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Myanmar citizens brought back home from ROK by relief flights



Myanmar returnees queue for immigration clearance at the Yangon International Airport on 17 December 2020. PHOTO: MNA

MYANMAR Embassy in Seoul organized a relief flight of MAI in bringing back 94 citizens whose contracts under the Employment Permit System have expired in the Republic of Korea.

They arrived at Yangon International Airport yesterday evening.

Moreover, another MAI re-

lief flight of the Myanmar Embassy in Seoul and the Myanmar Seafarers' Employment Services Federation flew from Incheon International Airport with 139 Myanmar seamen, and it also landed in Yangon in the same evening.

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, the

Ministry of Health and Sports and the Yangon Region government arranged the 7-day quarantine at specific places or designated hotels, followed by the 7-day home quarantine.

To bring back the Myanmar citizens who are stranded in foreign countries by relief flights and chartered flights in accord-

ance with the instructions from National-Level Central Committee on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs cooperated with the relevant ministries, Myanmar embassies from respective countries and shipping companies.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

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1,182 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 17 December, total figure rises to 113,082

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 113,082 after 1,182 new cases were reported on 17 December according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these 113,082 confirmed cases, 2,377 died, 91,537 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Updated at 8 pm, 17 December 2020

Total Cases

113,082

New Cases

1,182

Total Death Tally

2,377

Discharged from Hospital

91,537

Daily death toll until 8 pm 17-12-2020

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Ministry of Health and Sports

"People are the key"

MoBA holds meeting on development projects in border areas



Union Minister Lt-Gen Ye Aung chairs the meeting on implementation of border area development projects on 17 December 2020. PHOTO: MNA

UNION Minister for Border Affairs Lt-Gen Ye Aung presided over a coordination meeting yesterday on implementation of border area development projects by the tender winning companies for the 2020-2021 financial year.

The meeting was participated by the project supervising officers from regions and states via videoconferencing.

The Union Minister explained that business contracts were signed with tender winning companies in the third week of October after inviting tenders in the second week of that month in line with the rules issued by the Office of President.

The tender winning companies have completed 25 to 30 per cent of their works in the projects.

The projects were prioritized in line with the directives of the government, its guarantees and pledges at the Hluttaw, reports of region/state governments, demands of local people and fundamental development projects for the

respective areas based on budget allocation.

The Union Minister added that the ministry also selected the project in line with its four polices, seven goals, plans, three pillars of Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan and five objectives.

He also discussed the implementation of the projects in line with the 7 goals and 10 strategies of COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan, narrowing development gaps between regions and states, and socio-economic development of ethnic people.

The Director-General from the Department of Development for Border Areas and National Races reported on the progress in the implementation of projects.

The Ministry of Border Affairs is implementing 548 projects in 2020-2021 financial year for border area development with K65.258 billion budget.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Load test conducted at Kyunpyathat bridge in Ayeyawady region

THE construction of Kyunpyathat Bridge (Tha-yoot-myike) near milepost 22/4 on the Bogale-Mawlamyinekyun-Kyonemangae-Wakema-Myaungmya Road in Wakema Township of Ayeyawady Region has been completed, and the officials conducted the bridge load testing on the morning of 16 December.

The team led by Director U Zaw Linn Mya for Quality Control of the Department of Bridge under the Ministry of Construction conducted Static Load Test with 20 tonnes eight 10-wheel trucks and the result showed Fit for Service for the bridge.

The bridge is 750 metres in length, 9.5 metres in width and has a one-metre long pedestrian walkway on each side. The bridge is a steel box girder with the floor of reinforced concrete and can withstand up to 60 tonnes of weight. The middle bored piles of the bridge are 1.5 metres and 1.2 metres in diameters and the clearance is 40 ft and waterway under the facility is 240 ft. The local people will be able to travel across the bridge very soon, according to Bridge Group (2).—Hlwan Thiha (IPRD)

(Translated by Khine Thazin Han)

Load testing of the Kyunpyathat Bridge (Tha-yoot-myike) is conducted on 16 December 2020.



COVID-19 Call Centre opens daily

In efforts to speed up the prevention, containment and treatment of the COVID-19 disease, the call centre (phone number 2019) is established by four communications operators and the Blue Ocean Company with the coordination of the Medical Research Department of the Health and Sports Ministry and Post and Telecommunications Department from 9 am to 5 pm daily at the Medical Research Department in Yangon.

Over 43 staff from the Medical Research Department and 17 volunteers from the Myanmar Medical Association totally 60 workers have been working at the centre since 8th April.—MNA

Build a Union with a diversity of strength

The word Union is such a beautiful word. It is imbued with grace. It is very important for all of us to value, love and cherish this word. A Union means something which has been established collectively. A country which has been established collectively, a great country which has been established collectively is not the same as those countries which have not been established collectively. We will be able to establish a Union only after transforming our diversity and differences into strength.

(Extract from a Message of Greetings delivered by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on 15 January 2020 at the ceremony to celebrate Kayah State Day)



Myanmar Folk Dance - U Shwe Yoe and Daw Moe. PHOTO: ZAW MG MG OO (SANDAKU)

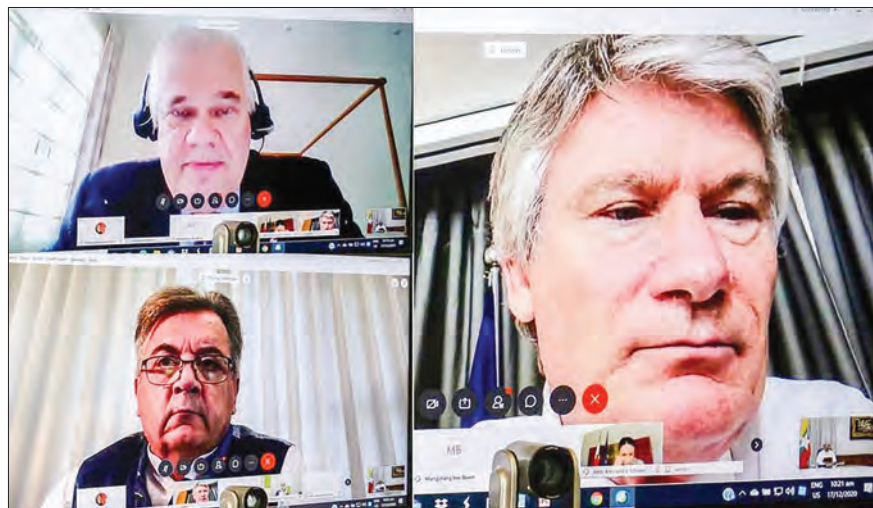
Myanmar hosts Roundtable Discussion on RCEP with European Partners

U THAUNG TUN, Union Minister for Investment and Foreign Economic Relations virtually met yesterday with heads of mission from EU member states headed by Mr Ranieri Sabatucci, Ambassador of the European Union to Myanmar. They exchanged views on the recently signed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and implications for Myanmar-Europe relations.

Describing the RCEP as an “unprecedented mega-regional trading arrangement comprised of a diverse mix of developed, developing, and least-developed economies throughout the region”, the Minister provided an in-depth briefing on the RCEP to those on the call. In doing so, the Minister outlined several of the benefits expected to flow to Myanmar as a result of signing the RCEP and stated that the Agreement has laid a foundation for deeper cooperation among member countries going forward.

The Minister also noted how newly harmonized Rules of Origin would help European businesses present in Myanmar and the region by allowing companies to ship their products across the region more efficiently while avoiding different Rule of Origin criteria at each step in the manufacturing process in each country crossed.

While highlighting how the RCEP is expected to hasten the shift in global economic activity



Union Minister U Thaung Tun holds virtual meeting with the heads of mission from EU member states led by Mr Ranieri Sabatucci, Ambassador of the European Union to Myanmar, on 17 December 2020. PHOTO: MNA



toward Asia already underway, the Minister also noted that it would be important for the region to continue to welcome Europe’s voice.

“...it is important that the region continues to welcome Europe’s voice. And I believe the region welcomes this voice – and is in agreement that both

Europe and RCEP members stand to benefit when regional cooperation remains open and rules-based.”

In light of Myanmar’s recent commitments to reduce the country’s carbon emissions, both the Minister and Ambassador Sabatucci were in firm agreement regarding new opportunities for

growth made possible via the new European Green Deal, with views exchanged on emerging opportunities for more transparent, responsible investment in wind, hydro, and solar energy projects amongst others.

Ambassador Sabatucci restated the EU’s willingness to deepen partnerships in areas in-

cluding good governance, human resources development, environmental conservation, and climate change mitigation in addition to continued support for expanding trade and investment ties.

The Minister went on to answer questions fielded by Mr Christian Lechervy, Ambassador of France to Myanmar, Mr Thomas Neisinger, Ambassador of Germany to Myanmar, Ms Alessandra Schiavo, the Ambassador of Italy to Myanmar, Ms Beatriz Lorenzo, the Chargé d’Affairs, Embassy of Spain, and Ms Frida Zoric, the Minister Counsellor, Embassy of Sweden.

The Minister closed the event expressing an eagerness to continuing to engage with the European Union “...as a development partner, as a source of responsible investment, and as a committed friend.”—MNA

“...it is important that the region continues to welcome Europe’s voice. And I believe the region welcomes this voice - and is in agreement that both Europe and RCEP members stand to benefit when regional cooperation remains open and rules-based.”

Just because you want to celebrate this time, I don't want your future to be affected in a bad way

With regard to public awareness campaigns about health, I think the people know already that we have been saying again and again; please wear masks all the time. Please wash your hands thoroughly in accordance with the guidelines of the Ministry of Health and Sports. Also, please stay 6-ft apart from each other. Please don't go outside unnecessarily. Especially at this time, please don't go outside. At this time when New Year is approaching, and Christmas is approaching, don't say to yourself "I'm going to have a nice party" and have yourself a celebration. Just because you want to celebrate this time, I don't want your future to be affected in a bad way. A loss for the people is a loss for the country. Therefore, at this time, I want you all to be extremely vigilant. Try to control yourselves.

(Excerpt from State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's report on COVID-19 containment measures, on 8 December 2020)



Land administration central committee holds 31st coordination meeting

THE Central Committee on Administration of Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands organized its 31st coordination meeting yesterday morning.

Union Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Dr Aung Thu, in his capacity as the Chairman of the committee discussed forest plantations, implementation of regional development projects in the places which cannot be recognized as reserved forest, the use of vacant, fallow and virgin lands, applications for land use certificate Form-7 and

land revenue.

Director-General for Agricultural Land Management and Statistics U Thet Naing Oo briefed the facts related to the vacant, fallow and virgin lands management and the attendees coordinated the discussion.

The meeting was also attended by Deputy Minister U Hla Kyaw, the Permanent Secretary U Kyaw Min Oo and other committee members of relevant departments. —MNA

(Translated by Khine Thazin Han)



Union Minister Dr Aung Thu participates in the 31st meeting of Central Committee on Administration of Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands on 17 December. PHOTO: MNA

NSSA launches 10th batch of Assessor Methodology Online Training



Union Minister U Thein Swe speaks at the 10th batch of Assessor Methodology Online Training via videoconferencing on 17 December 2020. PHOTO: MNA

THE National Skill Standards Authority began the 10th batch of Assessor Methodology Online Training yesterday morning.

Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe, in his capacity as Chairperson of Central Body for Employment and Skill Development, delivered a speech at the opening ceremony of the training via videoconferencing.

Mining and Engineering

Occupational Skill Standards Committee, Agricultural Occupational Skill Standards Committee and Business and Service Skill Standards Committee selected the trainees for the Assessor Methodology Online Training (10th Batch), said the Union Minister.

Assessor Methodology Training was launched online in accordance with New Normal situations. Since May 2020, the

training has been provided for 23 jobs.

The NSSA has been in operation for seven years, according to the Union Minister, who expressed thanks to all the stakeholders for their cooperation and for making the NSSA successful to some extent.

The Union Minister said that the NSSA aims to develop skills for a large workforce in Myanmar in order for the work-

ers to get decent jobs.

He said that the NSSA is making efforts to promote mutual recognition of skills within ASEAN nations, and it is also cooperating with Thailand's Ministry of Labour.

At present, there are more than 22 million workers in Myanmar, but the NSSA could award national-level occupational skill certificates to only 16,519 skilled workers for 30 occupations, said

the Union Minister.

In the 2020-2021 financial year, 3,000 workers were expected to receive skill assessments, but the target was not reached because of the limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. So, assessment methods that are compatible with New Normal situations will be used.

The Union Minister pointed out that it is necessary to provide high-quality training for workers to acquire 21st-century skills in a timely manner.

The opening ceremony of the online training was participated by 71 people including officials from NSSA, 13 committees on occupational skill standards, the Skill Assessment and Accreditation Committee, the Federation of Myanmar Engineering Societies and GIZ, and trainees.—MNA

(Translated by Maung Maung Swe)

MoC discusses progress in establishment of Myanmar-China Economic Cooperation Zone

MINISTRY of Commerce held the 6th coordination meeting on the establishment of Myanmar-China Border Economic Cooperation Zone yesterday morning in Nay Pyi Taw through videoconferencing.

Union Minister for Commerce Dr Than Myint, in his capacity as the chairman of the central committee on implementing the project, said the bilateral coordination meetings were held by working groups comprised with officials from relevant departments.

He urged to coordinate with the relevant departments to get the permission to use the area for the economic zone in accordance with the rules in implementing the processes, including the signing of the Framework Agreement on the Cooperation Zone.

The meeting also discussed the progress of the field study to determine the location and area for the zone.—MNA

(Translated by Ei Phyu Phyu Aung)



Union Minister Dr Than Myint speaks at the meeting on establishment of Myanmar-China Border Economic Cooperation Zone via videoconferencing on 17 December 2020. PHOTO: MNA

MoEA discusses drafting strategy for ethnic rights

THE Ministry of Ethnic Affairs convened the third coordination online meeting on drafting a strategy for the rights of Myanmar nationals yesterday.

At the opening ceremony of the meeting, Union Minister Nai Thet Lwin explained the works of ministry for the rights of national people, including development projects in ethnic areas, conducting environmental impact analysis, socio-economic development programmes, excursion tours to promote friendly relationship among national people, the publication of child story-books in ethnic languages and appointment of teaching assistant and language teachers.

The ministry is also organizing festivals of ethnic affairs and traditions in coordination with public and private sectors and drafting rules for the protection of ethnic rights.



Union Minister Nai Thet Lwin participates in the meeting on drafting a strategy for Myanmar ethnic rights via videoconferencing on 17 December 2020. PHOTO: MNA

The strategy for rights of Myanmar nationals will be based on fundamental ethnic affairs and surveys conducted in 2018-2019 financial year.

The Union Minister added the strategy should meet the policy and objectives of the government that is working for the establishment of

a Democratic Federal Union, national reconciliation and eternal peace.

Equal citizen rights for all national people, their consti-

tutional rights, provisions to protect their rights and ensuring consistency to the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan will be enshrined in the strategy.

Director-General U Min Aye Ko from the Department of Ethnic Rights reported on the yearly implementation for the drafting the strategy; Director Naw Ei Ei Min from the Point-Promotion of Indigenous and Nature Together presented cooperation of their organization in drafting the strategy; Deputy Director Daw Thinzar Naing explained the six titles in the third draft of the strategy.

The online coordination meeting was continued, and it was participated by 145 representatives of ethnic races from regions and states.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

5th Asia Pacific Summit of Mayors organized virtually

THE 5th Asia Pacific Summit of Mayors organized by the Asia Pacific Cities Alliance for Tobacco Control and NCDs Prevention (APCAT) was hosted by Nepal online yesterday.

Nay Pyi Taw Council Chairman Mayor Dr Myo Aung participated in the virtual meeting from his office in Nay Pyi Taw.

Speaking at the meeting, the mayor discussed matters related to the implementation in Nay Pyi Taw to be smoke-free, smoking behaviours among adults and youths, health risks

of smoking, and the needs of smoking control activities.

He said that the city has formed a task force on the control of smoking and tobacco use in 2019-2020, and made a public announcement on the rules for smoking and tobacco products control.

Coordination meetings with township-level officials were organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Sports. Meetings with cigarette and tobacco producers were also held, and awareness posters about

the health effects of smoking and tobacco use were set up citywide, he added.

He said the city would speed up the works on control of cigarette smoking and tobacco use and prevention of communicable diseases in the years to come.

Officials from the World Health Organization, ministers and mayors from the Asia-Pacific nations, and invited guests joined the meeting online.—MNA *(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)*



Nay Pyi Taw Mayor Dr Myo Aung joins the 5th Asia Pacific Summit of Mayors on 17 December 2020. PHOTO: MNA

MoC to construct 10,000 units of public rental housing under CERP

THE Ministry of Construction, in cooperation with Yangon Region government, Mandalay Region government, Nay Pyi Taw Council and private businesspersons, will implement a 10,000-unit public rental housing project under COVID-19 Economics Relief Plan.

The Public Rental Housing Construction Steering Committee held an online meeting on the project yesterday.

The Committee's Chairman Union Minister for Construction U Han Zaw, Secretary Deputy Minister Dr Kyaw Lin, Permanent Secretary U Shwe Lay, Department of Urban and Housing Development Director-General U Min Htein and officials, Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry's Deputy Minister U Sett Aung, Nay Pyi Taw Council member U Tin Tun, Yangon Region Electricity, Industry, Road and Communications Minister Daw Nilar Kyaw, Mandalay



Union Minister U Han Zaw joins the meeting on the implementation of a 10,000-unit of public rental housing under CERP via videoconferencing on 17 December 2020. **PHOTO: MNA**

Region Electricity, Energy and Construction Minister U Zarni Aung, and chairpersons of three businesspersons associations participated in the meeting.

Speaking at the meeting, the Union Minister said that Public Rental Housing Construction Steering Committee had been

formed to implement the works on construction budget, signing contracts, pre-engineering works, and structure designs in the short term.

The purpose of the 12-month project is to provide job opportunities and accommodations for the public under the CERP.

Three private associations will bear the costs of the project, which will be then paid from the excess budget (2019-2020FY) of the Ministry of Construction. The ministry was allowed to use the excess budget K130 billion of 2019-2020FY for the project.

Secretary of the Committee

and Deputy Minister for Construction Dr Kyaw Lin briefed about the construction project.

Deputy Minister for Planning, Finance and Industry U Sett Aung discussed the matters relating to contract rules for the project and payment of the funds in time.

Yangon Region minister Daw Nilar Kyaw, Mandalay Region minister U Zarni Aung, Nay Pyi Taw Council member U Tin Tun, Chairman of the Myanmar Construction Entrepreneurs Association U Shein Win, Myanmar Licenced Contractors Association Chairman U Kyaw Win and Myanmar Urban and Infrastructure Development Entrepreneurs Association Chairman U Weik made discussion about the project.

The meeting was concluded after the remarks of Deputy Minister Dr Kyaw Lin.—MNA

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

Conservation needed for rare Great Hornbills (Aung Laung birds) in Bago Yoma

A group of more than 40 rare Great Hornbills (Aung Laung birds) used to fly to a giant banyan tree for their favourite food beside the Minhla-Sein Kantlant motorway near Bago Yoma in Kyauktaga Township of Bago Region.

However, due to the killing of some bird hunters in Myo Chaung and residents in Bago Yoma, just around 20 birds of this species are now seen in the bayan tree.

The Great Hornbill, scientifically known as *Buceros bicornis*, is one of the 10 hornbill species endemic to Myanmar. The Great Hornbills can also be found in India, Myanmar, Thailand, Indochina, Malaysia and the Sumatra Peninsula and they are one of the top endangered species in the world.

In Myanmar, hornbills were commonly found in Rakhine State, Taninthayi Region, Bago Yoma, Shan State, Kayah State and Kachin State, but they are now extremely rare and poaching is also banned by law.

The hornbills are valued by Chin people and regarded as the state bird for Chin State as well as for Kerala and Arunachal states in India. They only live in forests above 4,000 feet and are the long-lived species. They eat various kinds of fruits, mainly fig and banyan

fruits as well as insects, snakes and different kinds of lizards.

Before eating, the food is thrown in the air and caught back, and the hornbills make noises during eating. The male and female hornbills live together forever, and the female are bigger than the male. They fly in pairs, in group of more than 40 or 50 birds, in the monsoons and scream loudly when the enemy invades them. During the breeding season, they return to the breeding area where the nest is usually built on the top of the tallest tree. Before mating, the male bird feeds the female and put the

food into the nest. The female bird stays in the nest during the hatching period. Around 40 days after that, the newborn birds and the female bird make a hole in the nest and asked for food by making noises. Then the male bird feeds them from the small hole. When the male bird was killed while searching for foods, the female hornbills and her young starve to death together. The hornbills can live around 50 years, even if they are raised at home.

According to Notification No 691/2020 of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conserva-



Two Great Hornbills sit on a tree branch in Bago Yoma. **PHOTO: LYNN TUNN**



People watch birds with telescopes beside the Minhla-Sein Kantlant motorway near Bago Yoma in Kyauktaga Township of Bago Region. **PHOTO: LYNN TUNN**

tion, the Wreathed Hornbill, Great Hornbill, Northern Brown Hornbill, Southern Brown Hornbill, Bushycrested Hornbill, Oriental Pied Hornbill, Helmeted Hornbill, White-crowned Hornbill and Rufous-necked Hornbill are regarded as endangered species under the Section 22 of Conservation of Biodiversity and Protected Areas Law. Therefore, the educating programmes should be conducted not to hunt these endangered species and every citizen living any parts of Myanmar should participate in the reproduction process of such endangered species and creating of a safe environment for them.—Pyo Ko Lin (Translated by Ei Phyu Phyu Aung)

Second shipment of Myanmar avocado to England planned in Jan 2021

TWO avocado varieties originated in Myanmar will be delivered to England again in January 2021, Myanmar Avocado Producers and Exporters Association stated.

“Myanmar avocado is sent to the neighbouring countries China and Thailand through the land border. Additionally, they have been shipped to England on a trial basis and reaped fruitful results. That’s why we will deliver the second batch to England again,” said Vice-Chair U Myo Nyunt of the Myanmar Avocado Producers and Exporters Association. “We will export at least one tonne of avocado produced along Chin Hills and southern Shan State. The avocado production from PyinOoLwin has not met the export volume for now. As it is local varieties, it will bring about benefits to the growers when we grasp market share in foreign countries. We are also trying to boost export,” he added.

The growers will earn a good reputation from local products and increase their interests. Beyond England, Germany and Italy also



A man is plucking avocados at a plantation. PHOTO: MIN HTET AUNG

proposed to buy Myanmar avocado. Local production still cannot meet the export demand until now. The market will grow undoubtedly.

Furthermore, the association is making efforts to have the global Good Agricultural Practice certificate to explore more external markets.

A half tonne of Myanmar av-

ocado has been sent to England on a trial basis, and given good feedback, according to the press statement issued by the Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in London on 14 November. Myanmar yearly exports 5,000-10,000 tonnes of local avocado varieties to Thailand and China through the land border. Those

varieties fetch between K800 and K1,000 per kilogramme. However, there is no guarantee, and the price is relatively low. Therefore, official trade pacts with China and Thailand are required for Myanmar avocado exports, said U Lin Thant Aung, secretary of Myanmar Fruit, Flower and Vegetable Producers and Exporters

Association. Meanwhile, around 3,000 tonnes are yearly sold in the domestic market. The demand is high when there is an increase in tourist arrivals.

The avocado is primarily grown in Chin Hills, Shan highland, Naung Cho and PyinOoLwin areas, covering around 25,000 acres. There are a thousand of Myanmar avocado varieties, and the avocado of foreign origins are also found in the country.

Myanmar avocado is abundant in October and the harvest season extends up to April. Myanmar prioritizes the fruit quality that meets international market standards for market potentials. Efforts are being undertaken to export Myanmar avocado to more foreign markets.

Myanmar Avocado Producers and Exporters Association was established in 2018, with 800 members. — Min Htet Aung (Mandalay Sub-Printing House)/GNLM

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Myanmar corn acreage to be expanded upon strong export market

By Nyein Nyein

THE growth in demand and the strong export market will lead to the expansion of corn acreage, according to the Myanmar Corn Industrial Association (MCIA).

“Myanmar has vast vacant, fallow and virgin land. Nevertheless, the growers do not take the risk without steady market demand, MCIA Chairman U Min Khaing said.

“It is easy for corn acreage expansion on the back of strong demand; however, there is no guarantee in Myanmar’s corn market. As there is no market responsibility, we need to solidify the market first. If the neighbouring country China will legally buy them under stipulated conditions regarding warehouse, quality and processing, Myanmar will firmly hold an export market. The government to government (G to G) pact will affirm the growers to expand the corn acreage. Our growers also need to hold Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) and farming-related certificates to ensure food safety and comply with import regulations and standard of the buyers. We need to wait for only four months per season, he suggested.

The authorities concerned of Myanmar and China are exerting

concerted efforts to have legal trade channel for corn.

“Food safety plays a pivotal role in import/export businesses. China market accepts HACCP and Good Agricultural Practices, which monitors the production chain and determines control points. The governments of the two countries have already agreed that. What matters most is a weak point in post-harvest technology. If the government, investors and our association work together on it, that problem will be sorted out in the next few years,” he elaborated.

At present, there is no legitimate trade route with China through the land border. The deal is on mutual trade, and there is no guarantee, he pointed out.

“This is usual in cross border trade. It depends only on the demand of importer countries. China tightens security and bans imported goods when they do not have market requirements. The traders often suffer from this. Only legal trade path can offer a guarantee. The trading is now weak with illegitimate goods,” the MCIA chair shared his opinion.

The government needs to support the corn industry to create strong market, choose pedigree corn seeds for cultivation, produce fertilizer locally, share

know-how to the growers with agriculturists, get government’s loan access for the growers to enhance production and boost exports, and attract the investors for post-harvest handling, Myanmar Corn Industrial Association requested.

At present, Myanmar’s corn export is heavily relying on border trade. The country mainly sends the corn to the neighbouring countries China, Laos and Thailand. It is also shipped to Singapore, Malaysia and Viet Nam through sea trade. The corn fetched US\$230-240 per tonne.

The corn is cultivated in Shan, Kachin, Kayah and Kayin states and Mandalay, Sagaing and Magway regions. Myanmar has three corn seasons- winter, summer and monsoon. The country yearly produces 2.5-3 million tonnes of corns.

Myanmar exported 2.2 million tonnes of corns to the foreign market in the past financial year 2019-2020, with an estimated value of \$360 million, the Ministry of Commerce’s data showed.

In the current FY, Myanmar set corn export target of 1.6 million tonnes as the local consumption grew higher than the previous years, the association stated.

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Pandemic-induced demand drives rubber price up

THE growing demand for rubber products in the global market caused the price to increase up to K900 per pound in the domestic market, market data indicated.

The growing demand of rubber gloves during the coronavirus pandemic, shortage of natural rubber, the appreciation of US dollar against Kyat are the reasons of price rise, said U Khaing Myint, secretary of Myanmar Rubber Planters and Producers Association (MRPPA).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused rubber price to drastically plunge to K350-500 per pound in early May, incurring financial hardships to the growers.

At present, the price reached the record high of K900 per pound during the pandemic on the back of strong demand by Thailand, said exporters.

Myanmar has exported about 200,000 tonnes of rubber worth around US\$240 million in the last FY2019-2020. The export volume is possible to reach below 200,000 tonnes amid the COVID-19 impacts, MRPPA guessed.

Rubber is primarily produced in Mon and Kayin states and Taninthayi, Bago, and Yangon regions in Myanmar. There are over 1.6 million acres of rubber plantations in Myanmar,

with Mon State accounting for about 500,000 acres, followed by Kayin State (270,000 acres). About 300,000 tonnes of rubber is produced annually across the country. Seventy per cent of rubber made in Myanmar goes to China. It is also shipped to Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Viet Nam, Korea, India, Japan, and other countries, according to the MRPPA.

At present, Myanmar is exporting only raw rubber sheets owing to lack of machinery and technology. Export rubber varieties include synthetic rubber, ribbed smoked sheet RSS 1, 3, 5, Myanmar Standard Rubber MSR-20, Technically Specified Rubber TSR-20, and Crepe Rubber.

About 150,000 tonnes of rubber worth \$186 million was exported in the FY2017-2018. Myanmar shipped over 200,000 tonnes of rubber, with an estimated value of \$250 million, to external markets in the FY2018-2019, an increase of 50,000 tonnes which helped boost earnings by over \$60 million compared to the year-ago period, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce. — Ko Htet

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Take carrot-and-stick approach to prevent illegal excavations

With a strong black market demand for antiquities, an increase in a surprising kind of crime: illicit excavation of artifacts in search of ancient Pyu beads are happening mostly in central Myanmar.

A case happened in October in Minbu Township in which about 300 villagers illegally digging up an ancient burial site in Minbu Township in search of Pyu-ear beads attacked the police with catapults before managing to escape from the scene.

Since then, the illegal excavation and trafficking of ancient artifacts have been in the spotlight. It also reflects the major challenges in protecting our cultural heritage and antiquities, limited resources to protect them, black market demand for antiquities, and impacts from climate change that is threatening the livelihood of farmers in rural areas.

Due to the economic crisis, people with no prior criminal record are looting antiquities.

While some farmers found antiques during their farming work are handing over these antiques to authorities and receiving cash awards, many other artifacts are slipping beyond our country's borders and into private collections.

While some farmers found antiques during their farming work are handing over these antiques to authorities and receiving cash awards, many other artifacts are slipping beyond our country's borders and into private collections.

This situation has sounded an alarm bell that we need to enforce the rule of law and encourage the livelihood of farmers through creation of jobs.

We should accelerate our efforts to enforce and make public these laws to take potential measures to protect our historical and cultural artifacts from degradation and trafficking.

The Protection and Conservation of Antiquities Law states that anyone who attempts to bring or transport "antiquities" overseas without permission, or who destroys or collects them for business purposes, could face a five to ten years prison sentence, as well as fines.

Under current laws protecting Myanmar antiquities, artifacts more than 100 years old are protected and cannot be sold or transferred without permission from relevant governmental departments.

Under "the Protection and Preservation of Antique Objects Law" an antique object is defined as an object which has been used by human beings including fossils over one hundred years old located above or under the ground or above or under the water.

Since 1970s, our country has ratified the UNESCO's convention against the illicit trafficking of cultural objects which encourages governments to catalogue and track antiquities and cultural artifacts.

We are confident that a carrot-and-stick approach with measures to protect our antiquities, including enforcing laws, and raising public awareness about cultural artifacts, punishment and giving awards are the best way to preserve our cultural heritage.

THE people have spoken. Voices have been heard. It was a landslide. Astounding to all. Elections were held throughout the world. Many divisions were noticed. Polarities were there. Some nations divided. Reasons many.

For us, we have shown the world that we can be united. Our goals are common. We all yearn for a destiny that will keep us together, live together, grow together, prosper together, shape our lives, raise our identity and standards, make our lives fulfilled and be proud of the nation that we called our home.

Myanmar stands majestically between two great nations, possesses the biggest land mass in mainland South East Asia. Located strategically. Linkages and network of roads within the region up to the Pacific Ocean makes us unique. Besides being a member of various economic blocs and endowed with abundant natural resources added to its luster alongside the human capital can be the region's future darling.

Paradigms around the globe has changed dramatically. Some due to COVID 19, others because of local politics — mainly nationalism, protectionism among many others. Resulting in disharmony, mistrust, divisions leading to civil disobediences.

Myanmar, on the flip side,

have passed through such episodes in the yester years and have learnt a lesson. We are experiencing a new dawn, never been so dramatic in the past. The end of our beginning. Now the burden lies on the winning party. The peoples' expectations are so high. The new government has to deliver with our participation.

The greatest challenge

The greatest challenge is to contain and control the spread of COVID 19. Like other nations on earth, the pandemic has devastated lives and livelihood of millions of people and may take at least a year to tackle the problem. Like many other nation, one major hurdle is the transportation and delivery of the vaccines to areas that lack proper storage facilities. Road to recovery can be long and arduous.

Our life-changer will be the economic recovery. Many countries are facing recession and some are technically experiencing so. Employment is the major challenge for all countries around the globe.

Almost all sectors have to be revived and governments have formulated short term, medium term and long term measures to overcome them.

Among our advantages are our agricultural, fisheries and livestock products. We should use all

our resources and even artificial intelligence means to upgrade at all level and to penetrate new markets while maintaining the old. Improve the quality, yield, packaging and create the seller's markets. The government should also lend a hand in negotiating alongside the private sector by formulating fair, free, level trading mechanism with overseas governments.

Improvement of transportation mechanism locally and minimizing the intermediaries can lower the transaction cost and alleviate poverty. Rails, riverine routes should be more considered than by roads thus making things relatively more cheaper. Like neighbouring countries, each and every town in every state and division has their own produce that can be marketed locally in Myanmar and be exported. New products must be identified and new markets ventured. Import substitution is a must and made in Myanmar brands have to be energetically created at all levels on a sustainable basis. Downstream value added manufacturing with overseas partners should be created for the agricultural, fisheries and livestock products as we usually experience surpluses during the years.

The game-changer for us is peace and national reconciliation. Without them, investment, pros-

perity will be just a dream and will still be remote. Never in this universe, a country prosper while there is incessant fighting, lack of unity and its people craving for harmony between warring factions.

Its complications can be dreadful. Sandwiched between many super powers and geopolitical situation can harness us into proxy wars that can be detrimental to our well being and endangering our objectives. Peace and prosperity is a must for our country and deeply desired by all.

For the latter, regional connectivity and global supply chain is crucial. Both economically and politically. We should be proactive on the world stage and consolidating friends on the basis of impartiality, non alignment, alongside with maintaining patency of our supply chain. COVID has taught the world a lesson. But we have to be mindful and be prepared not to be overwhelmed by the regional industrialized countries or be intimidated by them.

Growth and development

Growth and development can aggregate impact on the climate due to carbon footprints. We have to be fully aware of its side effects and prevent the devastation that might befall upon us. Myanmar is one of the countries prone to

United we stand.....

Dr Maung Maung Lay Vice-President, UMFCCI

such disasters and has to be surely prevented. Many measures have to be taken like reforestation for the generations to come. A collective approach is necessary in the first place.

Education for the future generation have been stalled by COVID 19 and the loss of time, missed opportunities, interruptions of studies of all sorts, complacent, lack of interest are so detrimental to the tender minds of kids and to some students. They should be allowed to think and be creative. The remedy lies on the parents, teachers and the policy makers. A careful, prudent tread is necessary to rebuild a system disrupted by the virus saga and the mismanagement of the past.

Either the "new normal" or the "new abnormal", whatever you name it, countries have stated to reskill their work force. Though sounds dramatic, the world is on its way of doing so. Some current skills are losing relevance. Depending on the industry, some may become redundant. We have to be prepared for the eventuality. As we cannot control the wind, we might as well adjust our sails. More technical, vocational, skills enhancement trainings should be

conducted around the whole country in order to attract investments in all the states and divisions. But we have to bear in mind that opportunities are always accompanied by difficulties.

Labour issues

Labour issues are endangering the attractiveness of investments. They have to be tackled lawfully so also is the maintaining of law and order. Incessant complaints regarding holidays have poured in and it is one of the factors discouraging FDIs in Myanmar. More skilled work force is needed and to disseminate their rights and responsibilities are the acute matters the stake holders have to act upon.

Come! Let us ALL be united, work three times harder, to show the world our wisdom, they will all envy. We can be the role model for each and everyone on this planet earth. Why are they developing missiles when they cannot even eliminate set aside eradicate a microbe named COVID 19? For Myanmar, united we stand, the best is yet to come.

GLOBAL EQUITABLE ACCESS TO COVID-19 VACCINES

Vaccines for all, an 'acid test' in COVID-19 battle

EQUITABLE distribution of COVID-19 vaccines will represent an "acid test" for the international community, the President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) told journalists on Wednesday, highlighting the importance of global cooperation and solidarity in beating back the disease.

Speaking during a virtual press briefing, ECOSOC President Munir Akram also outlined objectives for the coming year, including plans for a facility to support infrastructure investment in developing countries, and forums to examine issues critical to recovery and achieving sustainable development.

Mr Akram, who is Pakistan's Ambassador to the UN, stressed that COVID-19 vaccines must be

viewed as "a global public good" and thus accessible to everyone, everywhere.

He highlighted the groundbreaking international collaboration working to achieve this goal, known as the COVAX Facility, but stated it ultimately was a question of political will whether the entire global population will receive vaccines.

"It is up to governments to be able to decide that they will allocate a portion of the vaccine production for other countries: for developing countries, for the vulnerable in developing countries," he said, responding to a journalist's question.

"This will be an acid test, and certainly we as developing countries, as international actors here at the United Nations, we must

press for this equity."

Emergency response and structural change

ECOSOC is one of the UN's six main organs and promotes peace through international economic cooperation.

Mr Akram detailed how the pandemic is having deep impacts globally, but especially in the world's poorest countries, meaning the international community must fight both the virus and its consequences. He said this calls for an emergency response to mobilize financing for poorer nations, and to support the COVAX Facility and the Secretary-General's Global Humanitarian Response Plan, both of which are facing significant funding shortfalls. But he also emphasized the need for broader

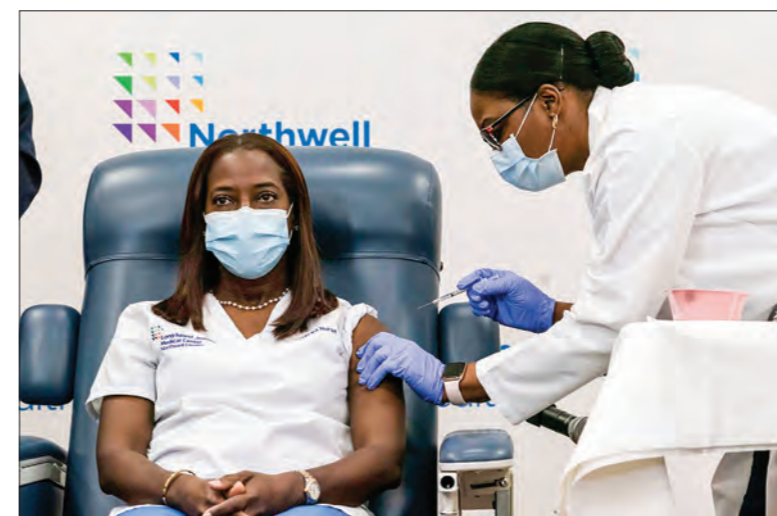
structural change to address inequality globally.

Invest in sustainable infrastructure

"Another important aspect of structural change is the need for investment in sustainable infrastructure", said Mr Akram.

"If we are to build back better, as the Secretary-General has said, and to build a new green economy which prevents and avoids the climate disaster that is facing us, we need to invest in sustainable infrastructure and to move away from the fossil fuel economy."

The ECOSOC President has proposed the creation of a public-private partnership to accelerate investment in sustainable infrastructure in developing countries. Consultations are currently



Sandra Lindsay(L), a nurse at Long Island Jewish Medical Centre, became the first person in the US to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

PHOTO: MARK LENNIHAN POOL/AFP

underway.

The facility would also utilize the UN's Resident Coordinator system: a vast network of agencies working on development issues in more than 130 nations worldwide.

"They are excellent instruments to be able to identify the possible infrastructure projects,

to help the developing countries build the capacity to formulate good pre-feasibility and feasibility studies for those projects, and the facility would be designed to find the right partners for those projects in the investment world", he said.

SOURCE: UN News



Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Thursday 17th December, 2020)

BAY INFERENCE: Weather is generally fair over the North Bay and partly cloudy to cloudy over the Andaman Sea and elsewhere over the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL NOON OF THE 18th December, 2020: Light rain or thundershowers are likely to be isolated in Yangon, Taninthayi Regions and Kayin, Mon States. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Upper Sagaing, Bago, Ayeyawady Regions and Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, Kayah States and generally fair in the remaining Regions and States.

STATE OF THE SEA: Seas will be slight to moderate in Myanmar waters. Wave height will be about (4-7) feet off and along Myanmar Coasts.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of decrease of night temperatures in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin, Chin States.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 18th December, 2020: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 18th December, 2020: Partly cloudy.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 18th December, 2020: Fair weather.



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Over 76,000 acres of oats grown in seven districts of Sagaing

MORE than 76,000 acres of oats have been grown in seven districts of Sagaing Region, said U Win Hlaing Oo, the head of the Sagaing Region Department of Agriculture.

The oats are cultivated on 7,138 acres of land in Monywa and Chaung-U townships in Monywa district, 38,607 acres in Myaung, Myinmu and Sagaing townships in Sagaing district, 26,470 acres in Wetlet, Khin-U and Dabayin township in Shwebo district, 3,825 acres in Yinmabin, Pale, Salin Gyi and Kanin township in Yinmabin district, 21 acres in Kale town-

Picture shows an oats field in Sagaing Region. **PHOTO: WIN OO**

ship in Kale district, one acre in Khampat sub-township in Tamu district and five acres in Homa-

lin township in Khamti district, according to the official figures of Sagaing Region Department of Agriculture.

The department targeted to cultivate a total of 114,300 acres of oats in 2020-2021 financial year, including 16,124 acres in Monywa district, 50,352 acres in Sagaing district, 15,533 acres in Yinmabin district, 29,420 acres in Shwebo district, 2,783 acres in Kale district, 20 acres in Tamu district and 68 acres in Khamti district, according to Sagaing Region Department of Agriculture. —Win Oo (Zay-yardine)

(Translated by Hay Mar)

MNA to launch its first non-landing sightseeing flight tours on 20 December

By Nyein Nyein

MYANMAR National Airlines (MNA) will launch non-landing sightseeing flight tours for the first time in Myanmar on 20 December, said U Naung Naung Han, chairman of Myanmar Tourism Entrepreneurs Association.

MNA will launch ATR-72 for the non-landing sightseeing flights of Yangon-Kyaikhtiyo-Hpa-an-Yangon with low-flying. The passengers on board can pay homage to the Kyaikhtiyo pagoda and see the scenic beauty of Hpa-an Town.

"The non-landing sightseeing flights will depart from Yangon and land in Yangon. This trip is not a regular trip. The flights will be launched only to see the sight by low-flying. We have planned to fly to Kyaikhtiyo, Kayin State and Thanlwin River. First, we will show the passengers around Kyaikhtiyo. Then, we will go round Hpa-an town, Kayin state. We will go around

Zwekapin Mountain and show the natural scenes of the Hpa-an town. After all, we will see the sight of the Thanlwin River and be back to Yangon," he further said. The passengers on board the plane of non-landing sightseeing flight tours need to have COVID-19 detected by their individual plan. They are allowed to board the aircraft if they can produce the negative result of their test. The passengers are not needed to be quarantined because the flight will depart from Yangon and land in Yangon.

Depending upon the response of the passengers of the first trip, there will be extended itineraries, according to Myanmar Tourism Entrepreneurs Association.

"If we have market demand and good response to the market, we will launch more tours. Now, this is a trial trip. Earlier, we have never launched this kind of tour. That is the very first time in Myanmar," he added.

At present, the tourism

industry has halted for nine months because of the pandemic. And, some of the airlines are terminated. At this time, we couldn't expect international tourists. During this period, it is necessary to be able to operate the domestic tours and conduct the tourism industry well, he added.

"We are trying to resume the domestic tours with the permission of the government. However, if these domestic tours can be handled systematically and in a disciplined manner and if we can also control the spreading of the disease, the tourism industry will be slightly promoted by resuming the tours systematically. With the achievement of this programme, we will be able to attract international tourists again. What is most important is that we need to show them that our country is safe for them, said U Naung Naung Han.

Myanmar Tourism Entrepreneurs Association will launch not only non-landing sightseeing flight tours but also the sight-

seeing cruise tours in the river, and inland tours and voyage for the development of the tourism industry.

As an initial attempt, the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism permitted to launch those non-landing sightseeing flights, the sightseeing cruise tours in the river, and inland tours and voyage in accordance with the standards and rules of the Ministry of Health and Sports and the Ministry of Transport and Communications.

The Ministry of Hotels and Tourism is conducting adventure sports tourism, food tourism, cultural tourism, nature-based tourism, agriculture-based tourism, river and train cruises, land and sea tourism and MICE tourism for the development of Myanmar's tourism industry.

The tourism industry in Myanmar has been suspended since March 2020 when Myanmar has discovered positive cases of COVID-19.

(Translated by Hay Mar)

MNA to resume flights to Ann

MYANMAR National Airline will resume its domestic flights, suspended during COVID-19 period to Ann township, Rakhine State starting from 21 December, said U Kyaw Htay, the head of MNA office in Ann Township.

MNA will resume its flights operating one day a week, and the Ann flight schedule will be amended in the coming months, he added. "The passengers who wish to board the plane need to bring a copy of air ticket, pass-

port and NRC card. They also need to have COVID-19 test conducted one day ahead at Dhamma Yakhita pagoda land, No.3 Market Ward from 1 pm to 4 pm. The COVID-19 results will be known within 15 minutes. The test of COVID-19 will cost a person K10,000," said Dr Aung Kyaw Moe from Ann Township.

MNA will operate its domestic flights to Ann Township every Monday. The schedule of Yangon-Ann-Sittway trip is

Ann Airport in Rakhine State. **WIN EI MON (IPRD)**

likely to change in the coming months, it is learnt. —Win Ei Mon (IPRD)

(Translated by Hay Mar)

TOKYO

Hospitals overwhelmed as virus cases hit new record

Tokyo's hospitals are struggling to provide routine care because of a sharp spike in coronavirus cases, officials warned Thursday as new infections in the Japanese capital hit another record high.

The city, which is preparing to host the virus-postponed Olympics next summer, raised its alert level for pressure on medical services to the top of a four-tier Covid-19 warning system for the first time.

"We need to have a sense of crisis more than ever... the virus does not have a calendar. It can strike at any time," Governor Yuriko Koike said.

Japan has so far avoided imposing strict lockdown measures and has seen a smaller out-



Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike meets the press in Tokyo on Aug. 6, 2020, asking citizens to refrain as much as possible from leaving the capital during the coming Bon summer holiday season amid the coronavirus pandemic. PHOTO: KYODO/FILE

break than many other countries, with only around 187,000 infections and 2,700 deaths recorded overall.

SOURCE: AFP

But with cases on the rise, this week Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga urged citizens to reconsider holiday travel, and suspended a controversial domestic tourism campaign.

Tokyo logged 822 new cases on Thursday -- breaking its record for the second day running and marking a jump from around 600 per day in recent weeks.

Koike warned that the city could soon see 1,000 new cases a day if infections continue at the current pace.

"Let's overcome this severe condition at any cost," she said, calling on residents to continue avoiding non-essential outings.

FRENCH-AUSTRIAN BIOTECH FIRM

Valneva launches trials of Covid-19 vaccine in UK

French-Austrian biotech firm Valneva said Wednesday it will begin clinical trials of its Covid-19 vaccine candidate in Britain, where the government has already ordered at least 60 million doses.

The specialist vaccine developer said the phase 1 and 2 trials, involving around 150 healthy adults, would focus on the drug's safety and ability to stimulate an immune response at three different doses.

Supported by Britain's National Institute of Health, the tests will take place at several sites around the UK.

Valneva hopes to determine the optimal dose of the vaccine



Britain said in July that it had ordered 60 million doses of Valneva's potential vaccine. PHOTO: JEAN-FRANCOIS MONIER AFP/FILE

in the second quarter of next year, putting it on track for approval by the autumn -- several months later than its previous mid-2021 ambition.

As well as a firm order for 60 million doses, Britain has options to buy a further 130 million between 2022 and 2025 in a deal worth up to 1.4 billion euros (\$1.7

billion, £1.2 billion).

Valneva's vaccine contains a deactivated form of the virus that can prompt an immune response from the body but cannot harm health, the same technique used in its existing inoculation against Japanese encephalitis.

Based in Nantes in western France, Valneva employs around 500 people worldwide and already has two vaccines on the market, for Japanese encephalitis and cholera.

It has a further vaccine against Lyme disease in phase 2 trials and a fourth, for the chikungunya virus, in phase 3.

SOURCE: AFP

NEXT PHASE OF TESTING

Vietnam starts human trial of coronavirus vaccine

A Vietnamese pharmaceutical company began testing a coronavirus vaccine on volunteers in Hanoi on Thursday, as developing countries jostle with richer nations to access affordable inoculations.

Nanogen's Nanocovax is one of four under development in Vietnam, and a company representative said it is expected to cost around \$5 a dose.

Three volunteers received the jab on Thursday and will be monitored for 72 hours at the Vietnam Military Medical Uni-

versity.

Nguyen Ngo Quang from the health ministry said 60 participants will receive the vaccine in the first phase of the trial.

University director Do Quyet said medical personnel were well prepared in case any participants developed problematic side-effects.

"All of us think that Covid is our enemy, so we are preparing for a battle... We have to prepare very carefully and we have to win (this battle)," he told reporters, describing the work on the

clinical trial.

Vietnam has won plaudits worldwide for its handling of the pandemic -- with just over 1,400 cases and 35 deaths in a country of around 96 million people.

There are concerns that at least a fifth of the world's population may not have access to a Covid-19 vaccine until 2022, according to a study published Wednesday.

Wealthy nations -- accounting for just 14 per cent of the global population -- have pre-ordered just over half of

the vaccine doses expected to be produced by the 13 leading developers next year, researchers from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found.

Researchers said that Canada had ordered the equivalent of four doses per person, the United States has reserved just enough for one vaccine course per person, while countries such as Indonesia have reserved less than one vaccine course for every two people.

SOURCE: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEFS

EU Covid-19 vaccinations to start December 27

THE EU is to start Covid-19 inoculations on December 27, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Thursday.

"It's Europe's moment. On 27, 28 and 29 December vaccination will start across the EU," she tweeted.

Her spokesman Eric Mamer told journalists the rollout was conditional on the European Medicines Agency authorizing the use of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine when it meets on Monday. Britain and the United States are already inoculating people with that vaccine under emergency national authorisations.

The EU is carrying out a coordinated vaccination programme across its 27 member states to ensure fair access to doses. The European Commission has sealed contracts with seven suppliers of potential vaccines to ensure all adult EU citizens will eventually be able to be inoculated.

Member states will decide who gets priority for the injections, but the elderly and healthcare workers treating Covid-19 patients will be at the front of the queues.

SOURCE: AFP

UK inflation slides on virus restrictions: data

Britain's annual inflation rate slid more sharply than expected in November as restrictions imposed on virus-hit businesses triggered price discounting, especially for clothing and food, official data showed Wednesday.

The rate, as measured by the UK's Consumer Prices Index, dropped to 0.3 per cent last month from 0.7 per cent in October, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement. Analysts' consensus forecast had been for a dip in inflation to 0.6 per cent.

"With significant restrictions in place across the UK, inflation slowed, predominantly due to clothing and food prices," noted ONS statistician Jonathan Athow.

"Also, after several months of buoyant growth, second-hand car prices fell back a little," he added.

SOURCE: AFP

NO PORT CALLS

Cruise lines test waters in pandemic with “cruises to nowhere”

MONTHS after the coronavirus outbreak aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship berthed in Japan cast a dark shadow on the cruise industry, some cruise lines have recently launched roundtrip cruises with no port calls dubbed “cruises to nowhere” in Singapore. But the undertakings are buffeted by the virus raging around the world and a COVID-19 scare that forced one of these cruises to turn back last week, underscoring the risks and challenges of trying to revitalize an industry badly hit during the pandemic.

The Quantum of the Seas, a cruise ship operated by U.S.-based Royal Caribbean International, sailed from Singapore on Dec. 7 on a four-day voyage carrying 1,680 passengers and 1,148 crew. But on Day 3, it returned to the city-state after a passenger tested positive for the virus on



A surf simulator on the Quantum of the Seas, a Royal Caribbean cruise ship, is shown during a media tour at the Marina Bay Cruise Centre Singapore in Singapore on Dec. 3, 2020. **PHOTO: KYODO**

board the ship. But subsequent tests by Singapore’s National Centre for Infectious Diseases found the passenger to be negative for the virus. Royal Caribbean and Genting Cruise Lines are two cruise lines that were recently permitted by the Singapore government to operate cruises

to nowhere in international waters off Singapore under a pilot program aimed to revitalize the cruise industry. Before the pandemic, the cruise industry in Asia had been experiencing double-digit growth. Singapore has long had ambitions to become a hub of the cruise industry in Southeast Asia,

a potential Caribbean of the East with its many islands, rich cultures and a climate that allows for year-round cruising. Last year, 414 cruise ships called at Singapore’s ports with a passenger throughput of about 1.8 million, up from 1.1 million in 2009.

SOURCE: Kyodo

ANDHRA PRADESH

Experts see pesticide residue as reason behind India’s mystery illness

EXPERTS probing into the mysterious disease that broke out in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh have found pesticide residue as the reason behind it, officials said Thursday.

The experts brought in from All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi and other top research institutes to ascertain the reasons for the mystery illness in the Eluru city of West Godavari district have found traces of nickel

in the milk samples collected from the area.

Last week a person was killed and over 600 people in the city were taken ill because of the disease. Patients admitted in the hospital because of the mystery illness complained of nausea, seizures and fainting. Preliminary investigations carried out by pathologists last week have found traces of lead and nickel in the blood samples of the patients.

A medical official said scientists

during the testing of milk samples collected from the area found the presence of nickel in them.

“Presence of nickel in the milk samples is simply alarming,” said Dr A V R Mohan, medical superintendent of the district hospital Eluru. “The reason behind the presence of heavy metal like nickel in milk samples is yet to be known but there is a possibility it may have come from some pesticides.”

SOURCE: Xinhua

Notice for Change of Distributor

We, **Zhejiang Tide Cropscience Co., Ltd** would like to change the Distributor of the following products, which registered under Pesticide Registration Board, Myanmar, From **MYANMAR GOLDEN BYTER CO., LTD** to **SEINN LAETHWIN CO., LTD**. If any objection or enquiry, please contact to Co-secretary Pesticide Registration Board, Plant Protection Division, Department of Agriculture, West Gyogone, Insein Township, Yangon From here to next (2) weeks.

No.	The Old Distributor	Trade Name	Active Ingredient	Registration Type	Registration no.	The New Distributor
1	Myanmar Golden Byter Co.,Ltd	Bupro – Top 25 WP	Buprofezin 25%	Provisional	P2020– 4868	SEINN LAE THWIN Co., Ltd
2	Myanmar Golden Byter Co.,Ltd	Tide Superior	Difenoconazole 12.5% Azoxystrobin 20%	Provisional	P2019 – 4753	SEINN LAE THWIN Co., Ltd
3	Myanmar Golden Byter Co., Ltd	Tide – Delta 2.5 EC	Deltamethrin 2.5%	Provisional	P2020 – 4867	SEINN LAE THWIN Co., Ltd

Address: SEINN LAE THWIN CO., LTD, Corner Of Merchant Street & 38th Street, No.(525), First Floor, Ward No.(6), Kyauktada T/S, Yangon
Tel : 09-452090708

ON THE AUCTION BLOCK

Imploding Trump’s casino

ATLANTIC City will auction off the right to press the button to implode a former Trump casino, all in the name of a good cause.

The Trump Plaza, closed since 2014, was US President Donald Trump’s first property in the US coastal gambling town in which he came to own several properties.

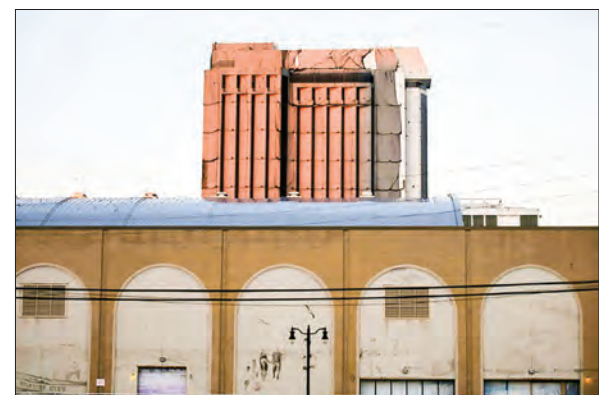
The former casino, which opened in 1984, has undergone little to no maintenance since shuttering, and on several occasions during storms, pieces of its exterior have fallen onto the seaside promenade that runs alongside the building.

Since 2016, the two-building complex has belonged to billionaire investor Carl Icahn, who was one of Trump’s main Atlantic City financiers.

In mid-June, Atlantic City Mayor Marty Small announced the building’s demolition, after taking legal action over what he considered to be a danger to residents.

On Wednesday the mayor announced that the right to press the button triggering the building’s January 29 implosion will be auctioned to benefit the youth organization Boys & Girls Club of Atlantic City.

SOURCE: AFP



The right to press the button to trigger the implosion of Trump Plaza, pictured in September 2020, will be auctioned off to benefit the youth organization Boys & Girls Club of Atlantic City. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

CYCLONE YASA

Super cyclone hits Fiji bringing floods, landslides

SUPER cyclone Yasa slammed into Fiji’s second-largest island Thursday, tearing roofs off buildings as it triggered flash floods and landslides in the Pacific island nation.

After days of dire warnings about widespread destruction, Fiji’s Met service said the top-of-the-scale Category Five storm made landfall on Vanua Levu late Thursday packing winds gusts of up to 345 kilometres an hour (210 miles an hour).

It said the cyclone, one of the most powerful ever recorded in the South Pacific, would be accompanied by monster waves exceeding 10 metres (33 feet). Yasa, which is expected to move out to sea early Friday, landed in the sparsely populated

Bau province.

There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties but social media posts showed flooded villages and corrugated sheeting blown off homes.

But Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama earlier warned the storm was so big that its impact was likely to be felt across the entire country. He feared destruction from Yasa would be worse than a cyclone four years ago that killed dozens.

“Over 850,000 Fijians are in the direct path of the cyclone — more than 95 per cent of our population,” he said. “Everywhere in Fiji, we can expect the rains will get worse, the winds will become more destructive.

SOURCE: AFP



Consumer spending and construction drove growth after a period of enforced hibernation during lockdown. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

RECORD ECONOMIC GROWTH

New Zealand's virus-induced recession ends with record growth

NEW ZEALAND roared back from a coronavirus-induced recession with record economic growth of 14.0 per cent in the July-September quarter, official data showed Thursday.

The strong figures followed an 11.0-per cent decline in the previous quarter -- when New Zealand was in a Covid-19 lockdown.

Finance Minister Grant Robertson said the recovery was a pay-off for New Zealand's success in containing the virus, with only 25 deaths among a population of five million.

"The economic bounce back is a result of our decision to go hard and early during the Covid-19 pandemic," he said.

"We supported more than 1.8 million workers through the Wage Subsidy Scheme and invested billions of dollars into infrastructure, training and creating jobs." Consumer spending and construction drove growth after a period of enforced hibernation during lockdown.

SOURCE: AFP

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19

BOJ begins policy meeting, extension of virus response in focus

THE Bank of Japan began a two-day policy-setting meeting on Thursday with a possible extension of its program to help corporate funding amid the coronavirus pandemic seen on the agenda.

With a resurgence of novel coronavirus cases in Japan raising uncertainty over the economic outlook, the central bank is widely expected to maintain its ultraloose monetary policy. The Japanese economy has rebounded from its worst slump earlier this spring when the country was hit by its first wave of infections.

The BOJ has deployed temporary measures to address the pandemic. They include the provision of funding to banks that extend zero-interest loans to struggling companies and buying commercial paper and corporate bonds from lenders to ensure ample liquidity in the banking system. BOJ Deputy Governor Masayoshi Amamiya said in early December that the central bank would extend the duration of the program beyond the current deadline of the end of March "if judged necessary."

SOURCE: Kyodo

Myanmar Upton Holdings Co., Ltd
(Under Creditors' Voluntary Winding-up)
[Notice under Section 370 of the Myanmar Companies Law]

Notice is hereby given that the Final General Meeting and Creditors' Meeting of the above Company under Section 370 of the Myanmar Companies Law will be held at Room No. 180, 8th Floor, Taw Win Myanmar Condominium, Botahtaung Pagoda Road, Pazundaung Township, Yangon Region, Myanmar on 29th January, 2021 at 2:00 p.m for the purpose of laying Liquidator's Statements of Accounts of the final winding-up and giving any explanation thereof.

Daw Thauung Mya Wai, Liquidator
LL.B, DA, DCA, ACCA, CPA
Room No. 2D, Rose Condominium, No. 182/194,
1st Floor, Botahtaung Pagoda Road, Pazundaung Township,
Yangon Region, Myanmar

Ministry of Transport and Communications Department of Marine Administration Invitation for open tender

1. The vessel "Viet Tin Lucky" registered in Vietnam (IMO No. 9147916, LOA-109.09 m, Breadth - 18.2 m, Depth-8.5 m, GT-4573, Type of Ship - Oil/Chemical Tanker) was abandoned by its crew within Myanmar waters dated 17th January 2020. Therefore, in accordance with the Myanmar Merchant Shipping Act, section 273, the Ministry of Transport and Communications has formed the Receiver of Wreck that has undertaken the said vessel into its custody at Old Explosive Anchorage (OEA) in Yangon River and given Notice to the owners of Viet Tin Lucky for taking delivery with full responsibilities through the Vietnam Embassy and its flag State.

2. On 7th May 2020, the Receiver of Wreck has also given further Notice to the owners of the said vessel in accordance with the Myanmar Merchant Shipping Act, section 277, to take over with their full responsibilities not later than 16:30 hours on 11th May 2020. The wreck is yet unclaimed and the shipowners have failed to take their responsibilities, the Receiver of Wreck will sell the wreck by open tender for the purpose of demolition of the wreck in Myanmar.

3. The Open Tender forms and Tender Terms & Conditions will be available for interested Myanmar citizen bidders as follows: -

- A) Available date for tender forms and tender terms & conditions - 18-12-2020 to 18.01.2021 (during office hours)
- B) Place of obtaining/submitted tender - Department of Marine Administration (Head Office), No-363/421, Corner of Merchant & Theinbyu Road, Botahtaung Township, Yangon, Myanmar
- C) Date and time of closing tender - 19-01-2021 12:00hr (Myanmar Standard Time)
- D) Date and time of opening tender for demolition procedure - 19-01-2021 13:00 hr
- E) Date and time of announcement for successful applicants of demolition procedure - 22-01-2021 12:00 hr
- F) Date and time of opening tender - 22-01-2021 14:00 hr
- G) Date and time of announcement for successful bidder - 26-01-2021 12:00 hr

4. Application for tender submitted after closing date and time will not be taken into consideration.

5. Interested bidders may acquire further information from the Department of Marine Administration (Head Office) Yangon, Phone - 01-9010039, 01-397643 during office hours.

Tender Acceptance and Scrutiny Committee

Ministry of Electricity and Energy Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation Invitation for Bids (International Competitive Bidding)

1. The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has received a loan (MY-P10) from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The Bid is invited by Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation (YESC) as follows;

Sr. No	Invitation for Bid	Descriptions	Issuing Date	Pre-bid Meeting	Submission Deadline Date and Time	Non-refundable Document Fee
1	IFB No: YESC/JICA/MY-P10(ICB/01)/001	Component I : Design, execution and completion of Installation of 66 kV GIS Substations and 66kV related distribution lines on Turnkey Basic	17 Dec 2020	24 Dec 2020 (14:00) Myanmar Local Time at the following address	15 Feb 2021 (14:00) Myanmar Local Time	Purchase upon payment of a non-refundable fee of Myanmar Kyats 50,0000 in cash

2. Interested eligible Bidders may obtain further information from the website (<http://www.moe.gov.mm>) or the documents from the Material Planning Department, Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation, Ministry of Electricity and Energy, at No. 197/199, Lower Kyeemyindaing Road, Ahlone Township, Yangon, Myanmar.

3. Bid Documents must be delivered to the address above mentioned on or before the deadline date and time.

4. Bid must be accompanied by a Bid Security of the amount equivalent of JPY 40,000,000 (Japanese Yen Forty Million only).

YESC's Tender Committee

Ministry of Electricity and Energy Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation Invitation for Bids (International Competitive Bidding)

1. The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has received a loan (MY-P10) from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The Bid is invited by Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation (YESC) as follows;

Sr. No	Invitation for Bid	Descriptions	Issuing Date	Submission Deadline Date and Time	Non-refundable Document Fee
1	YESC/JICA/MY-P10 (ICB/02)/004_Lot1	Component IV: Procurement of Utility Vehicles	17 Dec 2020	1 Feb 2021 (14:00) Myanmar Local Time	Purchase upon payment of a non-refundable fee of Myanmar Kyats 50,0000 in cash

2. Interested eligible Bidders may obtain further information from the website (<http://www.moe.gov.mm>) or the documents from the Material Planning Department, Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation, Ministry of Electricity and Energy, at No. 197/199, Lower Kyeemyindaing Road, Ahlone Township, Yangon, Myanmar.

3. Bid Documents must be delivered to the address above mentioned on or before the deadline date and time.

4. Bid must be accompanied by a Bid Security of the amount equivalent of JPY 4,000,000 (Japanese Yen Four Million only).

YESC's Tender Committee

NEWS
IN BRIEF

EU LEGISLATION

EU moves closer to protecting citizens from online defamation

THE European Commission on Tuesday (local time) released legislation giving regulators powers to force the U.S. tech giants such as Amazon (AMZN), Apple (AAPL), Google (GOOGL), and Facebook (FB) to “change their business practices”.

According to a report by CNN, very large social media companies and e-commerce sites face new obligations to removing illegal and harmful content from their platforms under the draft EU legislation called the Digital Services Act.

The second proposal -- Digital Markets Act -- will demand the “gatekeepers” follow a list of do’s and don’ts to prevent unfair competition.

SOURCE: AFP

A NEW AIR CARGO ROUTE

New direct air freight route links northeast China, ROK

NORTHEAST China’s Liaoning Province on Wednesday launched a new air cargo route linking the city of Dalian with Seoul, capital of the Republic of Korea (ROK). A charter cargo aircraft carrying 15 tonnes of mail and commodities including clothes and daily necessities departed from Dalian at 11:30 am Beijing Time on Wednesday and arrived in Seoul at 12:40 pm on the same day. The route is operated by China Postal Airlines and is the company’s first direct air mail connection between Liaoning and the ROK. Two flights from Dalian to Seoul will be operated weekly, every Wednesday and Friday morning. The inbound flights will return in the afternoon of the same day. The route will greatly enhance the efficiency of postage between the two cities and further promote economic, trade and cultural cooperation between Liaoning and the ROK.

SOURCE: AFP

THE BERBER DISH

UNESCO lists couscous as intangible world heritage



Algerian chef Rabah Ourrad puts the finishing touches as he prepares a dish of couscous at a kitchen in the capital Algiers on December 13, 2020. PHOTO: AFP/RYAD KRAMDI

COUSCOUS, the Berber dish beloved across northern Africa’s Maghreb region and beyond, Wednesday joined the UN list of

the world’s intangible cultural heritage.

The countries that submitted the listing to UNESCO —

Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania — may have their differences, but their common love of the grain staple runs deep.

“Couscous, present at every social or cultural event, is at once ordinary and special,” their joint presentation argued.

“Ordinary because of the frequency of its use in a family setting, and special because of the unifying and propitiatory role it plays at convivial community occasions at which food is shared.”

Bland by itself, couscous is served with meat or fish, spicy stews, chickpeas and vegetables in a mouth-watering variety of dishes.

Moroccan restaurant owner Hicham Hazzoum was among

the couscous connoisseurs who applauded UNESCO’s honour.

“I think we are the only Arab countries to have a high regard for this dish,” he said. “It is impossible not to eat it every Friday.”

“Moroccans are crazy about couscous and even children love it. It shows that the couscous flame will never go out.”

Across the region, couscous — also known as Seksu, Kusksi and Kseksu — is as elementary as rice or noodles are to Asian cuisine, the staple without which no meal is complete.

Arabic dictionaries have documented “Kuskusi” since the 19th century, though it is known to be far older.

SOURCE: AFP

PATHOGENS

Virus hunters delve into Gabon forest in search for next threat

THE scene looks like something out of a science fiction movie, or maybe some dystopian TV series.

Six men in yellow biohazard suits clamber in suffocating heat towards a cave in the heart of the Gabonese jungle.

Their quest: to unlock new knowledge on how pathogens like coronavirus leap the species barrier to humans.

In the cave is their goal — a colony of bats.

“Our job is to look for pathogens which could endanger humans and understand how transmission happens between species,” explained Gael Maganga, a professor at the University of Franceville.

Bats can be hosts to viruses

that do not harm them but can be dangerous to Homo sapiens, often crossing via other animals.

Covid-19 is just the latest microbe believed to have taken the zoonotic path from animals to humans.

It notably follows three other respiratory viruses, MERS in 2012, SARS in 2003 and H5N1 flu in 1997; the haemorrhagic virus Ebola in 1976; and AIDS, which is believed to have crossed over from chimps about a century ago, possibly through hunters who handled infected meat.

Bat cave

Getting to the cave is hard work. The team have to almost wade through thick soil, pieces of bark and russet-coloured leaves



Researchers with Franceville interdisciplinary Medical Research Centre (CIRMF, Centre Interdisciplinaire Medical de Recherches de Franceville) collect samples from a bat on Nov. 25, 2020 inside a cave in the Zadié region in Gabon. PHOTO: AFP/STEEVE JORDAN

that exhale the musky perfume of the forest. The environment here — hot and humid and filled

with natural hazards — is tough for humans, but perfect for viruses. SOURCE: AFP

LUNAR SAMPLES

Chinese craft returns to Earth with Moon rocks

AN unmanned Chinese spacecraft carrying rocks and soil from the Moon returned safely to Earth early Thursday, completing another chapter in China’s effort to become a space superpower.

The mission was the first in four decades to collect lunar samples, emulating the feats of the United States and the Soviet Union from the 1960s and 1970s — and going a few steps further.

Scientists hope the samples will give insights into the Moon’s origins and volcanic activity, though a more immediate focus was on how the mission showcased China’s technological



A model of the Chang’e-5 lunar probe is displayed during a press conference in Beijing on December 17, 2020, after an unmanned Chinese spacecraft carrying rocks and soil from the Moon returned safely to Earth. PHOTO: NOEL CELIS / AFP

advances. “China has been preparing for this for a long time,”

Jonathan McDowell, a Harvard-Smithsonian Centre for As-

trophysics researcher, told AFP.

“This was very important to them — and still risky, as the automatic rendezvous, docking and sample transfer in lunar orbit had never been done before, by anyone. It’s a sign of the maturity of the Chinese space effort that it went off so flawlessly.” In images broadcast on state television, the blackened capsule landed on snow-covered grasslands in darkness in the country’s remote north. A Chinese flag was quickly placed next to the capsule, reflecting the nationalist pride that the multi-billion-dollar space programme engenders.

SOURCE: AFP

TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY PICK

Biden names Pete Buttigieg to 'cabinet of firsts'

JOE Biden boasted of a "cabinet of barrier breakers" Wednesday as the US President-elect introduced his transportation secretary pick Pete Buttigieg, who if confirmed would become the first openly gay head of a cabinet-level department.

Buttigieg, whom Biden called "a policy wonk with a big heart", is one of several trailblazing picks by the veteran Democrat who appears to be following through on his pledge to name the most diverse US cabinet ever. "A cabinet that looks like America" is how Biden, 78, described the inner circle that he is putting together.

"We'll have a cabinet of barrier breakers, a cabinet of firsts," he told reporters in Wilmington, Delaware, noting that eight "precedent-busting appointments" were already made.

Vice President-elect Kamala Harris is among the historic picks, being the first woman and first person of color elected to the post.



US President-elect Joe Biden introduced former South Bend, Indiana mayor Pete Buttigieg (Left), as his nominee to be secretary of transportation, which if he is confirmed would make him the first openly gay US cabinet member. PHOTO: KEVIN LAMARQUE

Others include retired general Lloyd Austin, who would be the first Black secretary of defense, and Janet Yellen, the first woman to lead the Treasury Department.

"And today a ninth, the first-ever openly gay nominee to lead a cabinet department (and) one of the youngest cabinet members ever," Biden said. Buttigieg, a former small

town Indiana mayor who turns 39 one day before Biden is inaugurated on January 20, was like Harris a rival of Biden's on the 2020 presidential campaign trail. SOURCE: AFP

THE 32ND ANNIVERSARY OF THE BOMBING

US to unseal charges against Lockerbie bombing suspect - media



A file photo taken on December 22, 1988, shows a policeman walking away from the damaged cockpit of the 747 Pan Am airliner that exploded and crashed over Lockerbie, Scotland, with 259 passengers on board. PHOTO: AFP

THE United States plans to unseal charges soon against a Libyan man suspected of assembling the bomb that blew up a US airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, US newspapers reported

on Wednesday.

The suspect, Abu Agila Mohammad Masud, is currently held by the Libyan authorities, according to The Wall Street Journal, and US authorities are

seeking his extradition to stand trial in the United States.

The New York Times said Masud's exact whereabouts are unknown but he was imprisoned in Libya at one point for unrelated crimes. The Journal said Masud, alleged to have been a top bomb-maker for the late Libyan leader Muammar Ghaddafi, is suspected of assembling the device that blew up Pan Am Flight 103.

The newspapers said US prosecutors are expected to unseal charges soon against Masud.

Monday is the 32nd anniversary of the bombing which killed a total of 270 people, including 190 Americans and 11 people on the ground.

The Journal said the case

against Masud is based largely on a confession he gave to Libyan authorities in 2012 as well as travel and immigration records.

In a statement, the FBI said that while it "cannot comment on any upcoming announcement, we can assure the public and most importantly, the families of the Pan Am 103 victims, that we have worked tenaciously for 32 years to investigate this horrific terrorist attack."

"Domestic and foreign partners alike have been focused on identifying who was responsible for the bombing," the FBI said in a statement. "Just as in any investigation, the FBI is persistent in our investigations with a dedicated focus on the victims of crime and terrorism."

SOURCE: AFP

A DEAL WITH HUAWEI

Germany shrugs off U.S. concerns, approves Huawei 5G networks

DESPITE massive opposition from Social Democratic and Green Party members of the Bundestag, Chancellor Angela Merkel's government has struck a deal with Huawei to build 5G networks in Germany with security regulations.

Germany's cabinet on

Wednesday sent legislation to the Bundestag that will allow China's national champion Huawei to build 5G networks in Europe's largest economy, under strict security guarantees, reported Asia Times.

Earlier, the U.S. government had lobbied with Angela

Merkel's government to exclude the Chinese firm altogether over concerns that the gear could be exploited for espionage by China.

The American intelligence community has accused the Chinese firm of plotting to steal data transmitted through

its hardware, and U.S. officials last February claimed to have evidence of Huawei's ability to steal information, in the form of a "back door" for law enforcement monitoring of communications, reported Asia Times.

SOURCE: ANI

NEWS IN BRIEF

HACKERS

US intel agencies warn cyber attack on government 'ongoing'

US intelligence agencies have warned a "significant" cyber attack on several federal departments uncovered over the weekend remains ongoing as the government rushes to assess the extent of the breach.

"This is a developing situation, and while we continue to work to understand the full extent of this campaign, we know this compromise has affected networks within the federal government," the FBI, the director of national intelligence and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) said in a joint statement late Wednesday.

The March attack on software created by Texas-based IT company SolarWinds – in which hackers installed malware – continued for months until it was discovered by cybersecurity company FireEye.

SOURCE: AFP

ANIMAL WELFARE

EU Court rules States can mandate stunning animals for slaughter

THE European Court of Justice ruled Thursday that authorities can order that animals be stunned before slaughter in a case that Muslim and Jewish groups warned could curb religious freedom.

The court backed a regulation imposed in the Flemish region of Belgium to ban the slaughter of livestock that have not been stunned, on animal rights grounds.

"The court concludes that the measures contained in the decree allow a fair balance to be struck between the importance attached to animal welfare and the freedom of Jewish and Muslim believers to manifest their religion," the ruling said.

Belgium's Flanders regional government issued the order in 2017 which took effect in 2019 that abattoirs must stun livestock before slaughtering them.

SOURCE: AFP

ONE Championship: Collision Course fights to be launched tonight

A special event of the ONE Championship named Collision Course featuring bouts of world-class fighters will be held tonight at Singapore Indoor Stadium in Singapore. Tonight's fights will include thrilling bouts including Kickboxing, Muay Thai and Mixed Martial Arts. Fans across the globe can enjoy the event free via ONE Super Application, and ONE Championship YouTube channel, according to the ONE Championship organizers.

In the main card of the event or Light Heavyweight Kickboxing World Championship, Ro-

man Kryklia of Ukraine will fight against Aneri Stoica of Romania.

In the co-main event or Bantamweight Muay Thai World Championship Fight, Nong-O Gaiyanghai of Thailand will take on Rodelek PK. Saenchai Muaythaigym of Thailand.

In the Lightweight Mixed Martial Arts fight, Marat Gafurov of Russia will face Lowen Tynanes of the United States.

In the Bantamweight Mixed Martial Arts fight, Yusup Saadulaev of Russia will fight with Troy Worthen of the United States.

In the Flyweight Mixed Mar-

tial Arts fight, Tatsumitsu Wada of Japan will take on Yodkaikaew Fairtex of Thailand. In other Flyweight Mixed Martial Arts event, Chan Rothana of Cambodia will face Xie Wei of China.

The ONE: Collision Course event will begin at 8:30 pm of Singapore Standard Time and fans also need to check local listings for the global broadcast, the event organizers stated on the ONE Championship official page. The first two fights will be streamed live on ONE Facebook page, officials added. — Lynn Thit (Tgi)



PHOTO: ONE CHAMPIONSHIP

Winter Olympics prompts skiing construction boom in China



The Sunac Snow Centre indoor ski resort in Chengdu in China's southwestern Sichuan province. PHOTO: AFP

CHENGDU—Weaving down a steep slope, snowboarder Zhang Xu skid gracefully to a halt in a shower of white powder — one of a new generation of Chinese people learning winter sports in brand new indoor facilities.

“I fell in love with the sport,” said 25-year-old Zhang, who started coming to the Sunac Snow Centre in Chengdu in July, the same month it opened.

“Skiing used to be a relatively small sport (in China) but now it's more popular, and the credit for that is down to the Winter Olympics,” he said.

The 2022 Beijing Winter Games have inspired a boom in construction of snow resorts;

their numbers have rocketed nearly fourfold, fuelled by demand from China's swelling middle class. A decade ago there were only just over 200 ski resorts in China — at the end of last year, that figure had jumped to 770, according to real estate group JLL.

Nearly 21 million people visited one last year, as the ability to spend more on leisure activities grows — average national disposable income has increased four times over the last two decades.

China has grand plans for this burgeoning interest — it has previously said it wants to put 10 per cent of the world's most populous nation on skis ahead of the 2022 Games. — AFP

Federer, Serena eye special 40th birthday gifts in 2021

ZURICH—Having endured a 2020 wipeout and seen Rafael Nadal equal his record of 20 Grand Slams, Roger Federer will edge towards his 40th birthday in 2021 with his eyes on an elusive Olympic singles gold medal despite fears over his long-term fitness.

Federer played just one tournament this year, a bumpy run to the semi-finals of the Australian Open, before knee surgery put him on the sidelines.

The Covid-19 pandemic, which caused a five-month shut-down as well as the cancellation of his beloved Wimbledon, forced him to call time on his

season.

On the tour since 1998, Federer will be 40 on August 8, just a week after the men's final at the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics.

“The big plan is to be there for the Olympics. It's one of my big goals,” said Federer.

“Maybe it's a little selfish, but it's not a bad thing it was moved because of all the problems this year.”

Unlike Nadal, Federer has yet to win a singles gold at the Olympics although he did capture the doubles title with Swiss compatriot Stan Wawrinka in Beijing in 2008.—AFP

Solskjaer holds off rushing Cavani back into action

LONDON—Edinson Cavani will not be rushed back for Thursday's Premier League clash with bottom side Sheffield United says Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer ahead of the hectic end-of-year schedule.

The 33-year-old Uruguayan striker returned to training after missing the past two games due to a muscle injury he suffered against West Ham on December 5.

“Edinson has done well in rehab but we still have to make the decision if we should risk him because it would be a risk,” said Solskjaer at his eve of match press conference on Wednesday.

“I would doubt he will be available tomorrow.



Cavani will not be rushed back into action. PHOTO: OZAN KOSE /AFP

“We have to be mindful of little strains and niggles.” Solskjaer has been constantly mentioned

as being at risk of losing his job most recently after last week's Champions League exit.—AFP