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THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Vol. VII, No. 264, 7th Waning of Nadaw 1382 ME

www.gnlm.com.mm, www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Tuesday, 5 January 2021

President gives honorary titles for 2020

PRESIDENT U Win Myint delivered a speech at the ceremony conferring honorary titles at the Thabin Hall of the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Vice-Presidents U Myint Swe and U Henry Van Thio, Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U T Khun Myat, Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than, Union Chief Justice U Htun Htun Oo, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services and Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Soe Win, Union Ministers and honorary title winners and their family members.

The President made a speech at the ceremony.

(Speech of the President is covered on page 4)

The respective honorary titles for 2020 and the winners were Thayay Sithu Medal of the Pyidaungsu Sithu Thingaha Title to Patron of Kanbawza Bank Limited Wunna Kyaw Htin Sithu U Aung Ko Win; Thiha Thura Medal of the Military Gallantry Titles to Lt-Col Aye Min Aung from No. 564 Light Infantry Battalion and Thura Medal to Major Yan Naing Oo from No. 564 Light Infantry Battalion, Captain Zaw Oo Lwin from the Defence Services Academy and Warrant Officer Class Two Tun Wai (fallen) who was represented by his wife Daw Athan, Zeya Kyaw Htin Medal of Capability Title to Lt-Gen Thet Pon, Lt-



President U Win Myint (R) presents Thiha Thura Medal of the Military Gallantry Titles to Lt-Col Thiha Thura Aye Min Aung (L) at the Thabin Hall of the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw on 4 January 2021. **PHOTO: MNA**

Gen Tun Aung, Maj-Gen Lin Aung, Maj-Gen Khun Thant Zaw Htoo, Maj-Gen Ko Lay, Maj-Gen Thet Tun Oo, Maj-Gen Khin Maung Than, Maj-Gen

Aung Myo Min (retired), Maj-Gen Tin Aye (retired), Maj-Gen Myint Oo (retired), and Maj-Gen Tin Aung Chit (retired); Alankar Kyawswa Title to vet-

eran Myanmar orchestra or Saing-waing player U Sein Sa Tin (a) U Tin Maung (demised) who was represented by his son U Min Han (a) U Sein Min

Naing; Theikpa Kyawswa Title to specialists Dr Toe Hla and U Kyaw Win.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

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Foreign Heads of State send felicitations to President U Win Myint

The following are messages of felicitations from Foreign Heads of State/Government sent to President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar U Win Myint, on the occasion of the 73rd Anniversary Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

From His Majesty King Willem-Alexander R King of the Netherlands

On your country's National Day, allow me to extend to Your Excellency my congratulations and my best wishes for the well-being of the people of Myanmar.

As we mark this occasion, I want to acknowledge that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented challenge to us all. I wish you, your government and the people of Myanmar strength, courage and health as together we continue our efforts to overcome coronavirus.

From His Majesty Mohammed VI King of Morocco

As the Republic of the Union of Myanmar celebrates Independence Day, it gives me great pleasure to send you my warmest congratulations and to offer your people my best wishes for further progress and prosperity.

I welcome this opportunity to say how much I value the friendship and mutual esteem between our countries as well as our commitment to strengthening bilateral relations, for the benefit of our peoples.

From Miloš Zeman President The Czech Republic

Allow me to extend my sincere congratulations to you and to the people of Myanmar on the occasion of the Independence Day of your country.

I avail myself of this opportunity to wish you and your people lots of success and prosperity. I am confident that the relations between our two countries will continue to develop and deepen in many areas.

I wish you, Excellency, and the Myanmar people lots of success in the years to come.

From General Prayut Chan-o-cha (Ret.) Prime Minister The Kingdom of Thailand

On behalf of the Royal Thai Government and the people of the Kingdom of Thailand, I have the honour to extend to Your Excellency and, through you, to the people of Myanmar our sincere congratulations and best wishes on the auspicious occasion of the 73rd Anniversary of the Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

The bilateral ties between Thailand and Myanmar have been cordial, robust and deeply rooted in history. Our shared cultural and religious heritage has served as a solid foundation for the excellent people-to-people relations for more than seven decades. I am pleased that our Natural Strategic Partnership has grown stronger and gained dynamism in recent years.

As Myanmar celebrates her Independence Day, I wish to extend Thailand's firm support for the shared aspiration of the Myanmar people to achieve a peaceful and prosperous democratic federal union. Looking forward, Thailand and Myanmar should work hand in hand to further broaden and deepen our cooperation that would enable our two countries to build back better together and make a difference for the peoples of our two countries.

I firmly believe that our strong and enduring partnership will go a long way to uplift the well-being of our peoples and contribute to peace and prosperity of our two countries and the region.

Accept, Excellency, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.

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Foreign Heads of State send felicitations to State Counsellor

The following are messages of felicitations from Foreign Heads of State/Government sent to State Counsellor and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, on the occasion of the 73rd Anniversary Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

From Her Excellency Ana Brnabić Prime Minister The Republic of Serbia

On the occasion of Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, I extend to you, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and on my own behalf, sincere wishes for the further successful development and overall progress of your country and its people.

I am confident that the period ahead will see the promotion of friendly relations and cooperation existing between the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, particularly taking into account that we mark an important anniversary on 29 December 2020—70 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries.

Building on the fact that Serbia and Myanmar have been fostering a sincere friendship for seven decades, I stand ready to make a personal contribution in the period ahead so that the relations between our two states develop to the benefit of our peoples. I am certain that intensification of the political dialogue and economic cooperation would enhance the quality of bilateral relations between our two countries.

May I take this opportunity to underline that the Republic of Serbia highly values the firm support that your country lends to the preservation of its territorial integrity and sovereignty, with the hope that you will continue to maintain the same position on this highly important issue in the future.

Hoping that we will soon have an opportunity to exchange views in person on all issues of mutual interest, please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

From Mahinda Rajapaksa Prime Minister The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

It is with great pleasure that I extend to Your Excellency, my warm congratulations and best wishes on the occasion of the 73rd Anniversary of Independence Day

of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

The longstanding bonds of friendship between Sri Lanka and Myanmar which is based on the principles and teachings of Theravada Buddhism is the linking force of the solid foundation and this philosophy has strengthened ties between our two countries. I believe that our two countries could work closely in overcoming common challenges faced by our two nations in both bilateral and multilateral spheres. The longstanding ties between Sri Lanka and Myanmar have grown and strengthened considerably towards a progressive friendship evolving from traditional areas of cooperation to greater vistas covering the political, economic, security and cultural spheres.

Please accept, Excellency, my best wishes for your personal well-being and for the continued progress and prosperity of the people of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

From Mateusz Morawiecki Prime Minister The Republic of Poland

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Poland and myself I have the honour to extend my best wishes on the occasion of the National Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar — wishes of successes in political and economic transformation as well as those of stability and peace. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate on Your and Your Party spectacular success during last general elections.

At the same time I wish to assure you on Poland's willingness to further develop our bilateral relations on the basis of friendship and trust as well as the continuation of support for Myanmar's democratization process using Poland's experience of our own political and economic transformation.

I hope that once the Covid-19 pandemic will have been contained we will manage to reinvigorate our bilateral contacts and cooperation especially in the area of economic and cultural relations.

Please accept, Excellency, my wishes of good health and personal well-being.

From His Excellency Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin Prime Minister of Malaysia

On behalf of the Government, I wish to convey my heartiest congratulations to Your Excellency and the Government of Myanmar on this auspicious occasion of the 73rd Anniversary of the Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Malaysia follows the developments in Myanmar with keen interest. A progressive achievement in Myanmar is also a cause for celebration. I wish to express my support for Your Excellency's leadership in the peace and reconciliation process in Myanmar, which I am certain, will be further accelerated with the firm mandate retained by the Government of Myanmar. As a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural nation ourselves, Malaysia fully subscribes to the importance of unity and inclusivity as a way forward for peace, progress and prosperity for nations. In this regard, I look forward to working with Your Excellency in strengthening the relations between our two countries and in the context of ASEAN cooperation.

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

From Roman Golovchenko Prime Minister The Republic of Belarus

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Belarus and my own I sincerely congratulate You on the Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

I confirm the interest of Belarus in the development of all-round cooperation and deepening of partnership with Myanmar in various fields of mutual interest.

I am sure that by joint efforts we will be able to reach a qualitatively new level of cooperation and achieve significant results, especially in the economic sphere.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration as well as best wishes of sound health, inexhaustible energy, new successes and fruitful activity for the benefit of Myanmar and its people.



President U Win Myint delivers speech at the ceremony of conferring honorary titles at the Thabin Hall of the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw on 4 January 2021. PHOTO: MNA



President U Win Myint (R) presents honorary title to Patron of Kanbawza Bank U Aung Ko Win (L) on 4 January 2021. PHOTO: MNA



State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi greets Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and attendees at the ceremony of conferring honorary titles in Nay Pyi Taw on 4 January 2021. PHOTO: MNA



President U Win Myint and honorary title winners pose for documentary photos at the ceremony of conferring honorary titles at the Thabin Hall of the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw on 4 January 2021. PHOTO: MNA



President U Win Myint and honorary title winners pose for a group photo at the ceremony of conferring honorary titles in Nay Pyi Taw on 4 January 2021. PHOTO: MNA

Photo displays of the honorary titles conferring ceremony held in Nay Pyi Taw on the 73rd Anniversary Independence Day.

Speech delivered by U Win Myint, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar at the ceremony to present honours and awards (4 January 2021)

LET me first of all, extend my best wishes to all the distinguished persons and invited guests who have come to attend this ceremony to be blessed with auspiciousness.

Our country, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has existed since time immemorial as a sovereign state, standing tall among other countries of the world and we have a good histor-

the colonial era under the colonial system. One of the patriotic youths by the name of General Aung San, became a national leader. He worked with indomitable spirit together with other patriots, comrades and ethnic nationals, sacrificing lives, blood and sweat as a result of which we became an independent sovereign state beginning from 4 January 1948.

We were able to achieve our

ence and our national sovereignty which have been given to us through great sacrifice and effort by our patriotic leaders and ancestors will endure for a long time. Furthermore, all of us as citizens, as well as our future generations, will have to shoulder our responsibilities with steadfastness for our motherland to become peaceful, modern and developed.

At a time when the Union Government has been exerting strenuous efforts with the aim of establishing a peaceful, modern and developed Democratic Federal Union on all fronts and sectors, honorary awards will be presented on the auspicious occasion of the 73rd Independence Day to those who have worked for national security, peace and prosperity at the village/ward level, the rule of law, socio-economic development of the people, and other nation-building tasks; those who have worked with patriotism for the interest of others, with an indomitable spirit, unflagging zeal and determination; those who have worked for the State in an exemplary manner; those who have excelled in the performing arts, those who have excelled in the field of arts, science and other subjects, and those who have

Honouring those who have excelled in courage and sacrifice in the performance of their duties for the interest of others is a good tradition.

served the State with bravery and courage without having any regard for their own lives. Honouring those who have excelled in courage and sacrifice in the performance of their duties for the interest of others is a good tradition.

This year, honorary titles will be proudly conferred on one Theikpa Kyawswa title winner of 2019, together with one for Thayay Sithu title, one for Thiha Thura title, three for Thura title, 11 for Zeya Kyaw Htin title, 1 for Alinkar Kyawswa and 3 Theikpa Kyawswa in 2020.

Those who have won these honorary titles are worthy of honouring as they have shown bravery and selfless devotion to the national interest, rather than personal interest, during the course of their lives fraught with difficulties and hardships; they are worthy of being honoured as they have exhibited strong

determination, exemplary qualifications, and sacrifices which we should be proud of.

I wish to express in great seriousness on behalf of the State and the people that for those who could not be personally present on this occasion, as their achievements and qualifications are worthy of being recorded and recognized by the State, this is something that descendants could be proud of.

In conclusion, honouring those who are worthy of honour is in accordance with the Mingala Sutta. I conclude my speech with advice to the title winners to guide their posterity to participate in establishing a Democratic Federal Union, the perpetuation of national sovereignty, non-disintegration of the Union, and peace, modernization and development of the country.

(Translated by Kyaw Myaing, Aung Khin)

... our future generations will have to shoulder our responsibilities with steadfastness for our motherland to become peaceful, modern and developed.

ical record as a country where all our ethnic national brothers and sisters lived in close friendship and unity.

However, in the 19th century the British colonial imperialists waged three unjust wars against us, and we finally came under the British yoke as a colony; thus, we lost our independence.

The political thinking of the patriotic youths became more mature and developed during

independence because all ethnic nationals worked in unity with unflagging zeal, determination and exemplary courage under the leadership of our national hero, the architect of independence and father of the Tatmadaw, General Aung San.

All ethnic nationals must implement our Independence Day national objectives in unity without any divisions among ourselves so that our independ-

Foreign Heads of State send felicitations to President U Win Myint

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**From Mr Alexander Van der Bellen, Federal President
The Republic of Austria**

On the occasion of the celebration of the National Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar I take great pleasure in conveying to you my warmest congratulations.

I seize this opportunity to extend my best wishes for your personal well-being as well as for a happy future of the people of Myanmar.

**From Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa
President
The Portuguese Republic**

On the occasion of the National Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, I would like to convey to Your Excellency my congratulations and sincere wishes for the progress and prosperity of the people of Myanmar.

**From Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez
President
The Republic of Cuba**

On behalf of the Cuban people and government, I cordially congratulate you on the occasion of the 73rd Anniversary of the Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, while reiterating the willingness to further develop the bonds of friendship and cooperation between our countries.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration and esteem.

**From Abdel Fattah Al Sisi
President
The Arab Republic of Egypt**

On the anniversary of the Independence Day of Myanmar, it gives me pleasure to extend to Your Excellency my heartfelt congratulations together with best wishes.

Please accept my sincerest wishes for the best of your well-being and for the progress and prosperity of the friendly people of Myanmar.

**From Her Excellency Kersti Kaljulaid
President
The Republic of Estonia**

I wish to convey my sincere congratulations to

you and to the people of Myanmar on the occasion of the Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar on January 4th. I wish you and the people of Myanmar prosperity.

I would like to offer words of support to the people of Myanmar as we all confront the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

**From Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
President
The Republic of Turkey**

On behalf of my nation and on my own behalf, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Your Excellency on the occasion of the Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

I believe the relations between Turkey and Myanmar and our cooperation will develop further in the period ahead on the basis of the mutual benefit of our nations.

I avail myself of this opportunity to reiterate my best wishes for Your Excellency's well-being and happiness as well as for the welfare of the people of Myanmar.

Flag hoisting, saluting ceremonies of 73rd Independence Day held in Nay Pyi Taw

CEREMONIES to hoist and salute the national flag to mark the 73rd Independence Day were held in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning.

The events took place in front of Nay Pyi Taw City Hall in line with the rules and guidelines of COVID-19 preventive measures.

The flag hoisting platoon raised the national flag at 4:20 am, along with the ethnic races.

At 6 am, those present at the ceremony were Pyithu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Tun Tun Hein, Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Aye Tha Aung, Union Ministers, Union Attorney-General, Union Auditor-General, Chairman of the Union Civil Service

Board, Chairman of Nay Pyi Taw Council, Governor of Central Bank of Myanmar, Acting Chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission, Chairman of Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, senior Tatmadaw officers, judges from the Supreme Court of the Union, the Myanmar Constitutional Tribunal members, Union Election Commission members, Commander of Nay Pyi Taw Command, Deputy Ministers, Deputy Attorney-General, members of UCSB, Nay Pyi Taw Council members, Deputy Governor of CBM, departmental heads and staff members and national people.

Vice-President U Myint Swe, in his capacity as chairman

of Central Committee on the 73rd Independence Day celebrations, received the salute of the Guard of Honour.

The Guard of Honour also saluted the nation's martyrs and fallen soldiers and took the four-point oath.

The Vice-President read a message sent by President U Win Myint for the 73rd Anniversary Independence Day.—MNA
(Translated by Aung Khin)

National flag is hoisted to mark the 73rd Independence Day in Nay Pyi Taw on 4 January 2021. PHOTO: MNA



Vice-President U Myint Swe delivers the speech at the ceremony of hoisting and saluting the national flag to mark the 73rd Independence Day in Nay Pyi Taw on 4 January 2021. PHOTO: MNA

Military gallantry medals, titles presented to Tatmadaw personnel

A ceremony to award military gallantry medals and titles was held at the Zeyathiri Beikman in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday afternoon.

It was attended by Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Maha Thayay Sithu Min Aung Hlaing, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Thayay Sithu Soe Win, Union Ministers for Home Affairs, Defence and Border Affairs, Chief of the General Staff (Army, Navy and Air), Commander-in-Chief (Navy), Commander-in-Chief (Air), officers from the Commander in Chief (Army), winners of honorary titles and certificates.

The Senior General presented the gallantry awards to two colonels, three captains, one sergeant, one corporal and two lance corporals, as well as his honorary certificate to one captain.

Until January 2020, the number of mili-

tary gallantry medals and certificates winners has totalled six Aung San Thuriya title winners, 50 Thiha Thura title winners, 545 Thura title winners, six Thiha Bala medal winners, 3,871 gallantry record winners, 3,284 winners of gallantry certificate of Commander in Chief of Defence Services, and 1,826 winners of the honorary certificate of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, according to the Tatmadaw True News Information Team.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Maha Thayay Sithu Min Aung Hlaing presents the military gallantry award to a Tatmadaw personnel at the Zeyathiri Beikman in Nay Pyi Taw on 4 January 2021. PHOTO: OFFICE OF THE C-in-C OF DEFENCE SERVICES



Please be vigilant; please be patient Please brace yourself by visioning the future



I think what the people wish to know most of all at this time is regarding the vaccination programme for COVID-19 and when this programme would start. The purchase contract for buying the first batch of the vaccines from India has already been signed. As soon as the authorities concerned in India have issued permission to use this vaccine, we have made arrangements for the import of these vaccines into Myanmar. In accordance with this programme, we will be vaccinating the first priority group, which comprises medical professionals and medical personnel in February. There is a lot of competition as all the countries of the world are trying to get this vaccine. However, we believe that the vaccination programme could be carried out all over the country step by step. During the period when the vaccines are still not available, I wish to appeal to the people to abide by the health rules and regulations and give support to our efforts to beat COVID-19. Please be vigilant; please be patient. Please brace yourself by visioning the future. We are all in this together.

(Excerpt from Chairperson of National Reconciliation and Peace Centre and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's speech on New Year, on 2 January 2021)

Yangon govt organizes 73rd Independence Day's flag hoisting, saluting ceremonies

YANGON Government organized the flag-hoisting and saluting ceremonies to mark the 73rd Independence Day of 2021 yesterday.

The ceremonies were held at the Independence Monument in Maha Bandoola Park in line with COVID-19 preventive guidelines.

Those presented at the ceremonies were Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein, Region Hluttaw Speaker U Tin Maug Tun, Commander of Yangon Command Brig-Gen Nyunt Win Swe, Acting Chief Justice of Yangon Region High Court Daw Thin Thin Nwe, Regional Government Ministers, Deputy Speaker of Region Hluttaw,

region advocate-general, region auditor-general, senior Tatmadaw officers, region Hluttaw MPs, representatives of national people and departmental officials.

The flag hoisting platoon raised the flag at 4:20 am.

At 7 am, Chief Minister of Yangon Region U Phyo Min Thein and the attendees saluted the State flag together with the Guard of Honour.

The Guard of Honour also saluted the nation's fallen martyrs and soldiers, and took the four-point oath.

The President's message for the 73rd Independence Day was read by the Chief Minister at the event.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

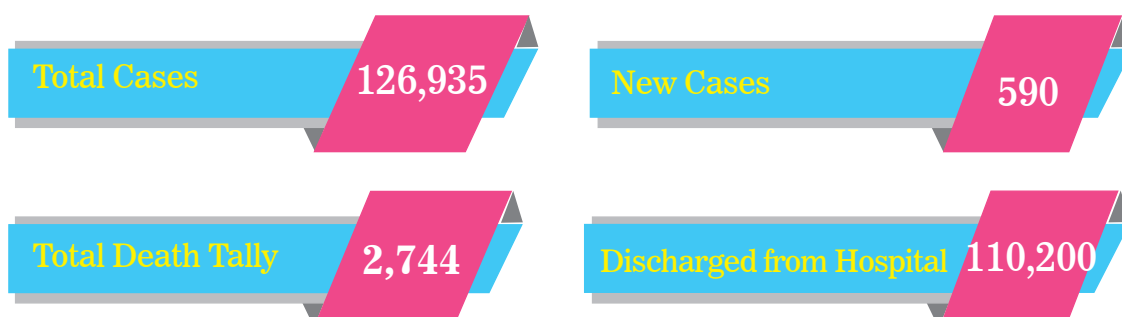


Yangon Region government organizes the flag-hoisting and saluting ceremonies to mark 73rd Independence Day at Maha Bandoola Park in Yangon on 4 January 2021. **PHOTO: MNA**

590 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 4 January, total figure rises to 126,935

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 126,935 after 590 new cases were reported on 4 January 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these 126,935 confirmed cases, 2,744 died, 110,200 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Updated at 8 pm, 4 January 2021



Daily death toll until 8 pm 4-1-2021



Ministry of Health and Sports

Hlegu rubber lab to issue certificates when COVID restrictions eased

By Nyein Nyein

MYANMAR Natural Rubber Quality Testing Lab in Hlegu will issue certificates when the government eases coronavirus restrictions. It depends on the pandemic situation, said U Khaing Myint, Myanmar Rubber Planters and Producers Association (MRPPA) secretary.

At present, the pandemic stopped the operation of the lab. Under stay-at-home guidelines, we cannot do anything but instead stay at home, he continued.

"The operation of the lab is related to coronavirus situations. We have prepared for the construction of the extended buildings. Some equipment in the lab will be changed," the MRPPA secretary said.

Myanmar Natural Rubber



(FILES) Rubber is weighed on a digital scale. PHOTO: AYE THAN

Quality Testing Lab was set up at the Commodity Testing and Quality Management Division (Hlegu Township) of the Consumer Affairs Department under the MOC.

The lab will soon to issue

the certificate after testing rubber quality, the association stated.

At present, Myanmar's rubber raw materials are offered a lower price than that in the international market as they do

not meet international standard. Therefore, rubber producers will keep trying to meet the international standard to earn actual market price, according to MRPPA.

The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) and MRPPA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2016 and set up Myanmar Natural Rubber Quality Testing Lab at the Commodity Testing and Quality Management Division (Hlegu Township) of the Consumer Affairs Department under the MOC.

Malaysia Rubber Board audited the lab in December 2016, and the lab passed Round Robin Test (or) Proficiency Test four times in 2017. International Rubber Association will accredit it. Rubber is primarily produced in Mon and Kayin states and Taninthayi, Bago, and Yan-

gon regions in Myanmar. As per 2018-2019 rubber season's data, there are over 1.628 million acres of rubber plantations in Myanmar, with Mon State accounting for 497,153 acres, followed by Taninthayi Region 348,344 acres and Kayin State with 270,760 acres. About 300,000 tonnes of rubber is produced annually across the country.

Seventy per cent of rubber produced in Myanmar goes to China. It is also shipped to Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Viet Nam, the Republic of Korea, India, Japan, and other countries, according to the MRPPA.

Myanmar yearly exports over 200,000 tonnes of natural rubber to foreign countries, generating over \$200 million.

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

MOC reports nearly \$400-mln trade deficit during Oct-mid Dec 2020

MYANMAR'S trade gap has significantly surged to US\$398.6 million in the financial year 2020-2021 from just \$16.9 million registered in the corresponding period of the 2019-2020FY, according to the data provided by the Ministry of Commerce.

Between 1 October and 18 December in the current FY, Myanmar's external trade drastically plunged to \$6.14 billion from \$8.206 billion recorded in the year-ago period.

While exports were estimated at \$2.87 billion, imports were valued at \$3.27 billion this FY. Compared to the FY2019-2020, exports showed a \$1.24 billion drop, while imports fell by \$824.8 million.

Myanmar witnessed a slump in exports triggered by the coronavirus pandemic. Moreover, the country cannot hold jade emporiums. As a result of this, export income plummeted, according to Myanmar Trade Promotion Organization.

Additionally, both sea trade and border trade dropped amid the coronavirus impacts. The neighbouring countries tightened border security and limited the trading time to contain the spread of the virus. Moreover, the severe container

shortage has become the biggest disrupter in shipping amid the coronavirus impacts, on the back of robust demand on the Asia-Europe and transpacific trade. Container shipping costs are drastically surging. Pandemic-induced container shortage pushed up the freight rates to almost triple in Myanmar, causing delays for traders.

Myanmar exports agricultural products, animal products, minerals, forest products, and finished industrial goods while importing capital goods, raw industrial materials, and consumer goods.

The country's export sector relies more on the agricultural and manufacturing sectors. The Ministry of Commerce is endeavouring to boost export under the World Trade Organization's rules, enhance value-added production and competitiveness, reduce export barriers and provide trade financing services. The government is trying to reduce the trade deficit by screening luxury import items and boosting exports. The country mainly imports essential goods, construction materials, capital goods, hygienic material and supporting products for export

promotion and the import substitution.

Myanmar's trade deficit was pegged at \$1.3 billion in the 2019-2020FY, \$1.14 billion in the 2018-2019FY, \$1.3 billion in the previous mini-budget period (April-September, 2018), \$3.9 billion in the 2017-2018FY, \$5.3 billion in the 2016-2017FY, and \$5.4 billion in the 2015-2016FY, according to statistics released by the Central Statistical Organization.

Under the National Planning Law for the Financial Year 2020-2021, Myanmar intends to reach an export target at US\$16 billion and import at \$18 billion.

The Ministry of Commerce has adhered to its policy reform depending on the requirements of the State and people. Moreover, a series of trade liberalization and openness for policy development have been introduced for enhancing a more viable trade environment. The private sector plays a prominent role in Myanmar's market-oriented economic system. The ministry is highlighting free and fair trade, ensuring product safety and quality goods and services.—GNLM

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Inflation rate extends 4.6% drop in November amid COVID impacts

ACCORDING to the inflation report released by the Central Statistical Organization under the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry, the annual rate of inflation in Myanmar, based on the Consumer Price Index, continued dropping to 4.6 per cent in November 2020 as consumer price fell amid the COVID-19 impacts.

The US dollar against Kyat is relatively weak in November, with a fall of about K203 against a year-ago period. The imported oil price also dropped against October's rate, causing the transport group's price index to slump, the inflation report showed.

The consumer price fell in food, non-food, transportation and telecommunication groups. Simultaneously, the CPI spiked in household goods and maintenance, other commodities, tobacco and beverages, clothing, recreation, culture and non-food. The price index of education and rent is stable amid the COVID-19, the report stated.

The annual rate of core inflation, which strips out volatile food and energy prices, was 9.67 per cent in November 2020. The year on year inflation rate stood at 3.65 per cent in November, the inflation data indicated.

During the one-year period from December 2019 to November 2020, the inflation rate stood

at 8.81 per cent in December 2019.

Despite the drop in fuel oil price and gain in the local currency, the power tariff hike led to a higher inflation rate of 9.2 per cent in February 2020. Then, it gradually declined during the coronavirus outbreak in March due to consumers' weak demand. Then, the rate fell to 4.60 per cent in November 2020.

In November, Ayeyawady Region recorded the highest inflation rate at 9.11 per cent, followed by Mandalay Region at 7.55 per cent, and Nay Pyi Taw at 6.68 per cent. The rate fluctuated with a maximum rate of 4.19 per cent in Ayeyawady and a minimum rate of -2.67 per cent in Kayah State.

Earlier, the inflation rate was calculated based on a 2006 survey. The base year was later changed to 2012. The Central Statistical Organization conducted a Household Income and Expenditure Survey in 82 townships in November 2012. The authorities concerned have been making efforts to reduce the inflation rate based on policies, finance, currency, trade, and foreign currency control, keeping with the second five-year National Development plan (2016-2017FY-2020-2021FY).—Htet Myat

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Attention to drug addicts while fighting pandemic

AMIDST the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement has announced that it will resume the rehabilitation and drug treatment centres with restrictions.

According to the ministry, rehabilitation and drug treatment centres will be resumed with no more than 30 patients in line with the COVID-19 health guidelines of the Ministry of Health and Sports.

It reflects that, we, despite facing challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, have not forgotten other health problems such as drug addiction and rehabilitation we are facing before we had a coronavirus crisis.

Before resumption of the centres, the ministry would review 17 tasks of the rehabilitation committee and would seek cooperation and coordination from the international organizations.

90-day rehabilitation centre-based trainings and 40-day community-based trainings are being conducted amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Drug addiction is not our country's problem only. It is a problem for the whole world. For a developing country like Myanmar, it may seem that the problem is much more intense and difficult but due to our people's enthusiastic spirit of sharing, we have some advantages.

Mental and physical trauma caused by addictions can contribute to higher drug use. The Ministry of Health and Sports established 26 major drug treatment centers and 47 minor drug treatment centers throughout the country.

The challenge is how to effectively prevent drug users from returning to drug use after they have stopped usage.

To overcome the challenge, we have to make them rely, trust and depend on their family and friends instead. That is why the government has opened up drug rehabilitation centres based on the people and community. Meanwhile, we need to make more efforts for providing them with vocational skills so that the addicts do not return to drugs.

Hence, all hands from the governmental and private sectors should be on deck to effectively carry out measures for rehabilitation, and conducting vocational skills trainings for the patients to ensure they get back on their feet as the government is drawing plans for them.

It is something everyone can collaborate in this drive. It doesn't matter what race you are, what religion you follow or what political stance you've taken; it concerns humanity and compassion and the stabilization of our community and environment.

'Growing momentum' to make 2021 the global action year for sustainable energy

United Nations

DESPITE that the world is not on track to meet climate objectives and achieve Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG7) for universal access to clean, affordable and reliable energy, Marcel Alers, UNDP Head of Energy, said that "clean energy solutions exist that can get us there".

"There is growing momentum to make them political and investment priorities", he added.

Smart investment

Fossil fuels used to be less expensive than clean energy but that is changing, according to Mr Alers.

Renewables are becoming more affordable every year, and "some options are now cheaper than fossil fuels", he said, pointing out that since 2010, the price of solar had decreased by 89 per cent.

"It is now cheaper to go solar than to build new coal power plants in most countries, and solar is now the cheapest electricity in history", the UNDP official said.

Moreover, amidst an exceptionally challenging year, and despite suffering setbacks, the renewables sector has shown resilience.



Eight villages between Ayeyawady and Chindwin rivers in Yasagyo Township get access to solar power 2019. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

"This fall in price, coupled with technological progress and the introduction of innovative business models, means we are now at a tipping point", he said, urging for a large-scale clean energy investments from the public and private sectors.

Translating pledges to action

Throughout 2020, countries have pledged to build back better, greener and fairer.

"With support from UNDP's Climate Promise, 115 countries committed to submitting enhanced Nationally Determined Contributions", Mr Alers said.

Among other things, he noted that high-emitting economies, such as China, Japan, South Ko-

rea, the United Kingdom and the European Union, had made net-zero commitments and that United States President-elect Joe Biden had vowed to rejoin the Paris Agreement.

"These pledges now need to be translated into action", said the UNDP official. "Ambitious commitments are a strong signal and a necessary first step towards

some needing to be stored at -70°C – get rolled out, powering a sustainable and reliable cold chain will be critical", Mr Alers reminded.

Furthermore, investing in renewables could create nearly three times as many jobs as investing in fossil fuels.

"As the world is rapidly urbanizing, energy efficiency in buildings, sustainable cooling and heating, smart urban planning and sustainable transport options...are key for the future of cities", he maintained.

Looking to September

In September, for the first time in 40 years, the UN will host a High Level Dialogue on Energy for countries, businesses, civil society and international institutions to step up action on sustainable energy.

UN-Energy and UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner recently called for a reinforcement of global energy governance, saying "we know clean energy can both deliver universal energy access and contribute to tackling the climate crisis".

Although phasing out fossil fuels and transitioning to green economies is a monumental task, Mr Alers assured that "we are ready to rise to the challenge".

China open to global cooperation on virus vaccine

BEIJING —China is always open to international cooperation on the COVID-19 vaccine and highly values the safety and effectiveness of vaccines, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said on Monday.

Spokesperson Hua Chunying told a daily news briefing that China actively supports domestic enterprises in forging cooperation with foreign counterparts on vaccine research and development as well as production. Currently, multiple vaccines developed by

Chinese enterprises are undergoing phase III clinical trials abroad with smooth progress.

In response to query about use of Chinese COVID-19 vaccines in countries like Indonesia and Egypt, Hua said China has actively joined in global cooperation initiatives, including COVAX, a global initiative backed by the World Health Organization, noting that countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have also approved the registration of

inactivated vaccines developed by China's Sinopharm.

"China will fulfill its commitment and make COVID-19 vaccines a global public good that will help ensure vaccine accessibility and affordability in developing countries, once they are developed and put into use," the spokesperson said.

Hua said the Chinese government always puts safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines in the first place, and Chinese



In this Dec 25, 2020 file photo, released by Xinhua News Agency, a staff member inspects syringes of COVID-19 inactivated vaccine products at a packaging plant of the Beijing Biological Products Institute Co Ltd, in Beijing. PHOTO: (ZHANG YUWEI/XINHUA VIA AP)

vaccine companies have always strictly followed scientific laws and regulatory requirements in vaccine research and develop-

ment. "China is willing to promote the equitable distribution of vaccines globally and join hands

with other countries to solidify pandemic fight, so as to protect people's lives and health," said the spokesperson.—Xinhua



Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Monday 4 January, 2021)

BAY INFERENCE: Weather is partly cloudy to cloudy over the South Bay and a few cloud over the Andaman Sea and elsewhere over the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL NOON OF THE 5 January, 2021: Weather will be partly cloudy in Upper Sagaing, Bago, Yangon, Taninthayi Regions and Kachin, Mon States and generally fair in the remaining Regions and States.

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

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of slight increase of night temperatures in Nay Pyi Taw, Magway, Bago, Yangon, Ayeyawady, Taninthayi Regions and Rakhine, Kayin, Mon States.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 5 January, 2021: Fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 5 January, 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 5 January, 2021: Fair weather.



THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR
သတင်းစာများကို ကြိုတင်များတွင် ဝယ်ယူပတ်နိုင်ပါပြီ

- မြန်မာ့အသံစာပေ**
အမှတ် ၅၈ ကိုယ်စားလှယ်အဖွဲ့ဝင်များ စာပေပြိုင်ပွဲများ ရန်ကုန်မြို့
- ကြေးမုံခင်စာပေ**
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Printed and published at the **Global New Light of Myanmar Printing Factory** at No.150, Nga Htat Kyee Pagoda Road, Bahan Township, Yangon, by the **Global New Light of Myanmar Daily** under Printing Permit No. 00510 and Publishing Permit No. 00629.

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

Fireworks displayed on 73rd Independence Day in Nay Pyi Taw



Fireworks set off over the Bogyoke Aung San Bronze Statue in Nay Pyi Taw to celebrate the 73rd Independence Day on 4 January 2021. **PHOTO: MNA**

Visitors flock to cloud sea tourist spot in Mogaung on Independence Day



Travellers are seen at the "cloud sea" tourist spot in Mogaung, Kachin State on 4 January 2021. **PHOTO: WIN NAING (KACHIN MYAY)**

A new "cloud sea" tourist spot has been set up in Mogaung, Kachin State, and on 4 January, the Independence Day, visitors flocked to Mount Loi Hin Chae and enjoyed the cloud

sea views.

We Love Mogaung Group and Kya Inn Ywama Village Youth jointly built two bamboo couches in the tourist spot in Mogaung Township for the visitors for recreation and to take pictures of the cloud sea.

Amyotha Hluttaw MP Dr Khin Ma Gyi, Kachin State Directorate of Hotels and Tourism Director U Khaing Win, and Kachin State Directorate of Investment and Company Administration Head Dr Theint Theint Moe also visited the place, and they will cooperate with relevant departments to make the new tourist spot clean, beautiful and sustainable.—Win Naing (Kachin Myay)

(Translated by Maung Maung Swe)

167 persons including 39 girls trafficked in 2020

By Nyein Nyein

A total of 111 human trafficking cases, involving over 167 victims, have been reported in 2020. Among them, 39 are young girls, according to the Myanmar Anti-Human Trafficking Police Force.

Myanmar Anti-Human Trafficking Police Force's record showed 15 reported human trafficking cases in January, seven in February, nine in March, six each in April and May, 15 in June, 14

in July, 16 in August, six in September, four in October, eight in November and five in December.

Those reported cases involve 339 suspects and 167 victims, and forced marriage, forced sexual service and labour exploitation are reported. The trafficking cases were reported in China, Thailand, Malaysia and the domestic labour market. The majority of victims were sent to China for forced marriage, Myanmar Anti-Human Trafficking Police Force reported.

Of 111 cases, 83 cases of forced marriages were reported in China, and one case occurred in Thailand, while the other three issues of forced marriage also happened in the domestic labour market. One case of forced prostitution was reported in Thailand. Twelve cases of forced sexual service and seven cases of labour exploitation occurred in the country. Two cases of labour exploitation in Malaysia, one issue of labour exploitation in China, and one surrogacy in China were

reported.

Among the regions and states, Shan State witnessed 37 cases of human trafficking, followed by Yangon with 30 cases. Ten trafficking cases were registered each in Mandalay Region and Kachin State, seven in Ayeyawady Region, six in Bago Region, three in Taninthayi Region, two each in Magway Region and Nay Pyi Taw, and one each in Rakhine State, Kayin State, Mon State and Sagaing Region in 2020.

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

SCHOOL REOPENING

Kenya reopens schools after 10-month virus closure

MILLIONS of Kenyan pupils returned to school on Monday for the first time since classes were dismissed 10 months earlier due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Mask-wearing students had their temperatures checked before entering school to repeat their lost academic year, in what was both a relief and a concern to their parents.

“As a parent I am pleased that the children are back in school,” said mother Hildah Musimbi.

“At the moment we have got a lot of fear because we really don’t know if other children in school have the virus or even if the teachers have the virus, or even if the support staff in school have the virus.”

Kenya shut schools in March 2020 when the new coronavirus arrived in the country, and partially re-opened to select classes in October.

All primary and highschool students returned on Monday, while universities and colleges were free to open and would do so on varying dates.

“We are happy to be back in school, that was a long break,” Mercy Nderi, a pupil at Kasarani



Students of Olympic Primary School wait in a line to have their temperatures measured at the entrance of the school in the early morning of the official re-opening day of public schools on January 4, 2021, in Kibera slum, Kenya, as students return to school following a nine-month closure ordered by the government in March 2020 to curb the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. **PHOTO: AFP**

Primary School in Nairobi said.

Teachers turned back students who were not wearing facemasks, while struggling to maintain social distancing in crowded classrooms.

“It is difficult because we don’t have sufficient desks to en-

sure we keep children one metre (yard) away from each other but we are trying our best,” said Mvurya Mumbia, a headteacher at Voi Primary School.

When schools were partially re-opened in October, there was a spike in COVID-19 cases,

with pupils and teachers falling ill and at least one school principal dying.

Kenya has had almost 97,000 cases and over 1,600 deaths since the start of the outbreak, with a surge in its positivity rate of up to 20 per-

cent in October decreasing to below five per cent in the past week.

“The turnout is good and as you have seen, apart from crowding, all students are wearing their masks and teachers are ready to teach so let us support them,” Education Minister George Magoha said when he toured Olympic Primary School in Nairobi’s Kibera slum, the largest in the country with 4,700 pupils.

“There is no reason why parents should fail to send children to school,” he said.

“We have put in place adequate safety measures but they need to ensure they give them masks.”

President Uhuru Kenyatta this weekend extended a 10:00 pm to 4:00 am curfew until March 12.

Kenyans have been under some form of nighttime curfew since March 25 last year, when they were ordered to stay indoors from 7:00 pm. In July this was moved back to 9:00 pm and in September to 11:00 pm, before being taken back to 10:00 pm in November as cases soared.

SOURCE: AFP

IT

Workers at Google parent Alphabet form union

EMPLOYEES at Google and other units of parent firm Alphabet announced the creation Monday of a union, stepping up a period of activism targeting Silicon Valley giants.

The Alphabet Workers Union, affiliated with the Communications Workers of America, aims to represent well-compensated tech workers as well as temporary workers and contractors, according to a statement.

The new labour group is focussing not only on pay and benefits as most unions but also a role in ethical decisions by the tech giant and protection from arbitrary firings for activism.

“We hope to create a democratic process for workers to wield decision-making power; promote social, economic, and environmental justice; and end the unfair disparities between TVCs (temporary, vendors and contractors) and FTEs (full

time employees),” the union’s website said.

As of the end of December, the union had some 200 members. Large tech firms, which offer generous compensation to software engineers and other skilled workers, have largely avoided labor drives but have faced growing unrest over workplaces issues in recent years. At Amazon, which has tens of thousands of warehouse workers, organizing drives have focussed on working conditions and safety during the pandemic.

One of the catalysts at Google was the recent firing of Timnit Gebru, a Black artificial intelligence ethics researcher and outspoken diversity activist. The company also faced a backlash from employees over its involvement with a Pentagon project known as Project Maven, which Google eventually ended.

SOURCE: AFP

UNIVERSITY

Hundreds protest in Istanbul against new university rector

HUNDREDS of people demonstrated in Istanbul on Monday against what they claim is the politically motivated appointment of a rector at a top Turkish university by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

An AFP reporter estimated the number at more than 1,000, with dozens of police officers watching the rally without intervening.

Anger erupted after a January 1 presidential decree in which Erdogan appointed Melih Bulu – a candidate in the 2015 general election for the president’s ruling party – as the rector of Bogazici University.

The protesters outside the public university’s campus included students outraged by what they alleged to be political interference.

They chanted “We don’t want an appointed rector” and “Melih, step down” while some held placards saying, “We want rights, why so many police?” and “Melih Bulu cannot be Bogazici’s rector”.



Students chant slogans and hold placards on 4 January 2021 in front of the Bogazici University in Istanbul during a protest against the direct appointment of the new rector to Bogazici university by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. **PHOTO: AFP**

Erdogan assumed the power to directly appoint university rectors after surviving a failed 2016 coup, and it is not the first time his choice for Bogazici has caused controversy.

When Professor Mehmed Ozkan was appointed as rector in November 2016, there were tensions and upset from students and academics.

Rectors for Turkey’s universities were appointed through elections before July 2016.

“Academia is above ideologies and politics, but to appoint a rector to our university in defiance of the will of the university members is a political move,” one of the protesters, Selen, told journalists at the rally.

SOURCE: AFP

UPDATE

Coronavirus: Latest global developments



Registered nurse Yeni Sandoval wears personal protective equipment (PPE) while she cares for a Covid-19 patient in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at Providence Cedars-Sinai Tarzana Medical Centre in Tarzana, California on January 3, 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

HERE are the latest developments in the coronavirus crisis:

First Oxford/AstraZeneca jab

An 82-year-old man from Oxford in Britain becomes the first person in the world to receive AstraZeneca and Oxford University's new Covid jab outside a clinical trial.

The shot is more than six times cheaper than the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and can be stored in normal fridges.

Under pressure

The French government faces growing pressure to accelerate its vaccination drive, with President Emmanuel Macron

reportedly furious over the slow pace of progress.

Just a few hundred people have received the jab so far in the country.

Chinese New Year

Thousands of people line up in Beijing to receive a vaccine as China races to inocu-

late millions before the Chinese New Year mass travel season in February.

More than 73,000 people in the capital have received the first dose of the vaccine over the last couple of days, state media reports, including community workers and bus drivers.

'Real' US deaths

US officials reject US President Donald Trump's claim that the national Covid-19 death toll of more than 350,000 has been exaggerated, but defend the stumbling campaign to vaccinate millions of Americans.

In response to the president's claim that the number of cases and deaths was "far exaggerated", top US scientist Anthony Fauci says "those are real numbers, real people and real deaths."

Getting serious in Japan

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga says he is considering declaring a state of emergency in the greater Tokyo area over a "very severe" third wave of cases in the country.

Speaking at his New Year press conference, Suga also says he hopes vaccinations will begin

in Japan in late February.

Singapore slump

Singapore's economy takes its worst ever annual hit in 2020 as the pandemic hammers the city-state's vital trade and tourism sectors, official data shows.

The 5.8 per cent decline is not as bad as feared, but the financial hub was plunged into its first recession since the 2008 global financial crisis in the second quarter when the government closed most workplaces.

1.84 million dead

The coronavirus has killed at least 1,843,631 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to an AFP tally on Monday based on official sources. More than 85 million cases have been registered.

The US is the worst-affected country with 351,590 deaths, followed by Brazil with 196,018, India with 149,649 and Mexico with 127,213.

The tallies are based on daily tolls provided by health authorities in each country and exclude later re-evaluations by statistical organizations, as has happened in Russia, Spain and Britain.

SOURCE: AFP

POLAND

Celebrity vaccinations cause outrage in Poland

A hospital in Warsaw is under fire for giving out Covid-19 vaccine shots to celebrities and politicians, causing public outrage and sparking a government investigation that began on Monday.

Poland, which like much of Europe began its vaccination campaign on December 27, is currently only supposed to be vaccinating medical workers under a government plan.

But the Medical University of Warsaw hospital last week said it had also vaccinated 18 cultural figures who are intended to serve as ambassadors for the vaccination campaign.

The hospital said it had given out a total of 450 shots, including 300 for its own staff members and 132 for their families and patients.

The list of patients included some politicians.

Among the celebrities were actress Maria Seweryn,

who is 45, singer Michal Bajor, 63, and Edward Mischczak, a 65-year-old TV journalist.

The unusual vaccinations first came to light when Leszek Miller, an MEP and former prime minister and regular patient at the hospital, tweeted a picture of a medical record showing he had received the vaccine on December 30.

Some local politicians in other parts of Poland, including members of the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, have also been heavily criticized for receiving the vaccine out of turn.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki told PAP news agency on Saturday that "observing the rules of the vaccination sequence is an expression of respect for the rules of social solidarity".

"There is no justification for breaking the rules," he said, calling it "a real scandal".

SOURCE: AFP

VACCINATION

France vows to speed up vaccinations after slow rollout 'scandal'

France's government on Monday promised to ramp up its vaccination campaign against Covid-19 after inoculating just a few hundred people in the first week, prompting accusations of a scandal.

The French campaign had rolled out just over 500 doses as of January 1, with critics comparing that figure with the 200,000 people immunised in Germany in a similar timeframe, after the EU-wide rollout began a week ago.

"What we have seen is a government scandal," Jean Rottner, the head of France's Grand Est eastern region, which has seen a particularly sharp rise in infections, told France 2 television.

"Things need to accelerate," said Rottner, a member of the right-wing Republicans (LR) opposition party. "The French need clarity and firm messages from a government that knows where it is going. It is not giving this impression." President Emmanuel Macron, under pressure to take personal responsibility, met of-

ficials including Prime Minister Jean Castex to discuss the rollout.

Under-fire Health Minister Olivier Veran wrote on Twitter there would be a "rapid increase in the vaccination campaign" with the focus on elderly in care homes and health workers aged over 50.

He later said during a hospital visit that France had already

drastically increased numbers and by Wednesday 100 hospitals would be able to vaccinate health workers.

"Today, we will have carried out several thousand vaccinations throughout the country. The pace will increase," he added, without giving figures.

SOURCE: AFP



A nurse prepares to administer a dose of the Pfizer coronavirus disease (Covid-19) vaccine to a resident of retirement home, on January 4, 2021 in Saint-Renan, western France. **PHOTO: AFP**

BREXIT

Smooth sailing for Channel traffic as post-Brexit flows ramp up

GOODS flowed smoothly across the Channel between Britain and France on Monday, the first working day since the completion of Brexit last week.

Nearly 3,000 trucks have passed through the Channel Tunnel from France to Britain since the UK left the EU Customs union and single market at midnight on December 31, in the final act of its divorce from the EU.

“Everything is going very well,” a spokesman for Getlink, the operator of the tunnel, which is used both by passenger and freight trains, said.

In the port of Calais, staging post for ferry crossings to the English port of Dover, there were also “no queues and no



Lorries board a ferry at the Port of Dover, southeast England, on 4 January 2021 following Britain's departure from the European Union. PHOTO: AFP

congestion” on Monday, the port's deputy director Benoit Rochet said.

With just 21 ferries scheduled to sail for England on Monday, com-

pared with over 30 on a normal day, “traffic is very slow,” he said.

Eleven months after Brexit, the free movement of people and goods be-

tween Britain and its EU neighbours came to an abrupt end on December 31 when an 11-month transitional period expired.

Under a new “smart

border” technology devised by France to keep goods moving smoothly post-Brexit, companies on either side of the Channel are required to fill out Customs forms online before shipping their goods.

Only two trucks arriving at the tunnel in Calais were prevented from boarding shuttles to Britain because the drivers did not have the proper shipping documents, Getlink said on Monday.

The drivers were rerouted to a new Customs building to complete their paperwork, the spokesman said.

Under the new rules, trucks arriving in Calais or Dover must present shipping documents containing a barcode, which is scanned and forwarded

to Customs officials on the other side of the world's busiest shipping route.

Once this is done the trucks can either be waved through with a green light or subjected to extra checks if given an orange one.

Many British importers had stocked up on goods from the Continent in December to avoid their consignments getting held up by border controls after January 1.

Around 60,000 passengers and 12,000 trucks cross the Channel between Britain and France each day.

French officials expect trade flows to progressively return to normal over the course of the month.

SOURCE: AFP

JAPAN

Tokyo stocks start 2021 lower on possible virus emergency

TOKYO stocks got off to a shaky start in 2021 on Monday as leisure activity-related firms pulled down the market with Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga hinting the government may soon declare another state of emergency in the capital and its vicinity.

On the year's first day of trading, the 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average ended down 185.79 points, or 0.68 per cent, from last Wednesday at 27,258.38.

The broader Topix index of all First Section issues on the Tokyo Stock Exchange finished 10.09 points, or 0.56 per cent, lower at 1,794.59.

Decliners were led by air transportation, land transportation and real estate issues. The U.S. dollar weakened to around the 103-yen line as traders sought the yen's perceived safety amid risk aversion after reports in the early morning that Suga is considering declaring a state

of emergency for Tokyo and Chiba, Kanagawa and Saitama prefectures as early as this week. Suga said in a morning press conference the measure is now under consideration given that the number of infections in those prefectures, accounting for about half of the nationwide daily total of over 3,000 in recent weeks, remains at high levels. The declaration provides a legal basis for governors to ask residents

in their prefectures to stay at home. The Nikkei briefly dropped more than 400 points in the morning but later trimmed losses and moved narrowly after Suga's press conference.

Suga hinted that social and economic activities are unlikely to be halted across the board this time, saying the state of emergency should be implemented “in a limited and focused manner”.

SOURCE: KYODO

MARKETS

London stock market surges 3%

THE London stock market surged by more than three per cent on Monday, the first trading day since Britain last week left the European Union's single market and Customs union.

After accelerating ear-

ly gains, the benchmark FTSE 100 index dipped slightly to 5,544.60 points, a gain of 2.9 per cent.

The UK formally left the EU on January 31, 2020 but remained in a year-long transition as both sides

negotiated a post-Brexit trade deal which was sealed only on Christmas Eve.

“The FTSE 100 is kicking off 2021 in style, with the headline UK market enjoying an impressive

3.0 per cent gain in early trade,” said IG analyst Joshua Mahony.

“With Brexit finally here, there are precious few signs of initial difficulties.”

SOURCE: AFP

BANKING

China's central bank drains liquidity from market

CHINA'S central bank on Monday conducted 20 billion yuan (about 3.06 billion U.S. dollars) of reverse repos to maintain stable liquidity in the banking system.

The interest rate for the seven-day reverse repos was set at 2.2 per cent, according to a statement on the website of the People's Bank of China.

Meanwhile, 160 bil-

lion yuan of reverse repos matured on the same day, resulting in a net liquidity withdrawal of 140 billion yuan from the market.

A reverse repo is a process in which the cen-

tral bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

SOURCE: XINHUA

NUCLEAR

Iran resumes enriching uranium to 20%

IRAN on Monday announced it has resumed uranium enrichment to a purity level of 20 percent at its Fordow underground nuclear facility, according to local media.

“The 20-percent enrichment started a few hours ago after gas injection, and the first UF-6 product will be ready later in the day,” Ali Rabiee was quoted as saying by the ISNA news agency, referring to a compound used in the process of enriching uranium.

Rabiee noted that

Iran earlier informed Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency of its plans, which breach its obligations under the 2015 nuclear deal reached with major powers.

He explained that the government is duty-bound to implement a law passed by the Iranian parliament last month that requires the government to scale back more obligations under that deal, which the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump pulled out of in May 2018.—Kyodo

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V SEA FOREST

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V SEA FOREST VOY. NO. (-)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **5-01-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **AIPT-2** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

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Myanmar Port Authority**

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TRAIL

Algerian jailed for 3 years for political protest memes

AN Algerian supporter of the Hirak protest movement was sentenced to three years in jail Monday for satirical social media posts mocking the government and religion, a campaign group said.

Walid Kechida, 25, was accused of insulting President Abdelmadjid Tebboune and “offending the precepts” of Islam in internet memes and other online posts, said Kaci Tansaout, from the CNLD prisoners’ rights group.

“Walid Kechida is sadly sentenced to three years in prison with a fine,” Tansaout said, adding that lawyers would appeal.

Lawyer Moumen Chadi confirmed the sentence.

The public prosecutor in Algeria’s northeastern Setif province had called for a five-year sentence, and Kechida has already spent eight months in detention awaiting trial.

Algerian authorities have arrested and prosecuted several activists in a bid to stem the Hirak protesters.

The CNLD says over 90 people, including activists, so-

cial media users and journalists, are currently in custody in connection with the country’s anti-government protest movement or individual liberties – mostly for dissenting social media posts.

Tebboune last week signed Algeria’s new constitution into law, a change the government hopes will turn the page on the long-running Hirak mass protest movement.

The Hirak first launched vast street demonstrations in early 2019 to oppose then-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s bid for a fifth term in office.

Following his resignation that April, the Hirak kept up the pressure to demand a full overhaul of the ruling system in place since the North African nation’s 1962 independence from France.

A November referendum to approve the constitutional changes received the backing of less than 15 per cent of the electorate, in a vote overshadowed by the novel coronavirus pandemic and Hirak calls for a boycott.

SOURCE: AFP

CONGRESS

Democrat Pelosi narrowly re-elected as US House speaker

NANCY Pelosi, the only woman to serve as US Speaker of the House, was narrowly re-elected to the position Sunday in a deeply divided new Congress that convened in the final weeks of Donald Trump’s presidency.

Pelosi, 80, faced a scare when five fellow Democrats defected and voted “present” or for someone else during the floor vote.

But the woman who is third in line to the presidency secured her fourth – and perhaps final – non-consecutive term as House speaker by earning 216 votes versus 209 for Republican leader Kevin McCarthy.

In a symbolic gesture beginning the 117th Congress, McCarthy formally handed the speaker’s gavel over to Pelosi, who raised it in triumph as Democrats cheered and applauded.

“We begin the new Congress during a time of extraordinary difficulty,” Pelosi told the chamber, noting the toll of 350,000 dead and 20 million infected by Covid-19.

“Our most urgent priority will continue to be defeating the coronavirus,” a masked Pelosi said. “And defeat it, we will.”

The vote took hours, as lawmakers were required to vote in groups of several dozen due to

social distancing rules imposed during the coronavirus pandemic. Pelosi has been Trump’s chief nemesis in Congress, and the two clashed bitterly over the past two years, particularly as she levelled impeachment charges against the president.

Trump was impeached in December 2019, but the Senate acquitted him early in 2020. His successor, Joe Biden, takes office on January 20.

With Pelosi scrambling to keep her post, it was a handful of progressive lawmakers and members-elect who have been critical of her leadership but ultimately voted for her on Sunday.

Among them was Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, one of the most high-profile Democrats in Washington, and incoming lawmaker Cori Bush, who is the first African-American woman to represent Missouri in Congress.

There are normally 435 members of the House, but just 427 votes were cast Sunday as a few congressmen-elect are in quarantine due to Covid-19 and a tight House race in New York has yet to be formally decided.

One congressman-elect from Louisiana, Luke Letlow, died of complications from Covid-19 last



Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) waits during votes in the first session of the 117th Congress in the House Chamber at the US Capitol on 3 January 2021 in Washington, DC. PHOTO: AFP

week, days before he was due to be sworn in. That leaves Democrats with one of the slimmest House majorities in two decades, 222 to 211 with two vacancies, as they navigate the remaining few weeks of Trump and carry into the Biden presidency.

On a day that was anything but conventional, Republican Chip Roy interrupted the swearing-in process to ask that the delegations from the six swing states where Trump has contested the election results not be seated Sunday as House members.

SOURCE: AFP

EXTRADITION

UK court rejects Assange’s extradition to US

A British judge on Monday blocked WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange’s extradition to the

United States to face espionage charges, finding he was at serious risk of suicide.

District Judge Vanessa Baraitser said the 49-year-old Australian publisher faced “oppressive” conditions in maximum-security isolation if detained in the US.

In court, Assange wiped his forehead as the decision was announced while his fiancée Stella Moris burst into tears and was embraced by WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson.

Outside the Old Bailey court in central London, his supporters who had gathered since early morning erupted in cheers and shouted “Free Assange!”

Assange and his legal team have long argued that the protracted case, which has become a cause celebre for media freedom, was politically motivated.

It follows more than a decade of legal controversies but the ruling is still subject to appeal. Assange was remanded in custody

but a bail hearing could be heard later on Monday. Any decision to block extradition should meet a high bar given Britain’s treaty obligations, Baraitser said.

But facing the “harsh conditions” likely in the US jail system, Assange’s mental health would deteriorate, “causing him to commit suicide” with the determination of a person with autism spectrum disorder, she ruled, siding with a diagnosis by psychologists.

Baraitser rejected US experts’ testimony that Assange would be protected from self-harm, noting that others such as disgraced US financier Jeffrey Epstein had managed to kill themselves in custody despite wardens’ supervision.

“For this reason I have decided extradition would be oppressive by reason of mental harm and I order his discharge,” she said.

‘Too repressive’

The US non-profit Freedom of the Press Foundation said the case against Assange was “the most dangerous threat to US press freedom in decades”.

“The extradition request was not decided on press freedom grounds; rather the judge essentially ruled the US prison system was too repressive to extradite.”

Assange faced 18 charges in the United States relating to the 2010 release by WikiLeaks of 500,000 secret files detailing aspects of military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

If convicted in the United States, Assange faced up to 175 years in jail. Before the ruling, both Germany and a UN rights expert expressed concern over the human rights and humanitarian problems presented by the extradition.

SOURCE: AFP



Supporters of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange demonstrate outside the Old Bailey court in central London as the court will rule on his extradition case on 4 January 2021. PHOTO: AFP

STATE OF EMERGENCY

Japan could declare 1-month virus emergency for Tokyo area this week

JAPAN plans to declare another state of emergency in Tokyo and three neighbouring prefectures, possibly to take effect for about one month from Saturday, to curb the spread of the coronavirus as infections have continued rising, government officials said Monday.

The plan comes after Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga touched on the need to consider such a special measure, following one put in place in April last year, as the greater Tokyo area is responsible for about half of the some 3,000 new daily cases reported in recent weeks.

But Suga hinted in a New Year's press conference that social and economic activities are unlikely to be halted across the board this time, saying the state of emergency should be implemented "in a limited and focused manner."

The officials said the measure is likely to focus on stemming the risk of infections at restaurants and bars, requesting them to close earlier and people staying home as much as possible, especially in the evenings, but no school closures are planned.

"We will consider the issue

of an emergency declaration," Suga said at the prime minister's office. "It is a fact that the number of people infected with the novel coronavirus has not declined but remained high in Tokyo and the three adjacent prefectures."

"Taking this seriously, we thought we need to issue a stronger message," he said.

Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike and her counterparts in Chiba, Kanagawa and Saitama prefectures on Saturday urged the central government to issue a second declaration for their areas, days after the capital reported more than 1,300 new coronavirus cases in a single day for the first time.

On Monday, the local governments agreed to jointly ask dining and drinking establishments to close by 8 pm, further cutting their operating hours from the 10 pm closing time currently requested, to prevent further spread of the virus.

Suga said the government will seek to begin vaccinations against COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the virus, in late February for front-line healthcare workers.

The 72-year-old premier said



Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga attends the year's first press conference at his office in Tokyo on 4 January 2021.

PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

he would "set an example" by taking a COVID-19 vaccination.

While pledging additional financial support for hospitals combatting the virus, he said a law revision aimed at providing benefits for those who comply with anti-virus steps and penalize those who do not will be sought in a parliamentary session to be convened later this month.

The amendment is expected to be approved by lawmakers in

early February as the Diet affairs chiefs of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan agreed on the plan.

Suga also said the entry to Japan of businesspeople now allowed from some designated countries will be stopped if a coronavirus variant is found there.

SOURCE: KYODO NEWS

VACCINE

Beijing vaccinates thousands in Covid-19 jab drive

Thousands of people lined up in Beijing Monday to receive a Covid-19 vaccine as China races to inoculate millions before the Chinese New Year mass travel

season in February.

More than 73,000 people in the Chinese capital have received the first dose of the vaccine over the last couple of days,

state media reported Sunday, including community workers and bus drivers.

Health authorities on New Year's Eve granted "conditional"

approval to a vaccine candidate made by Chinese pharma giant Sinopharm, which the company said had a 79 per cent efficacy rate.

An AFP journalist saw people being bussed into a temporary vaccine centre at a central park, after being instructed to fill in electronic forms about their health status and any allergies at an outside gate.

Some were wearing two layers of surgical face masks.

One man surnamed Gu, a catering worker in his 30s, told AFP his employer had booked him a vaccine appointment at the centre, and that he wanted the jab "for peace of mind".

"I believe any adverse effects will be controllable," he said.

Footage from state broadcaster CCTV showed queues outside local hospitals and community health centres as people waited to read consent forms and have their temperatures taken before getting the jab.

SOURCE: AFP



This photo taken on 3 January 2021 shows people waiting to receive COVID-19 coronavirus vaccines at a temporary vaccination centre in Beijing, as China races to inoculate millions before the Chinese New Year mass travel season in February. PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

US military blames Taliban for spate of Afghan assassinations

THE US military on Monday blamed the Taliban for a spate of assassinations of prominent Afghans, the first time Washington has directly accused the insurgent group of the killings.

The charge comes as the Afghan government and Taliban are due Tuesday to resume peace talks in Qatar, as both sides seek an end to the long-running conflict.

SOURCE: AFP

Shiites mourn miners killed in Pakistan attack claimed by IS

THOUSANDS of mourners from a minority Shiite community in Pakistan on Monday protested alongside the bodies of miners killed in an attack claimed by the Islamic State group.

The 10 miners were kidnapped before dawn on Sunday as they slept near the remote coal mine in the southwestern mountainous Machh area -- 60 kilometres southeast of Quetta city, local government official Abid Saleem said.

SOURCE: AFP

Japan's traffic accident deaths drop to record low in 2020

JAPAN'S traffic deaths dropped to a record low of 2,839 in 2020, falling below 3,000 for the first time since comparable data became available in 1948, the National Police Agency said Monday.

The number of fatalities decreased by 376 from the previous year, partly due to strengthened traffic regulations and enhanced safety performance of vehicles, the agency said. The figure stood at nearly one-sixth its peak of 16,765 in 1970.

SOURCE: KYODO

Phone Myint Kyaw wins Piston Open 8 Ball Championship

MYANMAR'S 8 Ball and 9 Ball professional player Phone Myint Kyaw (alias) Ko Ar Ti won the Ai Ke Hotel — Piston Open 8 Ball Championship in Si Hong, China by beating women Chinese 8 Ball Champion Lui Xia Zhi in the final game of the tourney on 3 January 2021.

In the final, Phone Myint Kyaw started the game full of concentration and his efforts proved the big 10-4 win over Lui Xia Zhi.

In the round of 16, Phone Myint Kyaw beat Chinese player Bao Zhi Chao.

Next in the Quarterfinal or Round of 8, the Myanmar player defeated another Chinese player Ma Yang by 10-5.

In the semifinal, Phone Myint Kyaw made a win over Zheng Xiao Huai by 10-7 to reach the final.

Upon his sweet victory, the 26-year-old Myanmar professional 8 Ball player has expressed his favourite memories along with the tourney.

"In the new year 2021, this month's competition has started with the first prize. This time, I did not lose in the final. In the semifinals, I defeated the Chinese national team player by 10:7, and in the final, I played against Chinese women's player in the final.

"Thank you very much for your support and love you all my beloved fans from Myanmar," said Phone Myint Kyaw.

For the win, Phone Myint Kyaw achieved 50,000 Yuan for the first prize of the Championship. —Lynn Thit (Tgi) ■



Phone Myint Kyaw (left) receives first prize award for winning the Piston Open 8 Ball Championship in Si Hong, China on 3 January 2021. **PHOTO: KO AR TI FACEBOOK PAGE**

Badminton: Japan's world No. 1 Momota tests positive for coronavirus

TOKYO — Men's world No. 1 badminton player Kento Momota has tested positive for the novel coronavirus, but has exhibited no symptoms, the Nippon Badminton Association announced Sunday. Momota and the rest of the Japan national team assembled at Tokyo's National Training Centre on Saturday ahead of two weeks of tournaments in Thai-

land starting from Jan. 12.

The delegation underwent polymerase chain reaction testing at Narita airport prior to its planned departure on Sunday. Although no other members of the delegation tested positive, the federation cancelled the trip.

Last January, Momota opened what was to be the Olympic year with a victory at the Ma-

aysia Masters. Early the next morning, however, he suffered injuries when the van he was riding in was involved in a fatal crash. He did not return to competition until Japan's national championships in December, when he won his third straight men's singles title. The Yonex Thailand Open was to be his first competition abroad in a year.—Kyodo News ■



Kento Momota. **PHOTO: KYODO**

Chelsea collapse leaves Lampard testing Abramovich's patience

LONDON (United Kingdom) — Frank Lampard knows the demands of being a Chelsea manager under Roman Abramovich more than most having played for nine different coaches during his playing career at Stamford Bridge.

Now Lampard is the man in the firing line after Sunday's 3-1 defeat to Manchester City capped a run of one win in six games that looks to have extinguished any hope of a Premier League title challenge.

Much more was expected of the Blues after a £220 million (\$300 million) spending spree in the transfer market at a time when most of European football's major powers were scaling back due to the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

After bankrolling the purchases of Kai Havertz, Timo Werner, Hakim Ziyech, Ben Chilwell and Edouard Mendy, Abramovich will have expected more than Chelsea's position of eighth in the table nearly halfway through the season. —AFP ■

Leicester can upset Premier League established order, says Rodgers



Leicester City's Northern Irish manager Brendan Rodgers (R) shakes hands with Leicester City's Turkish defender Caglar Soyuncu (L) after the English Premier League football match between Newcastle United and Leicester City at St James' Park in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, north east England on January 3, 2021. Leicester won the game 2-1. **PHOTO: AFP**

LONDON (United Kingdom) — Leicester have the potential to disrupt the dominance of the 'Big Six' in the Premier League, says Foxes manager Brendan Rodgers.

The Northern Irishman's side lie third in the table after beating Newcastle 2-1 on Sunday.

Leicester -- who in 2016 became the only club from outside the 'Big Six' to win the league title since 1995 -- are a point behind leaders Liverpool, who visit Southampton later on Monday, and second-placed Manchester United.

Leicester have played a game more than several of their rivals in a wide-open title race, with just seven points separating Liverpool and United from West

Ham in 10th.

By comparison, Liverpool held a 27-point advantage over the team in 10th place after 16 games last season, as did Manchester City at a similar stage in the 2017-18 campaign.

Rodgers says that while Leicester may be unable to compete financially with the biggest clubs, they can make their presence felt on the pitch.

"We want to be a team that, year on year, can get European football," said Rodgers.

"Our job is, can we disrupt the hierarchy? We might not financially - we don't have the finances to go and get that £70 million (\$96 million), £80m, £90m player -- but we can in a football way." —AFP ■