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Monday, 7 December 2020

MIFER, MoHT ministers receive Pa-O ethnic leader U Aung Kham Hti



Union Ministers U Thaung Tun and U Ohn Maung receive Pa-O ethnic leader U Aung Kham Hti in Nay Pyi Taw on 6 December. PHOTO: MNA

UNION Minister for Investment and Foreign Economic Relations U Thaung Tun and Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Ohn Maung received Pa-O ethnic leader U Aung Kham Hti and party in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

The meeting discussed matters relating to the implementation of rural tourism enterprises including community-based tourism at 14 ethnic villages including the villages of Pa-O ethnic nationals near Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory, and manufacturing and exporting of

quality agricultural products of Pa-O Self-Administered Zone.

They also exchanged views on the socio-economic development of local Pa-O ethnic nationals, creating job opportunities, and human resource development via tourism industry and investments.

Deputy Ministers U Bharat Singh and U Tin Latt, Nay Pyi Taw Development Committee Member U Min Thu, Pyinmana Township Pyithu Hluttaw MP U Than Soe Aung also attended the meeting.—MNA

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

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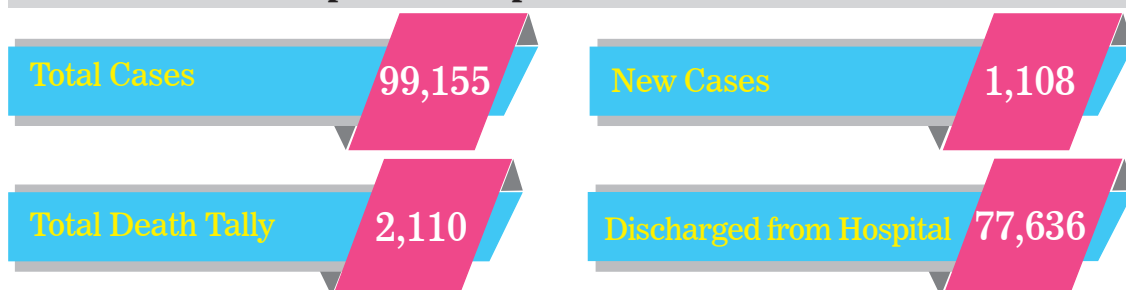


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1,108 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 6 December, total figure rises to 99,155

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 99,155 after 1,108 new cases were reported on 6 December according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these 99,155 confirmed cases, 2,110 died, 77,636 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Updated at 8 pm, 6 December 2020



Daily death toll until 8 pm 6-12-2020

29

Ministry of Health and Sports

Objectives for 100th Anniversary of National Day 2020

- Rights to basic education for all school-age children
- Rights to life-long learning of practical and useful subjects for socio-economics
- More education investment in ethnic areas for multi-sectoral development of the Union
- Technological and infrastructural inputs for education development
- Establishment of a Democratic Federal Union with the collective strength of all the nationals

Motto of 100th Anniversary of National Day 2020

- Make the Union Peace with collective efforts of all the nationals commencing 100th anniversary of National Day

10th Waning of Tazaungmon 1382 ME
(9-12-2020)

Over 10,000 cattle stranded in Muse amid COVID resurgence

CATTLE trade has ground to a halt amid the coronavirus resurgences, and over 10,000 cattle have stranded in Muse border, traders said.

The Ministry of Commerce grants a permit to each company for 100 cattle export, and the pass is valid for three months.

At present, the local companies are facing difficulties with over 10,000 cattle stranded in the Muse border as China has dried up the demand. It prompted the traders to call for the ministry to extend the validity of the permit. However, there is still no response to it.

The domestic companies are sending cattle in line with Standard Operating Procedure to China through the Muse border.

“Before the COVID-19, cattle were highly demanded. During the early outbreak of coronavirus, about ten traders from China entered Myanmar to purchase over 1,000 heads of cattle per day. The resurgence of COVID-19 in Myanmar prompt-

ed China to tighten its border areas with Myanmar. Consequently, it was over four months that cattle trading had halted. We are not sure when the cattle trading will go back to normal,” Ko Kyi Khin, a cattle trader, explained the reasons for trade suspension.

While cattle exports are legal in Myanmar, livestock trade is still not permitted by China. Therefore, Myanmar traders cannot directly send the cattle to China market, so they have to wait for China traders.

“The traders are facing many hardships as it is difficult to take care of the cattle in yards during the rainy season. We can't do anything else but only wait. As a result, traders have been burdened by labour wages, cost of feedstuff, healthcare services, and other general costs. It costs K3,000-4,000 per day to feed one cow, incurring losses,” a trader U Sai Tun stressed.

Typically, a large cow is valued at over K1.8-2.2 million depending on size. Still, the

suspension of trade often leads to Chinese traders resorting to price manipulation and offering a lower price.

“Chinese traders are also worried about mandatory quarantine when they enter Myanmar. Another reason is the surging COVID-19 new cases in Myanmar,” said Ko Kyin Khin, a cattle trader.

The Department of Livestock Breeding and Veterinary has been endeavouring to provide health care services to over 10,000 heads of cattle remained struck in Muse, and more than 3,000 of them are under the care of the department. The department is also planning for the remaining cattle.

During the previous financial year 2019-2020 ended September 2020, Myanmar's exports of animal products touched a low of US\$107.74 million, a sharp drop of \$258.6 million compared with the corresponding period of the 2018-2019FY when livestock trading was suspended by China.

As of 27 November, in the

current FY2020-2021, animal products exports were registered at only \$13 million, which plunged from \$40.5 million in the FY2019-2020.

Animal products exports are solely driven by the private sector this year.

Myanmar has held a series of negotiations with China at the Joint Border Trade Cooperation and Coordinating Committee (JBTC) meetings on legal exports of cattle along with cross-border control of infectious diseases.

At present, to prevent from animal disease, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation issued a notification on 11 March 2020 that the cattle are subject to particular goods and procedures for movement of the cattle in the regions and states were mentioned, posing difficulties to those livestock farmers working on a manageable scale.

The health certificate (AHD/PC-3) issued by the head of the related Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department in the

townships, districts and regions or states are required for the transportation of the cattle within the country.

If the traders fail to comply with the notification, they will face legal action under the Special Goods Tax Law.

At present, the COVID-19 consequences pose transportation difficulties, and it is hard to seek approval from the related Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department.

The country exports cattle that are above five years old, along with vaccination certificates, health certificates, and farming registration certificates. According to the 2018 cattle census, there are 11.5 million heads of cattle in the country.

Since the 2017-2018FY, over 460,000 heads of cattle, with an estimated value of over \$581 million, have been exported to China through the Muse border, according to trade figures.

— Ko Htet

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Police destroys 12 acres of opium fields in Kalaw, Shan State

AUTHORITIES recently destroyed about 12 acres of opium fields in two villages of Kalaw Township, Taunggyi District in southern Shan State.

A combined team of police wiped out 10.5 acres of opium fields in a valley on the west of Kyauksoap Village of Nannaing Village-tract in Kalaw Township on 5 December.

The authorities also destroyed 1.5 acres of opium fields on the south-west of Myaungchauk Village of Taunggye Vil-

lage-tract on 27 November.

Police are working on the opium destruction which is part of the government's efforts to stem opium production in the country.—Township IPRD (Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

Authorities and locals destroy the opium field in a valley on the west of Kyauksoap Village of Nannaing Village-tract in Kalaw Township on 5 December 2020.
PHOTO: TOWNSHIP IPRD



Benefits from working together

If we want the whole country to develop, we need to combine all our human, financial and material resources and work strenuously together. Only then shall we benefit. It will be of no benefit if the Bamars, the Karens, the Shans, the Kachins and the Chins are divided, each going their own way. We will enjoy benefits only if we work together. And you will find that out only if you try it out.

(Extract from a speech delivered by General Aung San on 11 February 1947 in Panglong at a dinner with Sawbwas)



Shwe-Kyet-Yet and Shwe-Kyet-Kya Pagoda. PHOTO BY: THANT ZAW OO

NREC Union Minister inspects University of Forestry and Environmental Science, Forest Research Institute

UNION Minister for Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation U Ohn Win on 5 December inspected teaching and research activities of the University of Forestry and Environmental Science in Nay Pyi Taw Council Area.

During the Union Minister's visit, the Rector of the university provided information about the university and explained the situations related to lecturer recruitment, the criteria for admission to the university and the subjects taught in the university.

The Union Minister asked the lecturers about their teaching experiences and difficulties encountered in teaching activities.

In Myanmar, the forestry subject was first introduced at the University of Yangon in 1923, so the 100th anniversary of it will be held in 2023, according to the Union Minister, who urged the university officials to form working committees to prepare for the Forestry centenary celebration.

Then, the Union Minister



Union Minister U Ohn Win speaks at the meeting with teachers and officials of the University of Forestry and Environmental Science in Nay Pyi Taw on 5 December 2020. PHOTO: MNA

and his entourage inspected the results of the Biodiversity Conservation Research Project jointly conducted by the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Yezin, Forest Research Institute and the Southeast Asia Biodiversity Research Institute. He told the researchers to publish the results of the research in English and

Myanmar languages.

The Union Minister also inspected the plan to hold the 32nd Forest and Environmental Research Paper Reading Session (virtual session). The Union Minister said that summaries of the research should be prepared in both English and Myanmar languages and posted on the official

website and the official Facebook page in advance.

After that, the Union Minister and his entourage inspected the activities of the Plant Tissue Culture Lab.

At the Forest Research Institute, the officials explained the implementation of the Integrated Forest Ecosystem Management

Planning and Demonstration Project in Mekong Subregion (Myanmar), which has been carried out in collaboration with Asia Pacific Forest Rehabilitation and Sustainable Management Network (APFNet). —MNA

(Translated by Maung Maung Swe)

Myanmar citizens abroad return home by relief flight

A total of 132 Myanmar seafarers' Employment Services Federation jointly organized the relief flight of Myanmar National Airlines to repatriate the Myanmar nationals from Dubai. The flight landed at Yangon International Airport in late evening.

Myanmar Embassy in Riyadh and Myanmar Sea-

farers' Employment Services Federation jointly organized the relief flight of Myanmar National Airlines to repatriate the Myanmar nationals from Dubai. The flight landed at Yangon International Airport in late evening.

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, the Ministry of Health and Sports and the Yangon Region government provided them with proper medical tests and arranged 7-day quarantine at specific places or designated

hotels, followed by the 7-day home quarantine.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been working with Myanmar embassies in foreign countries, local ministries and shipping companies/organizations to bring back Myanmar

citizens stranded abroad in accordance with the guidance of the National-Level Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment of COVID-19. —MNA

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

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

Freight rates spike to triple due to container shortage

A cargo vessel is seen in the Yangon River. **PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR**

PANDEMIC-induced container shortage pushed up the freight rates to almost triple in Myanmar, businesspersons in the logistic industry shared their opinions.

The container shortage has become the biggest disrupter in shipping amid the coronavirus impacts, on the back of robust demand on the Asia-Europe and transpacific trade. Container shipping costs are drastically

surging.

The shipping cost in Asia has increased from three-fold to five-fold from last year's rates.

Container shortage is forcing up the shipping rates and also exacerbating other additional costs.

The empty containers are desperately needed in Asia, but they are scattered at the ports across Europe, the experts pointed out.

The logistic sector is hugely affected by the pandemic, and some importers are holding back the containers and not return to carriers yet. Myanmar has faced container shortage problem since October, and it is expected to extend to another two months, traders said.

The value of Myanmar's maritime trade for the period between 1 October and 27 November in the 2020-2021 budget

year totalled US\$3.18 billion, a sharp drop of over \$963 million compared to the year-ago period, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

While maritime exports have valued at \$1.248 billion, imports have registered at \$1.934 billion. Compared to the corresponding period in the 2019-2020 financial year, both exports and imports were lower by \$470-490 million.

Meanwhile, the value of trade through the border was estimated at \$1.14 billion, a decrease of \$565 million from last FY.

The country's total external trade reached \$4.3 billion, which plunged from \$5.85 billion recorded in the year-ago period.

Myanmar exports agricultural products, fishery products, minerals, livestock, forest products, finished industrial goods, and other products, while it imports capital goods, consumer goods, and raw industrial materials.

The country currently has nine ports involved in sea trade. Yangon Port is the main gateway for Myanmar's maritime trade and includes the Yangon inner terminals and the outer Thilawa Port.—Htet Myat

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Passenger bus operators struggling under no coverage of CERP

THE highway passenger vehicle operators in Magway Region are facing difficulties as they are not covered by the COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan (CERP) by the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry, said the owners.

There are over 100 passenger bus lines running inside and outside the region. Most of the bus lines purchased the new vehicles with the bank loan, in line with the government's auto policy. They did not earn money during the COVID-19 essential lockdowns which are economically devastating.

"The owners of over 20 bus lines in Magway Region applied for the CERP. However, they have not been approved by the committee yet. The owners of passenger buses are struggling a lot as they cannot afford to pay off the monthly payment. They are risked of being sued by the banks," said U Myint Soe, owner of Pandaing passenger gate.

Those stakeholders including drivers, assistants, staff and their families are hard-living, said U Aung Soe Oo from Shwe Mann Thu Express.

The express buses were

Owners of passenger buses in Magway Region are struggling to make monthly payment to the bank. **PHOTO: ZAYYATU**

halted due to the COVID-19 impacts. Now, they are allowed to restart in the town. The drivers are mandatory to take a rapid diagnostic test at the toll gates. About 70 drivers and

assistants are tested at terminal every day, Magway Region Supervisory Committee for Private-owned Motor Vehicles stated.—Zayyatu

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Trade Mark Ads

Call Thin Thin May,

09251022355

We will try to get the vaccination for our people as soon as possible

People would like to know when the COVID-19 vaccination would be available. According to the latest information, a prominent pharmaceutical company has completed 97 per cent in producing this vaccination. Some sources said that this company could produce this vaccination next month. After this major company could produce the medicine, the remaining companies would be able to do it. The company would, of course, give priority to their own citizens for vaccination. This is natural. However, we will try to get the vaccination for our people as soon as possible with the assistance of global health support groups.

(Excerpt from State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's report on COVID-19 situation amid containment measures, on 21 November 2020)



MoHT plans to restart domestic tourism this month

THE Ministry of Hotels and Tourism has been planning to reopen its tourism industry with four travel plans in December.

“The first plan is the luxury flight tour which is expected to begin in early December, the second one is the river cruises tour which is intended to start in the second of week of December, and the last two plans are inland tour and marine tour that are expected to begin in the last week of December,” said Deputy Director-General Daw Khin Than Win of the ministry.

“Travel plans are just being arranged, not yet to be sold. The arrangements are being made to



Picture shows Surburg Airport in Falam Township, Chin State. **PHOTO: SOE MYINT AUNG**

be ready for reopening. Transportation is being planned to be ready when the inbound tourism restarts and Ngwehsaung and Chaungtha beaches are opened,” she said.

For the development of tourism industry in post-COVID-19 period, the ministry is taking measures to restart adventure sport tourism, food tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, agricultural tourism, river cruise and railway tourism, inland and marine tourism, and Meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) tourism. — Pwint Thitsar

(Translated by KyawZinTun)

Water supply facilities in MraukU Tsp benefit over 30,000 residents

DRINKING water supply facilities in MraukU Township completed benefiting over 30,000 people from over 5,700 households in the township.

The township's MraukU Township Department of Rural Development said in 2019-2020 financial year, it constructed seven lakes and seven tubewells

with the use of the budget allocation from the Union Budget, several facilities including two lakes, two tubewells, establishing fence around the lakes, building four water storage tanks, water supply system and one intake tower with the use of the budget allocation from the Rakhine State Government.—Tin Tun Oo



Water supply facilities in MraukU benefit more than 30,000 local people. **PHOTO: TIN TUN OO**

Singapore Startup help owners sell their car in record time with AI valuation tool

SINGAPORE'S online car marketplace UCARS is integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cloud computing into its platform together with Huawei to provide consumers with enhanced transparency, security and satisfaction.

Car owners can now expect to sell their vehicles within three days at the highest prices when they use the AI-enhanced tools provided by the UCARS platform.

Using AI, the company has successfully created a proprietary valuation tool on the platform that provides consumers with an estimate of their cars' resale value within seconds, making it the first instant AI Car Valuation Tool in Asia Pacific region. Compared to other valuation methods that take at least a day to give an estimate, the UCARS AI Valuation Tool is the fastest valuation tool available to consumers in the region.

With the current economic lull due to COVID-19, transfer of private vehicle ownership for cars has seen an average of 15% year-on-year increase compared to September last year and reached an all-time high in September this year (source: LTA). Consumer demand for new and used cars has



Singapore Startup help owners sell their cars in record time with AI valuation tool. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

been seeing a steady increase in the Southeast Asia region.

We speculate that some Singaporeans are anticipating an economic rebound in the near future, and coupled with pent-up demand for cars and reduced quotas, we are expecting to see car sales skyrocket in the coming months,” said Cho Kok Yick, Chief Technology Officer at UCARS.

“We want to make the second-hand car selling process as safe and as easy as possible, this is why we continuously invest in AI technologies. This will, of course, be made possible by Huawei technologies,” Cho added.—GNLM

VACCINE FOR QUEEN

Record US virus cases as reports say British queen to get vaccine soon

THE United States notched a record number of coronavirus cases in 24 hours for the third day running, as it was reported that Britain's Queen Elizabeth II will get a vaccine within weeks.

A tally by Johns Hopkins University showed the world's worst-hit country -- which has seen a dramatic virus resurgence in recent weeks -- reached nearly 230,000 new infections and 2,527 Covid-related deaths on Saturday alone.

For two weeks, the US has regularly topped 2,000 deaths per day, as it had in the spring at the height of the first wave of the country's outbreak.

US health officials warned of a surge after millions of Americans traveled to celebrate last week's Thanksgiving holiday despite pleas from authorities to stay home.

The coronavirus has now killed more than 1.5 million people and infected 66 million around the world since emerging in China last year, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP.

In Britain, it was reported that the 94-year-old monarch will receive the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine within weeks after UK regulators granted emergency approval. The roll-



The queen and her 99-year-old husband Prince Philip are in line to get the jab early due to their age.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

out of the vaccine will begin next week.

The queen and her 99-year-old husband Prince Philip are in line to get the jab early due to their age and will not receive preferential treatment, the Mail on Sunday reported.

The newspaper said Britain's most senior royals would reveal they have been given the inoculation "to encourage more people to take up the vital jab", amid fears so-called anti-vaxxers could dent

enthusiasm for it.

British health officials are set to use criteria based on age and vulnerability to decide who gets the vaccine first.

Elderly care home residents and their carers will be the very first to get inoculated, followed by those aged 80 and over and frontline health and care staff.

Britain has pre-ordered 40 million doses of the vaccine in total, and is set to receive an initial batch of 800,000 to begin next

week's rollout.

- Moscow jab rollout -

The World Health Organization has warned that vaccines are no magic bullet for the coronavirus crisis, as Russia started vaccinating its high-risk workers and other countries geared up for similar programs. The WHO cautioned against what it said was an erroneous belief that the pandemic would end soon with vaccines on the horizon.

SOURCE: AFP

CREATIVE SURVIVAL

'Rain checks': Germany's F&B sector in virus curbs survival mode

FROM distilling alcohol for pharmacies to printing takeaway bags and delivering order-in cocktails, Germany's food and beverage sector has been forced to get creative to keep their companies going through coronavirus shutdowns.

Three businesses tell AFP about their battle to survive:

Distilling for pharmacies

Bastian Heuser and his partners have been learning on the job since they stumbled into the whiskey business without any experience in the trade. But since March, the three Berliners have been forced to further improvise as their distillery was forced shut during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

"We had to react very quickly because we had invested a lot over the past three and a half years, and didn't have a big cash reserve," said Heuser, co-founder and marketing manager at the Stork Club.

As factories and shops were ordered closed in March to curb transmissions of Covid-19, the distillery lost all of its sales.

But the pandemic offered an opportunity: with demand soaring for hand sanitisers, pharmacies in the area contacted the Stork Club to distil its alcohol to help cover regional shortages.

The company also sold some whiskey barrels to make ends meet, Heuser said.

They also moved their bar from a streetside shop into a courtyard -- a timely investment, as the region benefited from a marked increase in domestic tourism after restrictions eased.

Guided tours, tastings and even weddings kept the distillery

busy all summer. Heuser said the Stork Club "had up to 50 percent more turnover than in the preceding year, which more or less undid the springtime losses". Although income has once again plunged since in-house dining was banned in the latest round of shutdowns that began in November, Heuser said the distillery can weather the storm.

"With the new vaccine ... I hope that by May, June a certain normalcy will return to our business," Heuser said.

'Rain checks', cocktails to go

Katja Hiendlmayer, co-owner of cocktail bar Buerkner Eck, admitted that she would have "thought about doing something else" if she had known in March that her business would have to stay shut for much of the year.

"We could have acted. Right now we're only reacting," she said.

SOURCE: AFP



French restaurateur Sebastien Gorius believes "there will be a collective trauma for a few years, perhaps a decade to come". PHOTO: AFP/FILE

NEWS
IN BRIEF

- The World Health Organization has warned that vaccines will be no magic bullet for the coronavirus crisis as nations gear up for a massive rollout to tackle surging infections.
- Moscow on Saturday began vaccinating workers at high risk of becoming infected with the coronavirus at newly opened clinics across the city.
- Argentina's Senate passed a tax on about 12,000 of the country's richest people on Friday, to pay for coronavirus measures including medical supplies and relief for the poor and small businesses.
- Kyrgyzstan on Saturday announced that citizens of all countries would be allowed to enter the Central Asian country, lifting border restrictions it had instituted at the start of the pandemic in the spring.
- Premier League chiefs have warned fans to avoid "excessive singing" and hugging as supporters return to English top-flight matches for the first time since March on Saturday.

SOURCE: AFP

PANDEMIC

Coronavirus toll: over 1.5 million dead

The novel coronavirus has killed at least 1,519,213 people since the outbreak emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT on Saturday.

At least 65,865,820 cases of coronavirus have been registered. Of these, at least 41,777,200 are now considered recovered.

The tallies, using data collected by AFP from national authorities and information from the World Health Organization (WHO), probably reflect only a fraction of the actual number of infections.

Many countries are testing only symptomatic or the most serious cases.

On Friday, 12,177 new deaths and 677,808 new cases were recorded worldwide.

SOURCE: AFP

RAPID SPREAD

Virus surge causing concern for Japan's straining medical system

WITH Japan witnessing a rapid rise in the number of new coronavirus cases in recent weeks, health care workers fear that the country's medical system may soon be strained to breaking point with hospital bed shortages becoming commonplace, especially in big cities.

Hospitals have seen bed occupancy rates rising in line with the number of severe cases, and medical workers are worried they may not have the requisite capacity to treat patients in need of emergency care if the trend continues.

Despite this, the Japanese government has decided to continue to strike a balance between protecting the economy and the populace.

It will allow social and economic activities to go on while trying to curb the spread of the COVID-19 respiratory disease even though medical experts have called on people to exercise extreme caution.

The bed occupancy situation in Tokyo is severe but the



Asahikawa City Hospital in central Hokkaido on Nov. 19, 2020. PHOTO: KYODO

concern is not limited to the capital with some other areas also seeing rates in excess of 50 percent as the country experiences what some medical experts have described as its third wave of infections.

"We have reached a phase

of rapid spread," said Norio Omagari, director of the Disease Control and Prevention Center, at a press conference with Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike on Thursday.

The Japanese capital logged a daily record of 534 new cases on that day as the metropolitan

government raised its virus alert to the highest of four levels.

Among the 2,640 hospital beds designated by the metropolitan government for COVID-19 patients, 1,354 or 51 percent were occupied as of Wednesday, the figure is up 10 percentage points

from the previous week.

"The strain will increase on medical facilities that have (patients hospitalized) for a long period of time. There is an urgent need to secure more beds," said Masataka Inokuchi, a vice head of the Tokyo Medical Association.

Hokkaido, a popular tourist destination known for its heavy snowfall and frigid temperatures, has seen a more urgent need with the bed occupancy rate standing at 72 percent as of Tuesday.

"We are narrowly getting by. We will not have enough workers if the number of patients increases," said a health care worker at a Sapporo hospital, which has accepted a number of patients in their 70s and 80s who require particular attention.

Asahikawa in central Hokkaido has made it a general rule to hospitalize everybody who tests positive for the virus, but that is not a prefecture-wide policy.

SOURCE: Kyodo

THE HOLY CITY

Bethlehem lights up Christmas tree as virus rules keep crowds away



Palestinians in Father Christmas costumes jump off a rock by a barbed-wire section of Israel's controversial separation barrier near Wallajah, west of Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

BETHLEHEM lit up its Christmas tree on Saturday evening but without the usual crowds, as novel coronavirus restrictions put a damper on the start of Christmas festivities in the holy city.

Palestinian authorities last week announced measures, including a night-time curfew, across the Israeli-occupied West Bank for 14 days to fight a "worrying spread" of the virus.

Locals and pilgrims traditionally gather each year for the lighting of the tree in Manger

Square, near the Church of the Nativity, built on the site where Christians believe Jesus was born.

But this year, only a small crowd of journalists was present due to coronavirus restrictions, an AFP photographer said.

Carmen Ghattas, director of public relations at the Bethlehem municipality, told AFP that Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Shtayyeh had lit up the tree remotely from his office in Ramallah.

SOURCE: AFP

"DOWN WITH DODON!"

Thousands in Moldova call for government's resignation

THOUSANDS of protesters rallied in the Moldovan capital Sunday to demand the government's resignation and snap parliamentary elections.

Moldova last month elected pro-European Maia Sandu to the presidency, earning her a surprise victory over pro-Russian incumbent Igor Dodon.

But Moldovan lawmakers this week passed a bill transferring control of the country's intelligence agency from the president to parliament, and Sandu called for her supporters to rally against it.

She and supporters say the legislation's goal is to undermine the presidency before Sandu takes office and to boost parliament, where Dodon's supporters outnumber the opposition.

More than 5,000 people rallied on Thursday against the move.

On Sunday, more than 50,000 protesters gathered in front of the parliament building, according to organisers.

AFP journalists at the scene said that at least 20,000 protesters had turned out.

The opposition said many more could not make it to the rally, and accused police of having blocked entry to Chisinau to those coming from outside, including farmers who had arrived in tractors.

During the protest, demonstrators chanted "Down with

Dodon!" and "We will not give in!" Hundreds of police cordoned off the parliament building, but did not interfere with the rally.

Protesters also called for Sandu to be inaugurated on December 10, the day the constitutional court is expected to officially confirm her victory. Her inauguration is currently scheduled for two weeks later.

SOURCE: AFP



AFP journalists estimated that 20,000 people took part in a rally to demand the government's resignation and snap parliamentary elections. PHOTO: AFP/BOGDAN TUDOR

Encouraging renewable energy key to limiting fossil fuels

WE are willing to establishing more renewable energy facilities to pursue its policy goals driven by our energy deficiency, but investment into the sector and assistance are still needed.

As part of efforts for pursuing the country's clean energy mission set in 2014, the Union Government is providing to communities, which can not access to the electricity grid, with power generated from rivers, with gas and diesel-fired generators while supplying power through its national grid to other parts of the country.

Regarding its shift to renewable energy, the Union Government gave permission to 29 solar power firms to generate electricity in our country, and the total production capacity of the firms is expected to boost our renewable energy consumption by 14 per cent when the firms are in operation.

Given that the renewable energy will remain a supplemental power to other fuel sources, we are committed to sticking to the green path to meet our climate and sustainable development goals.

Investment and assistance are essential to meet the country's electricity goal through the renewable energy, we need to expand the use of clean energy such as solar, wind and hydro. To ensure that, we need to upgrade and expand the energy infrastructures including the national power grid system and enough solar and wind power plants. It will also help our country move away from polluting the environment.

It is worth noting that the government is drafting a renewable energy bill while taking steps towards implementation of the energy conservation guidelines, prioritizing energy environmentalism.

Besides, Myanmar will set its target of boosting consumption of renewable energy by 54 per cent from hydro power, solar power and wind power by 2030 if it gets technology and fund assistance from international countries.

We will do anything that we can do to limit fossil fuels and switch to renewables helps the whole planet. Carbon emissions need to be dramatically reduced to prevent the most catastrophic consequences of climate change.

Given that the renewable energy will remain a supplemental power to other fuel sources, we are committed to sticking to the green path to meet our climate and sustainable development goals.

We are confident that we can double our efforts to meeting renewable energy goals with the technical and financial assistance from international communities. In fighting the climate change, our achievement is also yours.

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THE REPORT : HOW MANY CHILDREN AND YOUTH HAVE INTERNET ACCESS AT HOME?

Two thirds of world's school-age children have no internet access at home: UN report

The International Telecommunication Union and UNICEF call for urgent investment to bridge a digital divide currently preventing children and young people from accessing quality digital learning and opportunities online

TWO thirds of the world's school-age children – or 1.3 billion children aged 3 to 17 years old – do not have internet connection in their homes, according to a new joint report from UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The report "How Many Children and Youth Have Internet Access at Home?" notes a similar lack of access among young people aged 15 to 24 years old, with 759 million or 63 percent unconnected at home.

"That so many children and young people have no internet at home is more than a digital gap - it is a digital canyon," said Henrietta Fore, UNICEF executive director. "Lack of connectivity doesn't just limit children and young people's ability to connect online. It prevents them from competing in the modern economy. It isolates them from the world. And in the event of school closures, such as those currently experienced by millions due to COVID-19, it causes them to lose out on education. Put

bluntly: Lack of internet access is costing the next generation their futures."

Nearly a quarter of a billion students worldwide are still affected by COVID-19 school closures, forcing hundreds of millions of students to rely on virtual learning. For those with no internet access, education can be out of reach. Even before the pandemic, a growing cohort of young people needed to learn foundational, transferable, digital, job-specific and entrepreneurial skills to compete in the 21st century economy.

The digital divide is perpetuating inequalities that already divide countries and communities, the report notes. Children and young people from the poorest households, rural and lower income states are falling even further behind their peers and are left with very little opportunity to ever catch up.

Globally, among school-age children from richest households, 58 percent have internet connection at home, compared with



Afghan school children study at an open classroom in the outskirts of Jalalabad on Jan. 30, 2013. PHOTO: NOORULLAH SHIRZADA /AFP/FILE

only 16 percent from the poorest households. The same disparity exists across country income level as well. Less than one in 20 school-age children from low-income countries have internet

connection at home, compared with nearly 9 in 10 from high-income countries.

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SOURCE: UNICEF-ITU

FAIR ACCESS AND EQUITABLE ALLOCATION OF COVID-19 HEALTH PRODUCTS

Scientists optimistic on making COVID-19 vaccines affordable, equitable despite challenges

THE world's top scientists on the development of COVID-19 vaccines on Friday expressed optimism about and confidence in having affordable vaccines with equitable access to all despite challenges regarding funding, purchasing, distribution as well as information.

"I'm very optimistic and also confident that if we continue to mobilize everyone who is a stakeholder in vaccine development and distribution, we will make that happen," said Ozlem Tuerceci, chief medical officer at the German vaccine developer BioNTech.

Scientifically and technologically it is possible to make COVID-19 vaccines a global public good, said Soumya Swaminathan, the World Health Organization (WHO) chief scientist.

"We are confident that we're going to have several candidates that are safe and effective," taking into account all the work that is going on and the many more

vaccine candidates under development, said Swaminathan, who was speaking at a panel discussion of one special session of the United Nations General Assembly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We're in a very exciting stage now where we're seeing efficacy results coming out on the first vaccine licensure," said Sarah Gilbert, professor of vaccinology at Oxford University.

"That's not an option. We have to achieve it and we can achieve it," said Ugur Sahin, chief executive officer with BioNTech.

Still, the challenge is having world political leaders make it happen, said Swaminathan, citing a funding gap of 30 to 35 billion U.S. dollars for the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, which is a global collaboration to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines.



A staff member introduces a potential COVID-19 vaccine developed by BioNTech and Fosun Group at the Medical Equipment and Healthcare Products exhibition area during the third China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai, east China, Nov. 5, 2020. PHOTO: XINHUA/ZHANG YUWEI

The funding gap is just 1 percent of the stimulus package countries are spending and it would result in something like 150 billion dollars' return to the top ten economies of the world if "we have vaccines for the world," said Swaminathan.

Having a vaccine is not an end in itself, said Sahin, noting that there are still a lot of challenges on how to distribute the vaccine from the logistic, technical and scientific perspectives.

On the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, Tuerceci said it

"has to be cooperation in which organizations like the WHO or the United Nations have to take the lead."

As the milestone of having vaccines has been reached, the next key milestone is to find ways of equitable supply and distribution and up-scaling to global dimensions of all the vaccines with high efficacy, Tuerceci said.

"What we need to do is to continue with the collaboration (with partners) because we need more vaccines," and also, there are other vaccines in advanced stages of development, said Gilbert.

"That's the way that we're going to get the most number of vaccines for the world. It is a very good thing if we have vaccines made in different ways because that will give us the largest number of doses," Gilbert said.

Swaminathan said she is very happy to see the efficacy of a few candidate vaccines exceeding 70 percent of the benchmark and

many more vaccines in development would have results disclosed in the next few months.

Globally, there are 163 COVID-19 candidate vaccines in pre-clinical evaluation and 51 others in clinical evaluation, according to a publication of the WHO on Wednesday.

The COVID-19 Global Vaccine Access Facility, a global mechanism backed by the WHO, seeks to procure, equitably allocate and deliver 2 billion doses of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines by the end of 2021.

Though pharmaceutical giants AstraZeneca and Pfizer aim to produce up to 3 billion and 1.3 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines respectively in 2021, bilateral purchase agreements from rich countries have made vaccines supply to developing or small-sized companies an increasing concern.

SOURCE: Xinhua

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“ Orange the World: Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect!”

Myanmar Daily Weather Report
(Issued at 7:00 pm Sunday 6 December, 2020)

BAY INFERENCE: Weather is cloudy over the Southth-west Bay and a few cloud to partly cloudy over the Andaman sea and elsewhere over the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL NOON OF THE 7 December, 2020: Light rain are likely to be isolated rain in Kachin State. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be generally fair in Lower Sagaing Region and Chin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon states and partly cloudy in the remaining regions and states.

STATE OF THE SEA: Seas will be moderate in Myanmar waters. Wave height will be about (4-8) feet off and along Myanmar Coasts.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of slight decrease of night temperatures in Upper Myanmar areas.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 7 December, 2020: Partly Cloudy.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 7 December, 2020: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 7 December, 2020: Generally fair weather.

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INDONESIA'S SOCIAL AFFAIRS MINISTER

Indonesia minister arrested over pandemic aid corruption



A Covid mural goes up in Jakarta. PHOTO: AFP

INDONESIA'S social affairs minister was arrested Sunday for allegedly taking \$1.2 million in bribes linked to food aid for those hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

Juliari Batubara was named as a suspect after Indonesian anti-corruption agents seized suitcases, backpacks and envelopes stuffed with cash equivalent to \$1.2 million in a sting operation on Saturday.

He turned himself in on Sunday at the anti-corruption agency's headquarters, becoming the second minister in President Joko Widodo's government to be arrested over alleged graft in recent weeks.

"That's the people's money... it's aid urgently needed to help during Covid-19 and for the national economic recovery," Widodo said after Batubara's arrest,

vowing he would not protect any corrupt officials.

Indonesia's economy -- Southeast Asia's biggest -- has been hit hard by the pandemic, and the government has rolled out aid programmes such as food packages to help those in need.

Batubara has been accused of involvement in a bribery scheme linked to one such aid project.

Officials have alleged that he received more than \$1 million from two contractors that were appointed to supply basic food packages for people affected by the pandemic. For each package, Batubara would receive 10,000 rupiah, or \$0.71, officials alleged.

If found guilty, he could face up to 20 years in prison and a fine of one billion rupiah (\$70,000).

SOURCE: AFP

A "TRACE, TEST AND TREAT" APPROACH

South Korea tightens virus curbs in Seoul region

SOUTH Korea raised its coronavirus alert to the second-highest level in Seoul and surrounding areas Sunday as authorities struggle to contain a fresh outbreak.

The country largely brought the virus under control with a "trace, test and treat" approach, but in recent weeks new infections have jumped from around 100 a day to more than 500.

South Korea confirmed 631 new cases on Sunday -- the highest in nine months -- with the majority in the greater Seoul region, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency.

By global standards the figure remains low, but the rise has alarmed authorities, who have tightened social distancing measures.

"We are facing the biggest

crisis in our fight against Covid-19," Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun said Sunday.

All gatherings of more than 50 people will be banned and professional sports will be held behind closed doors with no spectators. Cafes will continue to serve only takeaways, while restaurants must close by 9 pm, with only deliveries permitted afterwards.

The tightened measures will be in place until the end of the year, Chung said.

Sunday's figures take the total number of cases in the country to more than 37,000.

South Korea endured one of the worst early Covid-19 outbreaks outside mainland China, but never imposed the kind of lockdowns ordered in much of Europe and other parts of the world.

SOURCE: AFP



A couple wearing face masks walk through Seoul Plaza in front of the City Hall in Seoul on 23 April, 2020. PHOTO: AFP

HAYABUSA2 SPACE PROBE

Japan space capsule collected in "perfect condition" in Australia

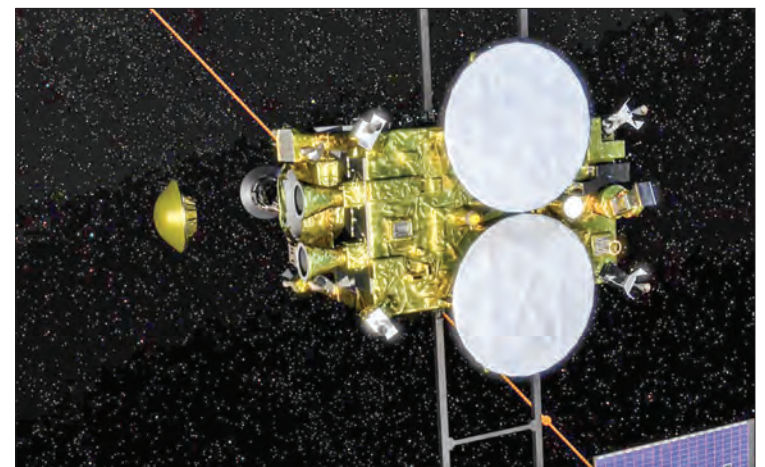
THE Japanese space agency said Sunday the capsule from its Hayabusa2 space probe was collected from the Australian desert in "perfect condition," hopefully containing samples from the Ryugu asteroid that could help explain the origins of life.

The capsule appeared as a bright fireball lasting several dozen seconds as it re-entered Earth's atmosphere before dawn, its protective heat shield glowing as it reached temperatures of approximately 3,000 C.

If the mission was successful, the capsule will contain two samples from the Ryugu asteroid, including the first subsurface asteroid sample ever collected. Scientists believe that organic matter and water existed on the asteroid when the solar system was created around 4.6 billion years ago.

Speaking at a press conference, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's Hayabusa2 project manager Yuichi Tsuda said, "The capsule was in perfect condition. We're looking forward to opening it up."

The deputy director general of JAXA's Institute of Space and Astronautical Science, Masaki Fujimoto, said during the same press conference that once collected from the desert, the capsule was carried by hand into a so-called "quick look facility" to



Supplied photo shows an image of the Hayabusa2 space explorer releasing its capsule. PHOTO: JAXA/ KYODO

be cleaned and dismantled so the interior sample container can be exposed.

An analysis of the gasses that may have been emitted from the asteroid material is expected to begin on Monday.

Fujimoto said the team in Australia is anxious to perform the analysis as the presence of gasses within the sample container would indicate that the asteroid samples were successfully collected.

Scientists hope primordial material believed to be contained in the samples will help further research into the origins of life on Earth and the evolution of the solar system.

The capsule, which was released from the space probe on Saturday afternoon, landed in a

desert near the Woomera Prohibited Area, a remote Australian military and civil aerospace facility that is also one of the largest land-based test ranges in the world.

The Hayabusa2 space probe made two landings on Ryugu to collect samples.

The first landing in February 2019 saw the probe collect a surface sample from the asteroid. The second sample, collected in July the same year, is the first-ever subsurface sample from an asteroid and was extracted after an artificial crater was created by firing a copper projectile into the surface. The two samples will provide scientists with a comparison of the composition of the asteroid above and below the surface.—SOURCE: AFP

A POST-BREXIT TRADE DEAL

Last-ditch effort to save Brexit trade talks from failure

BRITISH and EU negotiators embark on probably their final two-day scramble to secure a post-Brexit trade deal Sunday, after failing to reach agreement for eight months.

Michel Barnier and his UK counterpart David Frost will resume talks in Brussels where they broke off on Friday, calling a pause after a fruitless week of late-night wrangling in London.

“We will see if there is a way forward,” Barnier tweeted.

Meanwhile, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson will reportedly lobby European leaders, after a call with EU chief Ursula von der Leyen on Saturday ended with the sides still facing “significant differences” on the key issues.

The pair’s next call will be on Monday evening and then the 27 EU leaders will gather in Brussels on Thursday for a two-day summit planned to tackle their own budget dispute, but which will now once again be clouded by Brexit worries.

Johnson and von der Leyen’s issued a downbeat joint statement after their call.

“Whilst recognising the seriousness of these differences, we agreed that a further effort should be undertaken by our negotiating teams to assess whether they can be resolved,” they said.

While much has been agreed, the sides cannot close out the thorniest debates over

fishing rights, fair trade rules and an enforcement mechanism to govern any deal.

– ‘Anything is possible’ –
Britain formally left the EU in January, nearly four years after a referendum on membership that split the nation down the middle and two months after Johnson won an election touting what he claimed was an “oven ready” Brexit deal.

The UK is bound to the EU’s tariff-free single market until a post-Brexit transition period expires the end of the year — an immovable deadline by which time the two sides must try to agree on the exact nature of their future relationship.

SOURCE: AFP



Representative Image. PHOTO: AFP

AMID DEEP CRISES

Maduro eyes victory in Venezuela poll amid opposition boycott



A man sells plantains in a market in Caracas, Venezuela on December 5, 2020 on the eve of legislative voting. PHOTO: CRISTIAN HERNANDEZ AFP

VENEZUELANs vote Sunday in legislative elections set to tighten President Nicolas Maduro’s grip on power and further weaken his US-backed opposition rival Juan Guaido, who is leading a boycott of the polls he calls a fraud.

Victory will give Maduro’s ruling Socialist Party control of an expanded 227-seat National Assembly, the only institution not yet in its hands.

“The day has come. We have been patient,” Maduro said Saturday at his Miraflores presidential palace in Caracas. Sunday’s vote comes five years after the opposition won control of the National Assembly by a landslide.

Guaido, 37, called for a boycott on grounds that “free

and fair” conditions for holding elections do not exist. He labeled Sunday’s poll “a fraud”.

“Maduro’s objective isn’t even to gain legitimacy,” Guaido told AFP in an interview this week, adding that the goal was instead to simply wipe out all semblance of democracy.

Guaido and his allies plan a week-long plebiscite from Monday seeking public support to prolong the mandate of the current National Assembly until “free, verifiable and transparent” elections can be held.

However, the results will not be binding, as Maduro exercises control of the country’s institutions, including the Supreme Court and the powerful military.

SOURCE: AFP

SATURDAY’S STREET CLASHES

95 arrests at French security law protests: Minister

POLICE arrested 95 people during protests across France against a planned security law, and 67 officers were injured during the demonstrations, Interior Minister Gerard Darmanin said Sunday.

In Paris, the site of the worst violence, 48 police officers or gendarmes were injured during Saturday’s street clashes, the interior ministry said on Twitter.

A firefighter was also injured in the capital after being hit by a projectile, a police source said.

Paris police held 25 people, including two mi-

nors, said the prosecutors’ office. It was the second weekend of violence in the capital during protests against a security bill currently going through French parliament. Demonstrators clashed with police, vehicles were set alight and shop windows smashed. The weekly nationwide protests are becoming a major headache for President Emmanuel Macron’s government, with tensions intensified by the beating of a black music producer by police last month. Paris city officials and others also expressed

outrage over the way police broke up an improvised migrant camp in the heart of Paris in November.

Darmanin has ordered an investigation into the incident. The numbers demonstrating on Saturday were significantly down, with the nationwide figure at 52,350 against 133,000 a week earlier, the interior ministry said. Around 5,000 people demonstrated in Paris against 46,000 last week, it added. A police source on Saturday blamed the violence on 400 to 500 radical elements.

SOURCE: AFP

BASELESS CLAIMS

Trump shows no surrender in first post-election rally

PRESIDENT Donald Trump made clear Saturday he had no intention of relinquishing his baseless claims that last month’s election was stolen from him, telling a raucous crowd at his first post-poll rally he would somehow still win.

In a speech remarkable for its twisting of reality more than a month after the November 3 election, the outgoing president launched into another litany of allegations that the polls won handily by Democrat Joe Biden were rigged.

The crowd in Val-

dosta, Georgia for what was nominally a rally in support of two Republican Senate candidates facing a hugely consequential runoff election roared in support, at one point chanting “fight for Trump.”

Even with Covid-19 cases surging nationwide, there were few masks in the crowd and many ignored social-distancing rules.

In a nearly two-hour speech Trump, 74, declared he would not concede, at times sticking to his script but regularly going off-the-cuff for his

more incendiary claims.

“We’re winning this election,” Trump told the rally, which was similar to his many gatherings prior to the election, down to the soaring country song “God Bless the USA” played as he took the stage with First Lady Melania Trump.

“It’s rigged. It’s a fixed deal.”

It was yet another example of Trump breaking democratic norms, engaging in conspiracy-mongering and presenting falsehoods in ways unprecedented in US history.

SOURCE: AFP

DESPITE PRESTIGE

UK universities will lose cachet post-Brexit, EU students warn



The biggest hurdle for future students from the EU will be money once Britain is no longer bound by the bloc's rules from January 1. **PHOTO: AFP**

DESPITE the prestige of Oxford and Cambridge and other top universities, EU students warn Britain will be less attractive after Brexit, with fees set to soar and legal tangles still not ironed out.

"It's getting quite difficult

to decide if the UK will be the place the best students are going to come," said Polish graduate Michal Gren, 23, who is considering applying for a master's degree in Britain.

Daniel Haid, a 27-year-old

German student at Sheffield Hallam University in northern England, said he had asked other EU students whether they would apply again now.

"The answer is usually straight-up 'no'," said Haid, who

is in the second year of a doctorate in sports engineering and is a student ambassador for the UK Council for International Student Affairs, an advisory body.

"We have the luxury of being EU citizens. We have so many good options instead," he said.

In his view, Britain's new regime is "not really a competitive offer."

"For sure, there will be unfortunately less European students, I'm afraid," agreed Laura Langone, 31, who is the third year of a philosophy doctorate at the University of Cambridge.

"I know many people who were discouraged from applying, people who will start their degree from September 2021."

Dominik Frej, 22, an aerospace engineering undergraduate at Queen Mary University of London, heads a federation of Polish students, who number some 8,000 in the UK.

"This number will drop by 75 percent, for sure," he said.

There has already been a drop in EU students applying: down from 6,480 last year to 5,220

this year, according to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

'Huge money'

The biggest hurdle for future students from the EU will be money once Britain is no longer bound by the bloc's rules from January 1.

International tuition fees exceed £40,000 (\$54,000, 44,300 euros) for degrees such as medicine.

The fee for a student visa is about £350 and about £500 to use the state-run National Health Service.

EU students will no longer qualify for UK student loans and higher costs will hit poorer EU countries harder.

This is "huge money" for Poles, said Gren.

"From now on, not your academic potential and knowledge will decide whether you study in the UK but your financial background," said Frej, who is studying remotely from Warsaw to save money.

SOURCE: AFP

WINTER SPORTS

150 million people in China participated in ice-snow sports last winter

ABOUT 150 million people in China have participated in ice and snow sports last winter, according to a report released by Renmin University of China Saturday.

Since 2018, Renmin University of China has conducted an annual survey on the nationwide participation level of ice and snow sports, aiming to reveal the influencing factors behind people's participation in the sport. According to the re-

port this year, 41.2 percent of the interviewees have participated in ice and snow sports more than three times a year, and 27.2 percent have participated in ice and snow sports in any season other than winter.

The report also shows that 45 percent of the people participated in ice and snow sports for recreational purposes, 23.3 percent for health, and 17.5 percent for stress relief.

SOURCE: XINHUA



People play ice hockey on a frozen lake in Mentougou District of Beijing, capital of China, Jan. 12, 2020. **PHOTO: HOU JIQING/XINHUA**

LITTLE VAMPIRE

Insect invaders threaten Rome's iconic pines

ROME'S majestic umbrella pines are as much part of the landscape as the ruins and cobbled streets, but they are under threat from a tiny insect invader — the pine tortoise scale.

"If we do nothing, the pines of Rome will be destroyed by the thousands," warned agronomist Franco Milito, who estimates there are around 60,000 such trees in the city's public areas and another 30,000 on private land.

"And they are really the trees of Rome, which shape the views. We must look after them."

The insects, originally from North America, can kill trees already weakened by the urban environment within just two or three years, experts told AFP.

"It's very serious," said Patrizio Zucca, head of the association of agronomists in Rome. "Urgent action is needed."

Toumeyella parvicornis, to give it its Latin name, is about three millimetres long, and its reddish-brown oval shell resembles a tortoise.

It was unknown in Italy until five years ago, but after ravaging the stone pines of Naples in the south, it has moved up the coast.



Rome's umbrella pine trees are under threat from a tiny insect called the pine tortoise scale. **PHOTO: AFP**

The insect operates like a little vampire, sucking with its syringe-like mouth the sap from both the tree's needles and its bark.

It produces a sweet white excrement, on which thick black mould develops, covering the tree and blocking the process of photosynthesis.

Massacre in Naples

In Campania, the southern region that includes Naples, although many pines succumbed, others resisted.

"The scales act like agents of natural selection," said Antonio Pietro Garonna, professor of entomology at Naples Federico II university. He suspects that high temperatures, over 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit), can cause them to disperse.

"If, with climate change, temperatures rise in the summer, the scales will suffer a lot," he said.

But until then, "it's a massacre", laments Vincenzo Topa, an agronomist living in Posillipo, a coastal district of Naples.

SOURCE: AFP

IMPROVEMENTS

Wall Street at records as stocks gain on vaccine, stimulus optimism

INVESTORS pushed stock markets higher Friday with US equities ending at all-time highs as continued optimism over vaccines and signs of progress on new US stimulus offset worries about rising coronavirus cases.

All three major US stock indices finished at fresh records after European bourses also posted gains.

Oil prices also climbed to nine-month highs following the latest production agreement by petroleum exporters.

The rally on Wall Street came even following

government data showing the jobs recovery stalled, as US employers added just 245,000 new jobs in November.

And though the unemployment rate dipped to 6.7 percent from 6.9 percent, the lowest since the pandemic struck, that was due to Americans leaving the workforce.

Noting that new Covid-19 cases are “raging” in the US, FHN Financial’s Chris Low warned that “job growth will be sluggish for the next three or four months, minimum.”

The United States recorded more than

210,000 new cases in a 24-hour stretch to Thursday evening, and more than 2,900 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Still, Low said US approval of the first coronavirus vaccine could come as soon as next week.

And analysts said the weak jobs data provides further impetus for Congress to enact a new stimulus package, and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi have revived efforts to hash out a deal for more aid.

SOURCE: AFP



There are growing hopes US lawmakers will be able to reach a deal on a new stimulus and deliver a much-needed Christmas present. PHOTO: AFP

CENTRAL BANK

ECB to beef up stimulus as second virus wave bites



A sculpture depicting the Euro logo is pictured in front of the former headquarter of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany, on Feb. 7, 2018. PHOTO: DANIEL ROLAND | AFP

THE European Central Bank is set to unleash more stimulus for the eurozone at its last meeting of the year on Thursday, as the region’s battered economy grapples with a second coronavirus wave.

ECB chief Christine Lagarde in October all but promised that extra support was on the way, when she said the Frankfurt institution would “re-

calibrate” its instruments in December.

The ECB will also unveil fresh economic forecasts likely to have been revised downwards after a spike in virus cases forced renewed shutdowns across Europe, although the prospect of mass vaccinations from next year could brighten the longer term outlook.

Analysts widely ex-

pect the ECB’s governing council to add another 500 billion euros (\$600 billion) to its 1.35-trillion-euro pandemic emergency bond-buying programme (PEPP), and extend it beyond the current deadline of June 2021.

The purchases are aimed at keeping borrowing costs low to encourage spending and investment and bolster economic growth.

The ECB could also offer more ultra-cheap credit to banks for longer under a scheme known as TLTROs, whereby banks get loans at highly favourable interest rates in return for lending on to the wider economy.

The central bank is all but certain to keep interest rates at historic lows, but may increase its pre-pandemic asset purchases

from the current 20 billion euros a month.

At Thursday’s press conference, Lagarde is likely to reiterate pleas for governments to share the load through fiscal stimulus, as EU member states bicker over a 750-billion-euro recovery fund that has been blocked by Poland and Hungary.

The ECB will be “under pressure to do more while the European budgetary policy response is lagging behind,” said Pictet Wealth Management strategist Frederik Ducrozet.

Vaccine hopes

The ECB’s last round of projections in September forecast 3.1 percent quarter-on-quarter growth in the fourth quarter of 2020.

SOURCE: AFP

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Pandemic hits tiny Moldova’s hopes for wine tourism boom

THE vast underground cellars of Moldova’s Cricova winery used to echo with the sounds of hundreds of visitors. Now just a handful of guests wander past the huge barrels and endless rows of bottles holding its vintages. “We used to have 300 to 450 people a day but with the pandemic... there are days when there are literally 15 people,” winery tour guide Vita Viznyuk told AFP in the cellars, her face covered by a black mask.

Impoverished Moldova, a tiny country wedged between Romania and Ukraine, has struggled to build a solid economy since gaining independence with the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

One of the few bright

spots has been its long-established wine industry, well-known in eastern Europe with significant exports to Russia, Romania, Poland and other countries.

Vineyards have been trying for a decade to expand their business into tourism, offering wine tours and wine-themed resorts.

They were making some headway, but the pandemic has halted progress in its tracks.

In 2018 the country of only 3.5 million people welcomed 1.5 million foreign tourists -- and almost half of them came to Moldova specifically for wine tours, Kristina Frolov, the head of Moldova’s National Office of Vine and Wine, told AFP.

SOURCE: AFP

A SEVERE FUEL SHORTAGE

Venezuela: Top oil exporter in dire straits

VENEZUELA, once Latin America’s top oil exporter and a bete noire of the United States, is enduring a deep economic, political and migration crisis.

With a third of its 30 million people going hungry, embattled President

Nicolas Maduro still hopes to retake congress from the opposition in Sunday’s elections.

Maduro was propelled to power in 2013 following the death of the hugely popular leftist firebrand Hugo Chavez.

Strongly anti-America, Chavez -- first elected president in 1999 -- mixed a larger-than-life personality with a man-of-the-people style. His popularity was underpinned by oil-funded social programs.

Elected to a third

term in 2012, he died the following year of cancer.

His were big shoes to fill for Maduro, who quickly lost favor, notably when a 2014 fall in oil prices sparked a major economic crisis for the oil-dependent nation.—SOURCE: AFP

PESTICIDES DISTRIBUTER CHANGING

The manufacture of SHANDONG UNITED PESTICIDE INDUSTRY CO., LTD has registration the following products in Pesticide Registration Board of Myanmar to distribute in Myanmar. Now we have to change from old distributor name “SHWE SIKE KHINN CO., LTD”, to new distributor name “Myanmar Waifung Agriculture CO., LTD.” If any object or enquiry, please contact to Pesticide Registration Board, Plant Protection Division, Bayint Naung Road, West Gyogone, Insein Township, Yangon, from here to next 14 days.

| No | Trade Name | Active Ingredient Name | Registration Type | Registration Number |
|----|------------|--|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Chlazo | Azoxystrobin 60 g/L + Chlorothalonil 500g/L SC | Experimental | E2020-5050 |

Myanmar Waifung Agriculture Co., Ltd.
Ph no – 09777852960, 09261738699



Swe Taw Pagoda on the Lake Mountain



The most well-renowned Mansu Pagoda

By Thiha Lu Lin
(THIHA, THE TRAVELLER)
Photos: Sai Pan (Lashio),
Arkar Soe (AKAMI Creation)
(Translated by Ei Phyu Phyu Aung)

Mountain Town Lashio

I LOVE Lashio, the capital of northern Shan State. Since I attended the primary school in Hsenwi and high school in Lashio, it was like an environment where I grew up. I still remember that I had to plan an overnight trip to Lashio in a rush which I had not been able

to reach for various reasons although I wanted to go back several times. Please read in advance for the Lashio trip after the pandemic.

Mountain Town Lashio

During British rule, Lashio was considered a small mountain town. It was formerly part of the territory ruled by Hsenwi Saopha, and during the British government, a road connecting the Chinese border made the town booming. The site of the old city that was destroyed by bombs during World War II is now called Lashio Gyi, and Lashio is a new city.

Trip to Lashio

Lashio can be reached by train, flight, bus or car. It is not too far if we go by car, but we have to cross the Goktwin hill, and

it would unexpectedly take many hours to many days.

Because it is a significant trade route, there are trucks carrying tons of goods. Small passenger cars and high-speed buses are also moving daily.

As the Goktwin road is narrow, sometimes the trucks break down because of the ups and downs of the hill. In the event of a crash into a ravine or a car accident, the vehicles along the way can be stuck for many days or months. If you go by car, you can enjoy the beautiful view of the world-famous Goteik Railway from a distance. If you go by train, you will have to cross the Goteik Railway so that it can be a lot of fun. At that time, many tourists would pop their head out and take pictures from the train window.

Accommodation in Lashio

There are more good hotels in Lashio. As the number of hotels increases, so do the prices. The good hotels with a bit high cost in Lashio are Golden Hill Hotel, Golf Club Hotel and Mansu Hotel. The New Palace Hotel in front of Lashio College is cheaper. The room is a little cramped, though. Mizzima Guest House, near the Lashio Customs Office, is also good.

Visiting Lashio

It's nice to visit Lashio although residents say there is nothing to do in their town. The town is lovely to stay for visitors from other cities and villages. It is divided into four separate sections so that it can run as you wish.

As for pilgrimage,



Beautiful bypass road



Lashio City



Naga Yone Pagoda



Kone Nyaung Waterfall



Catholic Church in Quarter (12), Lashio Gyi

Mansu pagoda

It is the most famous in Lashio. It is said to have been worshipped by ancient kings.

Kabar Aye Pagoda

It is also known as Kyaw Hein Pagoda. It is located on a high hill in the centre of Lashio so that you can enjoy the view from above.

Yan Taing Aung Pagoda

It is a pagoda located at the entrance of the city.

Naga Yone Pagoda

It is a pagoda on the mountain where there are lakes that supply water to the city called Lake Mountain. The sculpture is magnificent.

Swe Taw Pagoda

It is another pagoda situated on Lake Mountain.

As for Shoppers, Lashio Myoma Market

It is the best market for shopping. It may be wrong to think that Chinese products sold here are cheap because they sell the right quality products, especially fashion clothes. As the quality is high, so is the price. Although there are affordable Chinese products, you

may not be satisfied if you compare the two products. There are also shops selling 5000 kyats for any item around the market.

Lashio Night Market

The night market is near the market, and I noticed a variety of food.

As for places to visit for photography and recreation Hot Spring

Although it is 3 miles from the city, I noticed that as the township boundary widened, the area around the hot springs became quite densely populated. We had to cross the airport to get to the hot spring.

The restaurant, which is open next to the hot spring, is suitable for eating pounded mutton and sticky rice. There are places where everyone bathes in the hot springs for free and private bathrooms.

There are separate places for male and female to take a bath in the hot spring. The bathing place for the male is a place that everyone can cross. It is like a stream so that you can relax in the hot spring. Riding a pedal boat in hot water is also unique. It is suitable for cold climates. On winter mornings, I enjoy taking pictures of the hot springs in the pool.

Six-tiered waterfall (Tami waterfall)

It is a small waterfall at the end of Man Ai village. It is advisable to go more in winter because there is not much water at that time.

Shan Khai Hindu Temple and Shan Khai Station

It is a beautiful temple next to Manson Waterfall. You will also like the Shan Khai station.

Nan Myaw Station

Before arriving at Shan Khai Station, there is the Royal Tower, which is a remnant of the colonial era. It was also a transit station for lead and silver ores from the Namtu mine before World War II.

Manson Waterfall/Lashio Creek

There is a small village called Naung Mon village on the road from Lashio to Mandalay. To the west, you can reach Manson Waterfall (Manson Fall).

Kone Nyaung Waterfall

Although it is dangerous to swim in the water, it is an excellent place to go for a photoshoot. It is one hour from Lashio.

Khashi Waterfall

Another 10 minute-drive from

Tangyan junction. It is said to be more beautiful when there is less water in winter.

Lake Mountain

There are beautiful streets with trees at the Lake Mountain, where lakes that supply water to Lashio situated. Many people come to relax. Some come for fishing; Some to drink beer; Some are seen enjoying a family meal on a mat.

Lashio Station

It is also good to take photos at the simple Lashio station.

Chinese Monastery

Not far from downtown Lashio, the Chinese monastery on the hill is also attractive. In the past, it was a place for people to come and ask their fortune.

Other places to visit

I have to run a lot to get there in two days. If you have more time in Lashio, you should also see Hsenwi and other remaining areas such as:

- Humon Dam
- Loi Sam Sit Mountain (Kutkai City)

You can also visit Hsipaw On the way back. As I love Lashio as my hometown, I will visit again.

May we all travel safely, healthily and happily.



Lashio Hot Spring.

Tun Tun Min, Yar Mhan battle to a draw in MLWC-5

VETERAN Lethwei fighter Tun Tun Min fought to a draw against youth fighter Yar Mhan in the 80-kilo bout of the Myanmar Lethwei World Championship 5 which was held behind the closed door in Yangon yesterday.

As Tun Tun Min is a defending champion of the MLWC, Yar Mhan hesitated to launch an open attack at first.

In the first and second rounds, Yar Mhan tried to stop the veteran Lethwei fighter Tun Tun Min with his high heels, but to no avail.

In the fourth and fifth rounds, Tun Tun Min stabbed Yar Mhan, who was playing defensively in a back-to-back style, with his left elbow, right fist, straight fist, and high kick.

The young fighter Yar Mhan endured till the end of the fight



The referee raised the hands of Tun Tun Min (left) and Yar Mhan (right) to declare the draw result of the primary fight of the Myanmar Lethwei World Championship yesterday. **PHOTO: KO TIN SOE**

to grab the draw result against veteran player Tun Tun Min.

As the fight ended with a draw, Yar Mhan could not take the

championship belt from the defending champion Tun Tun Min.

In other traditional boxing bouts, in the 67-kilo event, Dhana

Aung (White Blood Club) defeated Saw Ayine (Thatti Club) in the third round.

In the 63- kilo fight, Golden

Belt Champion Byat Gha (White Tiger) fought to a draw against Saw Htein Lin (Dol Yoe Yar).

In another 63-kilo bout, Saw Shwe Lay fought to a draw against Aphoe The (New White Blood).

In the 62-kilometre Lethwei event, Kyar The vs Thar Din (Pho Yar Za) fight ended to a draw.

Next, in the 61-kilo event, Ka Naung The vs Paying Thet Aung (Kanyaw Thwee) fight also ended to a draw. With the supervision of the Myanmar Martial Arts Group (MMAG), all the fights were launched following the COVID-19 rules and regulations, and the Championship was broadcasted live yesterday on Skynet Sports-4 and Skynet Sports-HD Channels.—Bala Soe

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Lin)

Trust the process, says Lampard as Chelsea take Premier League top spot



Flying high: Kurt Zouma (left) scored the winner as Chelsea went top of the Premier League. **PHOTO: MATTHEW CHILDS POOL/AFP**

LONDON — Frank Lampard believes there is even more to come from Chelsea after the Blues moved top of the Premier League with a 3-1 win over Leeds on the night 2,000 fans returned to Stamford Bridge.

Lampard's men had to bounce back after Patrick Bamford's early opener against his former club.

But the home fans in attendance after the coronavirus-enforced absence got a glimpse of why the new-look Chelsea are now title contenders as goals from Olivier Giroud, Kurt Zouma and Christian Pulisic extended their unbeaten run to 16 games.

Victory takes Lampard's

men -- reinforced by a £220 million (\$296 million) spending spree -- a point clear of Tottenham and Liverpool, who are in action on Sunday at home to Arsenal and Wolves respectively.

"We are a (team in) progression," said Lampard. "When you bring in new players and have young players, people moving to a new country, different city, different teammates, it takes time. I think there is more uplift in us.

"Whether it is this season we can get to real heights we want, we don't know. It's a long season. Consistency is our next challenge but we're moving in the right direction."—AFP ■

Holder's France to learn path to Qatar in World Cup qualifying draw

PARIS — European nations led by reigning champions France will tomorrow learn their opponents in qualifying as they begin the long and congested road towards the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

The draw for the qualifying stage will take place in a virtual ceremony at Fifa's headquarters in Zurich, allowing France and leading lights like Kylian Mbappe to start tracing out their route to a successful defence of the trophy in Doha.

Two years since their triumph in Moscow, the French look the strongest side around, and recently qualified for the finals of the Nations League that take place next October.

"We mustn't start believing we are better than we are but we do have the feeling that we can still do some great things," France coach Didier Deschamps said this week as he looked ahead to a packed 2021. Qatar and Fifa recently celebrated marking two years to go until the start of the

controversial tournament, which will start on November 21, 2022 and conclude with the final on December 18 after being moved to the northern hemisphere winter.

Playing with the dates of football's biggest events has become commonplace due to the coronavirus pandemic, and qualifying is scheduled to start with three rounds of matches next March, before the delayed Euro 2020 tournament goes

ahead in June and July.

France will be joined in the first pot of seeds for tomorrow's draw by the world's top-ranked side Belgium, reigning European champions Portugal and Croatia, the team they defeated in the 2018 final in Moscow.

England, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands will also be top seeds, with only the winners of each of the 10 groups qualifying automatically for the finals.—AFP ■



Two years since their triumph in Moscow, France looks like the strongest side around. **PHOTO: AFP**

Unbeaten Spence returns from horrific crash to dominate Garcia

WASHINGTON — Errol Spence overpowered challenger Danny Garcia in his first fight since surviving a near-fatal rollover car accident to re-

tain his World Boxing Council and International Boxing Federation welterweight titles on Saturday.

The 30-year-old Spence

put on a virtuoso performance winning almost every round in a 147-pound homecoming fight at AT&T Stadium in Dallas, Texas.—AFP ■