility of the spreading within the congest-

ed communities of the across the country.

There are information of many CMP factories are closing down in Myanmar that have openly stated this shortage reason while there are also some factories that have vague reasons in so called close-downs. We have updates of garment factories that have just opened up and hiring workers / we also know factories that are calling overtime work now and have said that should they have to close down due to shortage, they will give the minimum wage and close temporarily.

Many possibilities, many risks for the employers, employees as well as for the country.

The CMP and SME Employers do not want to loose their experienced workers (and their market), Employees do not want to loose their jobs, the Government does not want a national collapse — and international investors are

looking for who can survive this crisis.

At the same time the transport sector, the tourism sector, the hotel sector, the logistics (cargo and containers truck owners + drivers) sectors, all those that directly are related to the China border trade are facing very harsh impacts on their livelihood and will need quick financial stimulus package from the government. Some Asean countries have already taken step to ease (reduce, delay or even eliminate interest payments) the loans of the small and medium sized firms so that they avoid bankruptcy.

A good and practical solution by the Yangon region Government and the Fruit and vegetable Growers Association was to see hear the positive impact of the fruit and vegetable show in Kandawgyi that helped with the selling of (130 tons) of Watermelon.

SEE PAGE-10

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Finding a common ground

FROM PAGE-9

Then there are the franchises – big international food chains that get their finished product other than from China, package and sell in Myanmar. Of these we still have not heard of anomalies within their workspace.

We also have extractive industries where the raw products are still being sent to China – a big difference in the necessity and value is seen in the opening and blocking of the border. CTUM urgently urges the “The Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)” to scrutinize the health conditions of the drivers and their communities.

National Task Force:

Myanmar already has a national task force. The Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV).

As of today CTUM members have distributed 20,000 of the COVID 19 Awareness raising pamphlets issued by Social Welfare dept of MOLIP in 64 factories within the Hlaingtharyar industrial zone, some fringe areas of the Shwepyithar industrial zone and Dagon Seikkan industrial zones.

Workers can participate in this kind of action in this National Crisis and we are ready to do more.

As a country we are very proud and do our best to find our own solutions. But the Trade Unions would like to suggest that we need to find out

what the World Bank (www.worldbank.org Press Release Mar 3,2020) and the IMF (<https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/03/04/sp030420-imf-makes-available-50-billion-to-help-address-coronavirus>) are ready to support us before the raw material shortage and the stoppage of tourism crashes our fledging economy.

We also understand that the G7 members “are ready to cooperate further on timely and effective measures”.

Local issues:

At the same time our farmers are reporting that they are unable to sell their paddy in their rural areas, the factory workers (Hlaingtharyar township, Hmawbi township) are informing of the increase of the rice in the markets.

Rice, Onions, Potato are all grown locally, transported locally and sold locally. We call upon the Government to work with the UMFCC and the Myanmar Rice Millers Association to maintain or even decrease the price of rice. (it is not fair to try and cover up the losses occurred in the China border closing on the local population).

As a country we produce enough food for ourselves and after all citizens have eaten their full, there will be enough for the traders to sell to our neighbors. Government intervention of this kind is essential so that we could and should avoid the food shortage now seen in other countries.

Our view:

The workers within the

CMP and SME sectors understand that this a global crisis, a national situation and we all have to prepare for the worst.

But CTUM also sees that for whatever reasons as Myanmar does not have any direct infection (up to this moment) if the COVID 19 situation (health, economic, social conditions) is handled well, our country can come out on top within the recovery.

Myanmar survived a lot of hardships. At the moment, that this is the first time all of us are working in advance of a National crisis reflected from a Global Pandemic.

If we open our eyes and ears, listen to all and decide collectively, work in unison we, as country will come out for the better from this Global Crisis. We can do it.

Blasts in Afghanistan as feuding leaders hold separate oath ceremonies

KABUL (Afghanistan) — Afghanistan lurched deeper into political crisis Monday as the country's two rival leaders swore themselves in as president at simultaneous ceremonies that were interrupted by at least two blasts.

The bitter feud between President Ashraf Ghani and his former chief executive Abdullah Abdullah has raised fears for Afghanistan's fragile democracy as the US prepares to leave the country following an agreement last month with a strong and largely unified Taliban.

Polls were held in September, but repeated delays and accusations of voter fraud meant that Ghani, the incumbent president, was only declared as winner of a second term in February — sparking a furious response from Abdullah, who vowed to form his own parallel government.

On Monday Ghani, dressed in traditional Afghan clothing and white turban, arrived at the presidential palace to be sworn in, surrounded by supporters, senior political figures, diplomats and foreign dignitaries including US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad.

Minutes later, in another corner of the sprawling presidential palace compound, a suit-clad Abdullah inaugurated himself as president, vowing to “safeguard the independence, national sovereignty, territorial integrity” of Afghanistan.

As hundreds of people watched Ghani's ceremony, two loud explosions were heard, prompting some people to flee.

There were no reports of casualties from the blasts, which mirrored a similar incident in August 2018 when militants fired several mortars as Ghani was making a speech at the palace, injuring six civilians.

“I have no bulletproof vest on, only my shirt,” Ghani told those who stayed behind as sirens wailed. “I will stay even if I have to sacrifice my head.”

An AFP reporter saw many of those who fled return to their seats after Ghani's refusal to leave the podium prompted cheers and applause.

The game of thrones has strained the patience of the international community and Afghans alike, with Washington warning earlier that the bickering posed a risk to the US withdrawal deal, which requires the Taliban to hold talks with Kabul.

Widening divisions among Afghan politicians would leave the insurgents with the upper hand in those negotiations.

Fight for power

The row has left many Afghans despairing for their country's future.

“It is impossible to have two presidents in one country,” said Ahmad Jawed, 22, who urged



Many Afghans are left despairing for their country's future over the game of thrones between Abdullah Abdullah (L) and President Ashraf Ghani (R), pictured with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. **PHOTO: AFP**

the men “to put their personal interests aside and only think of their country instead of fighting for power”.

“Instead of holding oath-taking ceremonies they should talk to each other to find a solution”, he told AFP. During Monday's speech, Ghani appeared to extend an olive branch to his opponents, saying: “Today is the day for unity we have to think about the future.”

“I call on ... (past) political rivals to lend me a hand and a shoulder to serve this country.

Our mission is peace and ending the 40 years of war,” he added.

Afghans have shown little enthusiasm for Abdullah, Ghani or the election process in general. Most of them abstained in last year's lacklustre poll that saw candidates pitch few ideas or policies.

Unemployment is high, and even university graduates like Jawed are struggling to find work, while violence has continued unabated, except for during a week-long partial truce ahead of the US-Taliban deal. In the dead-

liest attack to hit Afghanistan in weeks, Islamic State group gunmen shot dead 32 people and wounded dozens of others at a political rally in Kabul on Friday.

The Taliban, who have slammed the electoral process as “a fake and foreign-run” affair, have also ramped up attacks on Afghan forces and civilians.

The insurgents' spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP the competing ceremonies showed that “nothing is more important to the slaves than their personal interests”. — AFP ■

Twitter strikes deal with investors, ending bid to oust Dorsey

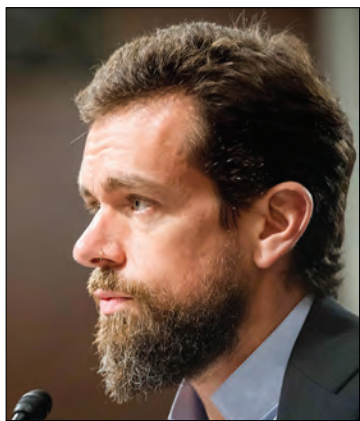
WASHINGTON (United States) — Twitter unveiled a deal with key investors Monday to end an effort to oust chief executive Jack Dorsey, creating a new committee on the board of directors to keep tabs on company leadership.

The plan calls for a fresh \$1 billion investment in Twitter by private equity group Silver Lake, and a pledge by the social media group to launch a \$2 billion share repurchase plan.

The deal also enables the hedge fund Elliot Management — which had been pressing to remove Dorsey — to get its partner Jesse Cohn a seat on the board of the San Francisco-based firm.

Also joining the board will be Egon Durban, co-CEO and managing partner of Silver Lake.

As part of the agreement, Twitter will create a temporary board committee to “build on our regular evaluation of Twitter’s leadership structure,” said



Chief executive of Twitter Jack Dorsey. PHOTO: AFP

a statement by Patrick Pichette, lead independent director of the Twitter board.

“This committee, which I will chair, will provide a fresh look at our various structures, and report the findings to our board on an ongoing basis,” Pichette said.

Twitter had been facing pressure by Elliott Management, which owns about four percent of the company, to oust Dorsey, amid

concerns he has spread himself too thin by running Twitter along with the digital payments firm Square.

Dorsey said in a statement the new investment by Silver Lake “is a strong vote of confidence in our work and our path forward.”

Cohn of Elliott management said in the statement: “I am looking forward to working with Jack and the board to help contribute to realizing Twitter’s full potential.”

The statement also included Twitter’s goals for 2020 to boost the number of users by 20 percent or more and to accelerate advertising revenue growth.

Twitter said it is “reinforcing its commitment to impartiality in the development and enforcement of its policies and rules” and that neither Elliott nor Silver Lake would be in a position to influence the rules or enforcement on the platform. — AFP ■

Amazon offers cashierless tech to rival retailers

WASHINGTON (United States) — Amazon on Monday began offering its “just walk out” technology to other retailers in a move aimed at boosting the use of the cashierless store system.

The US technology giant launched a new website to promote the offering, saying the installation can be done in “as little as a few weeks.”

Amazon said it would work with existing retailers or new stores as part of a construction or remodeling plan.

“Just Walk Out technology enables shoppers to simply enter a store, grab what they want, and just go,” the website said.

“Born from years of experience at Amazon Go, Just Walk Out uses a combination of tech-

nologies to eliminate checkout lines. We now offer retailers the ability to leverage this technology in their stores to help bring fast and convenient checkout experiences to more shoppers.”

The move comes weeks after Amazon launched its first full-size grocery store in Seattle using the cashierless model.

Amazon has already opened more than 20 smaller Amazon Go stores using the same system, including in New York, Chicago and San Francisco.

The stores allow pre-registered customers to skip the cashier and allow their credit cards to be billed for their purchases, with the technology detecting what they take and return to the shelves. — AFP ■

Senior high schools reopen in China’s Qinghai after outbreak

XINING — The first batch of 144 senior high schools and secondary vocational schools reopened Monday in northwest China’s Qinghai Province after a delay of spring semester due to the novel coronavirus outbreak.

The schools have adopted a string of protective measures, including strict and comprehensive approaches to sanitation and disinfection to ensure the safety and health of students and teachers.

The Qinghai Provincial De-

partment of Industry and Information Technology has allocated masks, medicinal alcohol and disinfectant to schools across the province.

Lessons about the epidemic prevention and emergency drills were among the school activities on the first day.

Yang Fayu, deputy head of Qinghai’s education department, said the future infection spreading in Qinghai can be generally under control based on expert

assessment. By Sunday, Qinghai has reported 18 confirmed cases of coronavirus infection. All of the patients had been cured and discharged from hospitals by 21 February. The province has reported no new confirmed cases for 32 consecutive days, according to the provincial health committee.

The emergency response of Qinghai was lowered from the third level to the fourth level, the lowest in a four-tier response system, on 6 March. — Xinhua ■



A teacher introduces the knowledge of epidemic prevention and control at Haidong No. 2 High School in Haidong City, northwest China’s Qinghai Province, on 9 March 2020. PHOTO: XINHUA



In the file photo, Swedish actor Max von Sydow poses for a photo at the opening of the European Premiere of “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” in central London on 16 December 2015. PHOTO: AFP

‘Star Wars’ actor Max von Sydow dies at 90

WASHINGTON DC (USA) — Veteran actor Max von Sydow, known for his roles in ‘Game of Thrones’, ‘Star Wars’, and ‘The Exorcist’, has died on Sunday at age 90.

According to USA Today a statement from his wife, Catherine read: “It is with a broken heart and with infinite sadness that we have the extreme pain of announcing the departure of Max von Sydow.” Max was nominated for two Academy Awards, one for his supporting role in “Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close” and for his leading role in 1987’s “Pelleerobreren.”

More recently, Sydow ap-

peared in, Star Wars: The Force Awakens (2015), Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (2011), and on Game of Thrones as the mystical Three-Eyed Raven.

Director Edgar Wright, expressed condolences by writing a heartwarming note.

“Max Von Sydow, such an iconic presence in cinema for seven decades, it seemed like he’d always be with us. He changed the face of international film with Bergman, played Christ, fought the devil, pressed the HOT HAIL button & was Oscar nominated for a silent performance. A god,” read the note shared on Twitter. — ANI ■

North Korea fires multiple projectiles: South's military

SEOUL (South Korea) — Nuclear-armed North Korea on Monday fired what Japan said appeared to be ballistic missiles, a week after a similar weapons test by Pyongyang.

Analysts say the North has been continuing to refine its weapons capabilities during its long-stalled nuclear discussions with the US, which have been at a standstill since the collapse of the Hanoi summit between leader Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump more than a year ago.

The North “appeared to have carried out joint firing drills involving various types of multiple rocket launchers”, the South’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said, expressing “strong regret” over Pyongyang’s actions. Initially they said three projectiles were involved, before changing the description to “multiple”.

The devices were fired northeastwards into the sea from South Hamgyong province and flew 200 kilometres (124 miles)

at a maximum altitude of 50 kilometres, the JCS said.

That was slightly shorter but also slightly higher than last Monday’s firing.

A Japanese defence ministry spokesman said North Korea had launched what appeared to be “ballistic missile(s)” — which it is banned from doing under UN Security Council resolutions.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told parliament: “Repeated launches of items such as ballistic missiles have been a serious issue for the international community, including our country. In an emergency meeting, South Korea’s security ministers said the North’s continued firing drills were “not helpful” to efforts for lasting peace on the Korean peninsula.

Three projectiles fired successfully from a single Transporter Erector Launcher (TEL) would be “a new milestone” for the North’s short-range ballistic missile programme, tweeted



Kim Jong Un oversaw a Korean People’s Army ‘long-range artillery’ drill at an undisclosed location. **PHOTO: AFP**

Ankit Panda, senior fellow at the Federation of American Scientists. Vipin Narang of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology added: “Kim continues to test, improve, and operationalize his force.”

After last week’s launch the North’s state media said Kim had overseen a “long-range artillery” drill, carrying images of multiple launch rocket systems and several of a larger calibre rocket being fired in a forest.

The South’s military had said that launch appeared to be two short-range ballistic missiles.

Personal letter

Monday’s firing came days after Kim sent a personal letter to the South’s President Moon Jae-in, offering “comfort” for the rapid outbreak of the new coronavirus in the country. South Korea has one of the world’s largest infection totals outside China with more than 7,300, while Pyongyang insists it has not had a single case.

That message had followed an unprecedented statement by Kim’s younger sister Yo Jong, berating Seoul’s “truly senseless” and “perfectly foolish” condemnation of Pyongyang’s weapons test last week. The North carried out a series of weapons tests late last year, the last of them in November, which it often described as multiple launch rocket systems although others called them ballistic missiles.— AFP ■

One last event before Harry and Meghan bow out



Prince Harry and wife Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, will join other royals members Monday at a Commonwealth Day ceremony at Westminster Abbey, their last official appearance before stepping back from their roles at the end of March. **PHOTO: AFP**

LONDON (United Kingdom) — Prince Harry and his wife Meghan will make their last official appearance as senior royals on Monday, joining Queen Elizabeth II for an event in London before they set off on their own.

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex will join other members of the royal family at a Commonwealth Day ceremony at Westminster Abbey.

It is their final public engagement before they step back from their roles at the end of March, no longer representing the queen and pursuing a new, financially independent life based

in Canada.

Harry and Meghan rocked the monarchy with their bombshell announcement in January that they wanted to break free from the constraints of royalty.

They complained about media intrusion, a long-running issue for Harry, who watched how photographers pursued his mother Diana until her death in a Paris car crash in 1997.

Their decision to leave prompted anger and dismay among many royal fans in Britain, but both Harry and Meghan received a warm welcome in their final flurry of engagements.

The couple received a standing ovation as they took their seats at an evening of military band music at London’s Royal Albert Hall on Saturday.

And Meghan drew shrieks of delight from school children in Dagenham, east of London, when she made an unannounced visit on Friday.

“She really is beautiful, innit?” head boy Aker Okoye, 16, told the audience after the duchess asked him up on stage.

In a visit to mark International Women’s Day, Meghan paid tribute to the women whose strike at the nearby Ford Motor Plant in 1968 helped pave the way for the 1970 Equal Pay Act.

“No matter what colour you are, no matter what gender you are, you have a voice and you certainly have the right to speak up for what is right,” she told the children.

- Always serving -

Harry is the youngest son of the queen’s heir, Prince Charles, and the 35-year-old will remain sixth in line to the throne.

But from the end of this month, he and his wife will no longer use the “Royal Highness” style or use public funds, except for their security.— AFP ■

UK retailer Tesco sells Thailand, Malaysia ops for £8bn

LONDON (United Kingdom) — Britain’s biggest retailer Tesco said Monday that it has agreed to sell its businesses in Thailand and Malaysia to Thai conglomerate CP Group for £8.0 billion (\$10.4 billion, 9.2 billion euros).

“Following inbound interest and a detailed strategic review of all options, we are announcing today the proposed sale of Tesco Thailand and Tesco Malaysia,” said outgoing Chief Executive Dave Lewis in a statement, adding the supermarket chain would return £5.0 billion of the proceeds to investors. “This sale releases material value and allows us to further simplify and focus the business, as well as to return significant value to shareholders.”

Tesco added that the divestment will also slash debt and streamline the group, enabling a “stronger focus” on UK, Irish

and central European activities.

“The disposal will further de-risk the Tesco business by reducing indebtedness through a £2.5-billion pension contribution that, along with other measures, is expected to eliminate the current funding deficit and significantly reduce the prospect of having to make further pension deficit contributions in the future,” the retailer said.

The move was unanimously agreed by the Tesco board, but remains conditional on shareholder and regulatory approvals. The deal is set to complete in the second half of this year. The announcement comes as Dave Lewis prepares to step down in 2020, having overseen a major overhaul at Tesco during his five years at the helm, axing thousands of jobs as part of a massive cost-cutting programme.— AFP



Britain’s biggest retailer Tesco is to sell its businesses in Thailand and Malaysia to Thai conglomerate CP Group. **PHOTO: AFP**

Markets plunge, Italy locked down as virus spreads

ROME (Italy) — Financial markets around the world crashed on Monday and millions of people in northern Italy were in lockdown as officials struggled to contain the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

The government is attempting to shutter an area home to a quarter of the population — including Milan and Venice — mimicking a lockdown at the disease's epicentre in China.

Tens of millions of people are now in virtual quarantine worldwide but there are fears that the disease will spread further and that disruptions could force several economies into recession.

British and German stock markets slumped by more than eight percent in opening deals on Monday following earlier

losses in Asia, where markets opened with some of the heaviest falls since the global financial crisis.

Equity markets fell more than five percent in Tokyo and 7.3 per cent in Sydney, wiping hundreds of billions of US dollars off the value of companies and compounding weeks of losses. Roughly 110,000 people in 99 countries and territories have been infected with the virus and many more have seen daily life disrupted by school closures, runs on basic household goods and travel restrictions.

In Italy, police will set up controls at train stations and stop all cars on main roads, flights from Milan are being suspended and penalties of three months in jail or a 206 euro (\$233) fine will be imposed for flouting the rules.

There are mounting concerns that the United States — the world's largest and most connected economy — could be the next COVID-19 hotspot.

At least 21 people have died in the United States and the number of cases soared past 500 on Sunday.

A string of Republican politicians reported they were among those who may have come into contact with the disease — including former presidential candidate Ted Cruz.

He revealed he had shaken hands at a conservative conference in Washington with a person who later tested positive.

"I have decided to remain at my home in Texas this week, until a full 14 days have passed," he wrote on Facebook, adding he had no symptoms. —AFP ■



A closed bar in Venice, as large parts of northern Italy go into lockdown to prevent the spread of the virus. PHOTO: AFP

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Japan ready to prevent yen surge, stock plunge from weakening economy

TOKYO — The Japanese government and central bank said Monday that they would act appropriately to prevent volatile markets from weakening economic activities and to regain market stability after Tokyo stocks plummeted and the yen surged sharply on coronavirus concerns.

Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda said financial markets remain unstable and the central bank is prepared to respond to market uncertainty "without hesitation."

The comment came as speculation grew in the foreign exchange market that Japanese authorities could move to stem the yen's sharp appreciation. A stronger yen undermines the price competitiveness of Japan-made products overseas and reduces profits earned abroad when repatriated.



Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso speaks to reporters in Tokyo on 9 March 2020. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

"We will make every effort to provide ample liquidity and ensure stability in financial markets" through bond-purchase operations and increased buying of exchange traded funds, Kuroda told a parliamentary committee session.

Amid growing concern that the new coronavirus could have a significant global economic

impact, the dollar plunged to the mid-101 yen range earlier in the day, its lowest level since November 2016, as the Japanese currency attracted strong buying as a safe-haven asset.

The 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average ended Monday down 5.07 per cent at a 14-month low on coronavirus fears and concern over plunging oil prices. —Kyodo News

Oil crash sparks 'Black Monday' meltdown on virus-hit markets

LONDON (United Kingdom) — World oil prices crashed Monday, fuelling a vicious selloff on stock markets -- which were already buckling under intense pressure over the spreading deadly coronavirus.

Stocks tanked as the global oil market nosedived 30 percent at one stage after top exporter Saudi Arabia slashed the prices it charges customers following a bust-up

with Russia over crude production.

The dollar slid versus the yen, a haven investment.

"The markets have passed from panic mode into pure hysteria," said AyushAnsal, chief investment officer at trading firm Crimson Black Capital.

"Markets were at breaking point before Saudi Arabia's decision to launch an oil price war, but this latest development



Australian stocks saw their worst day since the financial crisis. PHOTO: AFP

has taken them beyond that."

OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia had last week wanted Russia to join the cartel in deep production cuts after world prices had already tanked on forecasts of plunging demand because of COVID-19.

However, Moscow declined, triggering Riyadh's move to preserve market share and sideline its closes competitor — but creating fresh markets chaos.

"The war against the coronavirus is turning into a war for oil export markets," said analyst TamasVarga at oil broker PVM Associates.

The dizzying oil drop — the steepest since the 1991 Gulf War — sent investors fleeing for safety alongside mounting fears over the worsening fatal coronavirus, which has seen Italy lock down a swathe of its north. —AFP ■



Most passengers on the doomed flight were Dutch. PHOTO: AFP

MH17 murder trial starts with calls for justice

BADHOEVEDORP (Netherlands) — Four men accused of murder over the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in 2014 went on trial in the Netherlands on Monday, with families of the 298 victims calling for justice.

The suspects — three Russians and a Ukrainian — were not present in the dock of the high-security court but judges ruled that the hearing could continue in their absence.

In a sombre moment, a prosecutor then read out the names of each of the men, women and children who died when the Boeing 777 was torn apart by a Russian-made missile over Ukraine while flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur.

Head judge Hendrik Steenhuis declared the trial open at the court near Schiphol Airport where the flight took off, adding that there had been a “tragic loss of human lives from all around the world” in the “atrocious disaster”. “The court realises the impact of the loss of so many lives and the manner in which they so abruptly ended is barely conceivable,” he said.

Silence descended over the courtroom as the victims’ names were read out with some relatives listening with bowed heads, many with their eyes closed, an AFP correspondent in court said. “I think today is of the highest importance,” said Piet Ploeg, head of a foundation for MH17 victims who lost his brother, sister-in-law and nephew on the doomed flight.

“This is the first day that we will know what happened, who was responsible, why the plane was shot down, and to questions like what was Russia’s role.”

‘Gaps in evidence’

Dutch prosecutors last year

charged Russian nationals Igor Girkin, Sergei Dubinsky, Oleg Pulatov and Ukrainian citizen Leonid Kharchenko over the tragedy.

Prosecutors say all four were linked to pro-Russian separatists on whose territory the plane’s wreckage fell near the start of Ukraine’s bitter civil war.

They argue the men were instrumental in bringing the BUK missile system to Ukraine from its original base in Russia — even if they did not pull the trigger.

Judges ruled that proceedings could go ahead “in absentia” against Girkin, Dubinsky and Kharchenko as Dutch, Russian and Ukrainian authorities had tried to contact them by post and by electronic media.

Girkin and Dubinsky had also been quoted by media as saying they did not recognise the Dutch court, the judges said. “We assume they have waived their right to be present since they do not value the right to be present,” Steenhuis said.

A fourth suspect, Russian national Oleg Pulatov, would be represented by a lawyer but would not be present, the judge added.

Russia has long denied any involvement in the downing of MH17, and has offered a series of alternative explanations for the plane’s downing.

Moscow again on Friday accused the Netherlands of a “crude attempt to put pressure on the court”.

“In the last days before the hearings everything was done to fill the gaps in the evidence presented and to camouflage the falsification of the facts of this version in advance,” Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.—AFP ■

Twitter labels video retweeted by Trump as ‘manipulated’

WASHINGTON (United States) — Twitter has used a new policy to identify misleading content for the first time on a post retweeted by US President Donald Trump that appeared to show Democratic Party rival Joe Biden endorsing his re-election.

The social media platform has struggled with removing deceptive and abusive content in the past, but has also faced accusations its curbs have suppressed some political views.

Last week it announced moderators would begin flagging media that had been “deceptively altered or manipulated,” the same day it announced an expansion of a ban on hate speech.

A clip posted by White House social media director Dan Scavino appeared to show Biden telling a crowd: “We can only re-elect Donald Trump.”

The footage was later retweeted by Trump and had been viewed nearly six million



Twitter has started implementing a new policy that clearly labels manipulated content. PHOTO: AFP

times by Monday. But the video cropped the end of Biden’s sentence — made during a recent campaign speech in Missouri — where he was discussing the need for party unity in the wake of a bruising primary contest.

“We can only re-elect Donald Trump if in fact we get engaged in this circular firing squad here,” Biden had said.

Twitter appended a label to

the video describing it as “manipulated media,” prompting a denial from Scavino in a later tweet on Monday.

The platform last month suspended dozens of accounts for spam-like posts supporting former Democratic presidential hopeful Michael Bloomberg, whose campaign hired hundreds of people to promote him on social media.—AFP ■

Erdogan holds Brussels talks as EU mulls taking in child refugees

BRUSSELS (Belgium) — Migration crisis talks were set to be held between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and senior EU officials in Brussels on Monday, as Germany said the bloc was considering taking in 1,500 child refugees.

Tens of thousands of asylum-seekers have been trying to break through the land border from Turkey for a week after Ankara announced it would no longer prevent people from trying to cross into the European Union.

Turkey, which hosts around

four million mostly Syrian refugees, has repeatedly railed against what it describes as unfair burden-sharing.

Erdogan called on Greece to “open the gates” to the migrants after Greek police used tear gas and water cannon in skirmishes with crowds at the border.

“I hope I will return from Belgium with different outcomes,” he said at a speech in Istanbul on Sunday as he announced the meeting.

“Hey Greece! I appeal to you... open the gates as well and

be free of this burden,” he said, adding: “Let them go to other European countries.”

Early on Monday, Germany said the EU was considering taking in up to 1,500 migrant children who are currently housed in Greek camps.

“A humanitarian solution is being negotiated at the European level for a ‘coalition of the willing’ to take in these children,” the government said in a statement.

Berlin was ready to take in an “appropriate” share, it added, saying the country wanted to support Greece in the “difficult” situation it is facing.

Concern over the plight of the minors have grown as they either require urgent medical treatment or are unaccompanied by adults.

On Friday, Erdogan ordered the Turkish coastguard to prevent risky Aegean sea crossings after more than 1,700 migrants landed on Lesbos and four other Aegean islands from Turkey over the past week. The coastguard however said Turkey’s policy of allowing migrants and refugees to leave by land was untouched, and the instruction only affected sea crossings.—AFP ■



NGO members help refugees to disembark from a dinghy as it lands ashore the Greek island of Lesbos. PHOTO: AFP

China closes makeshift hospitals as virus cases plunge

BEIJING(China) — China has closed most of the makeshift hospitals opened to receive coronavirus patients in the epidemic's epicentre as the number of new infections in the country hit a record low.

There were 40 new cases nationwide, the National Health Commission said Monday, the lowest number of fresh cases since it started reporting the data in January.

Most of the new cases, as well as 22 new deaths, were in Hubei, the central province at the epicentre of the outbreak.

The deaths — which were all in Hubei except one — bring the country's toll to 3,119.

More than 80,700 people have been infected in total in mainland China.

New infections reported from Hubei have been on a downward trend for several weeks.

On Monday, all the new cases in the province were in the capital city Wuhan, where the



A staff member removes waste after the final patients were discharged from a temporary hospital set up to treat people with the COVID-19 coronavirus in a sports stadium in Wuhan. **PHOTO: AFP**

virus first emerged in December.

In Wuhan, nearly 31,000 patients have recovered and been discharged from hospital, the provincial government said.

Eleven of the 16 makeshift hospitals in Wuhan converted from public facilities including stadiums and schools were suspended by Sunday, the official

Xinhua news agency reported.

Two of the most recent makeshift hospitals to be closed — a converted sports centre and a factory — had enough capacity

for nearly 2,000 patients at a time.

The two hospitals discharged a final batch of 61 patients on Sunday, Xinhua said.

New infections in China have been generally declining in recent weeks as the country's draconian measures appear to be working.

A senior government official hinted last week that China could soon lift the lockdown on the province imposed in late January, which has effectively restricted the movement of some 56 million people in Hubei.

The only new cases outside Hubei were four imported from overseas, the health commission said, bringing the total of imported infections brought into the country to 67.

The rise in imported cases is raising fears that the country's progress in bringing infections down could be undone, and several local authorities are imposing quarantines on those arriving from hard-hit areas. —AFP ■

Embassies close in North Korea as diplomats evacuated over virus

SEOUL (South Korea) — Several embassies in North Korea closed Monday as many diplomats were flown out following weeks of tight quarantine restrictions imposed by Pyongyang over the spread of the novel coronavirus.

North Korea has not confirmed a single infection but has imposed strict rules, including closing its borders and putting thousands of its own people into isolation.

It has also subjected hundreds of foreigners — including diplomats — to a virtual lockdown in their own premises.

Russian ambassador Alex-

ander Matsegora described the conditions as “morally crushing”.

Those restrictions were finally eased last week after more than a month, when more than 200 foreigners were allowed to leave their compounds.

Swedish ambassador Joachim Bergstrom tweeted a selfie from the city centre with the caption: “I have never been happier standing on Kim Il Sung Square.”

Monday's evacuation comes after reports that a special flight was being arranged to fly diplomats and other foreigners from Pyongyang to the Russian city

of Vladivostok.

“Sad to say farewell this morning to colleagues from German Embassy and French Office #NorthKorea which are closing temporarily,” tweeted Colin Crooks, the British ambassador to Pyongyang, adding that his embassy would remain open.

The Vladivostok airport website showed an Air Koryo flight JS 271 had arrived from Pyongyang at 10:49 am local time (0049 GMT).

It was not immediately clear how many diplomats were on board, but previous reports said around 60 people would be evacuated.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un warned last month of “serious consequences” if the virus reaches his country, which has banned tourists and suspended international trains and flights.

Pyongyang, subject to multiple international sanctions over its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, has a weak medical infrastructure and analysts say prevention is its only option.

The number of coronavirus cases has risen worldwide to more than 100,000 across 100 nations and territories, with around 3,800 dead. —AFP ■



Foreign diplomats, embassy staff and their families check-in for a flight to Vladivostok at Pyongyang International Airport. **PHOTO: AFP**

India's Yes Bank founder arrested on money laundering allegations



Rana Kapoor, the founder of India's Yes Bank, is pictured after his arrest in Mumbai. **PHOTO: AFP**

MUMBAI (India) — The founder of India's Yes Bank was arrested on allegations of money laundering Sunday, amid efforts to formulate a rescue plan for the country's fourth-largest private lender.

In a late-night move Friday, the Central Bank seized control and imposed withdrawal limits on Yes Bank, which has been struggling with bad loans.

Rana Kapoor was arrested at about 3:00 am Sunday after being questioned for more than 20 hours by officials from the Enforcement Directorate, India's financial intelligence agency, in Mumbai.

“He has been arrested as he was not cooperating in the probe,” an Enforcement Directorate official who requested anonymity told AFP.

Yes Bank confirmed the ar-

rest. Officials earlier raided Kapoor's sea-facing residence in an upscale Mumbai neighbourhood.

The limit on withdrawals to 50,000 rupees (\$678) every 30 days had sent customers rushing to Yes Bank ATMs and branches on Friday and Saturday in a desperate bid to retrieve their deposits.

The State Bank of India, the country's largest lender, said Saturday it was ready to invest 24.5 billion rupees for a 49 percent stake in Yes Bank as part of a Reserve Bank of India-backed rescue plan.

“Twenty-three potential investors have approached us to invest and they include some very good names,” SBI chairman Rajnish Kumar told reporters.

The Reserve Bank said Yes Bank's weakened position was “largely due to inability of the bank to raise capital to address potential loan losses and resultant downgrades”.

India has been grappling with a liquidity crunch caused by the near-collapse more than a year ago of IL&FS, one of India's biggest shadow banks — finance houses responsible for significant consumer lending. —AFP ■



Head coach U Phone Naing (l) and striker Mung Theih Pau (r) of Chinland FC win the best coach and player for the month, February, of MPT Myanmar National League II 2020. **PHOTO: MNL**

MPT MNL II 2020: Chinland FC leads standing table after Week-6

AFTER Week-6 of the MPT Myanmar National League II2020, Chinland FC. is leading the standing table with 15 points from five wins and one loss, according to the league's website.

The team is followed by Myawady FC and Junior Lions FC. with 15 points each.

University FC is in the fourth place with 10 points from three wins, one draw, and three losses; Mawyawadi FC is in the fifth place with six points from two

wins and four losses; and, Silver Stars FC is sixth with five points from one win, two draws, and three losses.

They are followed by Kachin United FC with four points from one win, one draw, and four losses, and Yaw Myay FC with no points. Coach and player of Chinland FC get awards for the month.

Head coach U Phone Naing and striker Mung Theih Pau of Chinland FC won the awards for

the best coach and player in the MPT Myanmar National League II2020 for the month of February.

U Phone Naing, who won the best coach award for the month, led Chinland FC to win all five matches in February. Striker Mung Theih Pau was declared the best player for the month after scoring six goals for the team in five matches. The awards were presented before the match between Chinland and Junior Lions on 9 March. — Kyaw Khin ■

AFC Cup 2020: Myanmar, Singapore football clubs to meet today

TWO Myanmar football clubs will take on two Singaporean clubs in Yangon and Singapore today (10 March), according to the Myanmar National League's Facebook page.

Yangon United FC, a Myanmar National League club, will meet Singaporean club Hougang United FC at the Thuwunna Stadium in Yangon. This would be the third Group F match for both teams. In the last two matches, Yangon United tied with Ho Chi Minh City 2-2 and beat Lao Toyota 3-2, while Hougang United beat Lao Toyota 3-1 and was defeated by Ho Chi Minh City 2-3.

Meanwhile, MNL club Shan United will take on Singapore's Tampines Rovers at the Jurong West Stadium in Singapore today.

The two teams are from Group H and have played two

matches each. Shan United was defeated by Kaya-Iloilo of the Philippines 0-2 and by Indonesia's PSM Makassar 1-3, while Tampines Rovers beat PSM Makassar 2-1 and tied with Kaya-Iloilo 0-0.

The next matches for Yangon United in Group F will be against Hougang United FC at the Jurong West Stadium in Singapore on 15 April, Ho Chi Minh City at the Thong Nhat Stadium, Ho Chi Minh City on 29 April, and Lao Toyota at the New Laos National Stadium in Vientiane on 13 May.

The next matches for Shan United in Group H will be against Tampines Rovers at the Thuwunna Stadium on 15 April, Kaya-Iloilo at the Rizal Memorial Stadium, Manila on 28 April, and PSM Makassar at the Thuwunna Stadium on 12 May.— Kyaw Khin ■

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Australia F1 rules out fan ban in wake of Bahrain GP move

MELBOURNE (Australia)—Australian Formula One chiefs Monday ruled out any chance of the opening grand prix of the year following the lead of Bahrain and barring spectators because of the coronavirus.

On Sunday it was announced that the season's second race in Bahrain would go ahead without fans in a bid to prevent a spread of the deadly virus that has forced a growing number of sports events to be cancelled, postponed or played behind closed doors.

But Australian Grand Prix Corporation boss Andrew Westacott said that won't be happening in Melbourne.

"Not at all," he told Melbourne radio station SEN when asked if barring fans was being considered. "When you look at 86,000 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground last night, and the footy

the week after, we've got to go around things sensibly and keep moving on through life while taking the necessary precautions."

A world record crowd of 86,174 for a women's cricket game

crammed the MCG on Sunday evening to see Australia beat India in the Twenty20 World Cup final. Big crowds are also expected for the start of the Australian Football League season later this

month, despite the number of coronavirus cases rising to 93 on Monday. Most Formula One teams are already in Australia or en route, including powerhouse Ferrari and Alpha Tauri

from their bases in Italy, where swathes of the country are now in lockdown in a bid to halt the spread of the virus.

There were fears that the Australian government could bar travel from Italy, which would have prevented staff from the two teams being at the grand prix. But it has yet to do so with travellers from Italy still granted entry with more stringent health checks. "The interesting thing is the Italian freight. The Alpha Tauri cars and the Ferrari cars are on their way from Melbourne (airport) as we speak, so it's really good. The key personnel are on their planes," said Westacott.

He said the only Ferrari people not arriving from Italy were drivers Sebastian Vettel and Charles Leclerc, who were heading from Switzerland and France respectively.— AFP ■



In this file photo taken on 31 March 2019, drivers steer their cars after the start of the Formula One Bahrain Grand Prix at the Sakhir circuit in the desert south of the Bahraini capital Manama. **PHOTO: AFP**