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Khuepra area near Dimawhso Township expected to become tourist attraction



Development plan is underway to make Khuepra (local name) or Shwe Taungtan area 'tourist attraction'. PHOTO: KO SAI (LOIKAW)

LOCAL authorities are planning to develop Khuepra (local name) or Shwe Taungtan area into a tourist attraction area.

With abundant natural beauties, the area is located at 35 miles near Dimawhso Township in Kayah State.

U Lin Zaw Htut, the officer of the Directorate of Hotels and

Tourism in Kayah State, said, "This area has potentials to become a tourism zone with the cultivation of coffee and avocado plants in this area."

Khuepra or Shwe Taungtan is situated at 5,840-ft altitude and its adjacent mountain, Sinphyutaung, is with about 5,100-ft height.

The nearby forest reserves

are the water resources for Kayah State.

"Some Kayan migrants have returned to home from Thailand due to COVID-19 crisis in the Kingdom. They have experiences in the tourism sector. We have proposed to the Kayah State government to set up a village for them. The village will be designed into a site

of community-based tourism with agricultural projects," the officer said.

Mountainous and scenic views, terrace farms, wooden houses and bungalows atop the mountains can be seen in Shwe Taungtan area, while the visitors are enjoying traditional foods.—Ko Sai (Loikaw)

(Translated by Aung Khin)

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523 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 13 January, total figure rises to 132,260

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 132,260 after 523 new cases were reported on 13 January 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these 132,260 confirmed cases, 2,902 died, 115,621 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Updated at 8 pm, 13 January 2021

Total Cases

132,260

New Cases

523

Total Death Tally

2,902

Discharged from Hospital

115,621

Daily death toll until 8 pm 13-1-2021

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Ministry of Health and Sports

Announcement on contribution of cash donation towards COVID Vaccination Fund

- THE people who want to contribute cash donation for the purchase of vaccines, can donate to the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund at Myanmar Currency Account No. OA 013733 of Myanma Economic Bank (Nay Pyi Taw) by using the following methods:
 - Cash contribution can be made at Myanma Economic Bank (Nay Pyi Taw), branches of State-owned banks and private banks.
 - Cash contribution can be made with the Account Transfer method from other saving accounts of state-owned banks and private banks.
 - The donation via Mobile Banking/ Mobile Wallet can be made through Mobile Apps of their respective service Provider/private banks.
 - The donation via MPU Card (ATM Card) can be made through MPU.
 - The further information will be announced later for the well-wishers to donate safely via Over-the-Counter which links with MPU Debit/Credit cards, local/foreign Visa/Master Credit cards at the Website of the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry.
- The people who want to contribute cash donation for the purchase of vaccines can donate to the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund at Foreign Currency Account No. EDC 600012 of Myanma Economic Bank (Nay Pyi Taw) by using the following methods:
 - Any type of foreign currency can be directly donated via all the branches of Myanma Economic banks which received MC and AD licences.
 - Cash contribution can be made with the Account Transfer method from foreign currency accounts opened at the branches of Myanma Economic Bank.
 - Cash contribution can be made via the private and foreign banks by using SWIFT Code-MYEBMMMY together with the expression of Donation to COVID-19 Vaccination Fund (Account EDC 600012) Myanma Economic Bank.
 - If there is no direct communication between Myanma Economic Bank and the foreign banks for cash contribution by using the above — mentioned SWIFT Code and Donation to COVID-19 Vaccination Fund (Account EDC 600012) Myanma Economic Bank, the cash contribution can be made via the following foreign bank partners of Myanma Economic Bank:

Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp (Tokyo)	Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi UFJ (Tokyo)
Mizuho Bank (Tokyo)	Bangkok Bank (Bangkok)
Siam Commercial Bank (Bangkok)	Krung Thai Bank (Bangkok)
Thanachart Bank (Bangkok)	ICBC Bank (China)
OCBC Wing Hang Bank (Shanghai)	China Construction Bank (China)
Sonali Bank (Bangladesh)	AB Bank (Bangladesh)

- For the records, the donors should send their names, phone numbers and addresses in full and other pieces of evidence of cash contribution to the e-mail — treasury05@365mopfi.gov.mm, treasury10@365mopfi.gov.mm (or) Viber-09-251182042 and 09-420788851.
- Those who want to donate in person and in virtual system in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Mandalay can contact the following persons:

Nay Pyi Taw	Yangon	Mandalay
Daw Si Si Pyone Director-General Treasury Department 067-3410156 09-450455237	U Min Thu Managing Director Myanma Agricultural Development Bank 01-8391342 01-8391072	U Tun Tun Aung Director Internal Revenue Department 02-4035916
Daw Yi Yi Khaing Deputy Director-General Treasury Department 067-3410158 09-254558424		

UOB Bank (Singapore)	OCBC Bank (Singapore)
DBS Bank (Singapore)	May Bank (Singapore/Kuala Lumpur)

- The cash donated to COVID-19 vaccination Fund is exempted from tax according to the Income Tax Law.

Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry



167 Myanmar returnees brought back home from Malaysia by 43rd relief flight

A relief flight of Myanmar Airways International landed at Yangon International Airport yesterday, carrying 167 nationals back

Returnees are seen going through immigration process at the Yangon International Airport yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

home from Malaysia.

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, the Ministry of Health and Sports and the Yangon Region government arranged 14-day quarantine at specific places or designated hotels, followed by the 7-day home quarantine.

In accordance with the instructions of the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, the Myanmar Embassy in Kuala Lumpur is cooperating with the relevant organizations in Malaysia for the repatriation of citizens after verifying the nationality.

Myanmar has organized a total of 43 relief flights to bring Myanmar back home until now. —MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Announcement on fund establishment to purchase COVID-19 vaccines

- The National-Level Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) on 30-12-2020 formed a Fund Management Sub-committee on the Purchase of COVID-19 Vaccines. The sub-committee has opened the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund at the Myanma Economic Bank in Nay Pyi Taw as follows:
 - Fund for purchase of COVID-19 vaccines (Foreign Currency Account No. EDC 600012). The bank account will be initially deposited with USD250 million, equivalent to about K338 billion from State-funding.
 - Fund for purchase of COVID-19 vaccines (Myanmar Currency Account No. OA 013733). The bank account is initially deposited K1 billion (K1,000 million) from State-funding.
- Therefore, organizations and people (local/ foreign countries) who want to contribute cash donation for the purchase of vaccines, can donate any type of foreign currency to the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund (Foreign Currency Account No. EDC 600012) at the Myanma Economic Bank (Nay Pyi Taw), and can donate Myanmar Kyat to the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund (Myanmar Currency Account No. OA 013733).
- The potential well-wishers can contact the following phone numbers:
 - Director-General (067 3410156)
 - Treasury Department (067 3410158)

Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry

“People are the key”

COVID-19 prevention guidelines to be applied in phase-by-phase reopening of Bagan pagodas

UNION Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko looked into preparations for reopening temples and pagodas in Bagan cultural zone in line with COVID-19 prevention guidelines.

At the Htilominlo and Ananda temples, the Union Minister and party inspected preparations for COVID-19 preventive measures, the on-line registration system for the visitors, installation of medical test equipment, auto counting system and coordination of local authorities and board of trustees from Shwezigon, Bu

Phaya, Alotawpyae, Myazedi and Shwesantaw pagodas.

The management committee in NyaungU Township will publish updated information about Bagan area through websites and other online platforms.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Union Minister Thura U Aung Ko coordinates the preparations for reopening Bagan temples and pagodas under COVID guidelines on 13 January. **PHOTO: MNA**



The Kayin National Flag Hoisting Ceremony was held to commemorate the Kayin New Year Day on 13 January 2021. **PHOTO: THI THI MIN**

Kayin New Year Day celebrated in Yangon east district

THE Kayin Literature and Culture Committee (Yangon East District) held the Kayin National Flag Hoisting Ceremony in commemoration of 2760 Kayin Era, Kayin New Year, in accordance with the COVID-19 protection directives from the Ministry of Health and Sports yesterday morning in Yangon.

At the ceremony, Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee member Pado Dr Saw Tun Aung Myint hoisted the Kayin national flag and Rakhine Ethnic Affairs Minister for the Yangon Region government U Zaw Aye Maung and an offi-

cial struck Mingala Hpassi (frog drum).

Those present at the ceremony saluted the Flag of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Kayin national flag and the ceremony also included the Kayin traditional music.

The ceremony was held for the limited number of people in accordance with the COVID-19 rules, and it was broadcast live on Facebook pages such as Yangon Eastern Karen New Year Page and LZaw Nan.—Thi Thi Min

(Translated by Ei Phyu Phyu Aung)

Many tourists visit Kimmon Chone Beach in Thayetchaung Township, Dawei

THE number of tourists visiting Kimmon Chone beach in Thayetchaung Township in Taninthayi Region has been increasing since the very beginning of January.

“This beach has only been popular for about two months. These days, there is a lot of traffic. This beach is long and clear and good for swimming. Large shady trees grow along the beach so you can swim and rest for a while,” said a visitor from Myeik.

The beach is also consid-

ered to be a tourist destination not only for local tourists but also for international tourists. The natural rock formations and the mermaid statue are good places to take a souvenir photo at the beautiful sandy beach with She-Oaks.

“Coming to this beach also provides fresh air and free mind. It is a moment of freedom from the oppressive city life,” said a male visitor to the beach.

The beach is located in Thayetchaung Township,

about 92 miles far from Myeik. It takes about two and a half hours drive and can be reached with the help of sign boards that direct to the beach. For those who want to cook fresh seafood at the beach, there are fishing boats nearby which sell fresh seafood and the beach can be turned into the party to celebrate birthday or any other special day.—Myint Oo (Myeik)

(Translated by Ei Phyu Phyu Aung)



Visitors are seen enjoying at the Kimmon Chone Beach. **PHOTO: MYINT OO (MYEIK)**

For the economic recovery of the country

The government has implemented the short-term plan of CERP to relieve the impacts of COVID-19. In addition to the relief plan, the country was required to adopt wider policies for the economic recovery of the country. The Myanmar Economic Recovery and Reform Plan (MERRP) has been drafted to solve economic problems. Among the mid-term projects of the plan, the works with highest recovery opportunities will be prioritized. The MERRP emphasizes on the economic sector, and the implementation of works in the plan could help the country to reach the objectives of Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan.

(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)



MoHS conducts first 'tabletop exercise' for COVID-19 vaccination programme



Union Minister Dr Myint Htwe coordinates the discussions to conduct pieces of training for health workers in COVID vaccination, on 13 January. **PHOTO: MNA**

UNION Minister for Health and Sports Dr Myint Htwe led the first 'tabletop exercise' on 12 January, with the discussion about preparations for the countrywide COVID-19 vaccination

programme in Myanmar.

At the meeting, the Union Minister explained the reason for this exercise which is crucial for any major programme in public healthcare.

He also discussed different schedules of vaccination depending on available brand, type and amount of the vaccine.

The government will conduct the 'tabletop exercise' for

three times at the national level and one time at least at the sub-national levels ahead of vaccination against COVID-19 in the country.

Director Dr Htar Htar Linn from the Public Health Department and the respective working groups reported on the expected amount of vaccine in each time, people with 65-year old and above as prioritized groups and storage temperature of the vaccine from normal lower temperatures to ultra-low freezing temperatures, coordination with the relevant ministries to distribute the vaccines by roads or by air within 24 hours, registration of people for vaccination by using the version 2 of the District Health Information Software, public information about vaccination programmes, surveillance of adverse event following

immunization and the overall expected budget for vaccination programme and effective implementation of the plans.

The Union Minister then coordinated the discussions and made suggestions about conducting training for health workers in COVID-19 vaccination, and exchanging information about the vaccine among health officials.

The first 'tabletop exercise' was taken part by the Deputy Minister, the permanent secretary, the director-general and the deputy directors-general from the departments of Public Health and Medical Services, the members of COVAX National Coordinating Committee and the COVAX National Technical Working Group and the officials of vaccination project.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Kayin New Year celebrated in Hpa-an

THE 2760 Kayin New Year was celebrated at the Kayin State government office in Hpa-an Township in Kayin State yesterday morning.

Firstly, the Kayin national flag hoisting ceremony was held with the traditional sound of a buffalo horn, and the strike of Kayin Hpasi at 6 am. The Kayin State Hluttaw Speaker U Saw Chit Khin raised the national flag to the top of the pillar while the Kayin national anthem was being sung together.

Those present at the ceremony saluted the Kayin national

flag, and the master of the ceremony explained the history of the symbolic Kayin national flag.

At the new year celebration ceremony, the attendees saluted the flag of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, and they paid tribute to General Aung San and the fallen martyr leaders.

After the reading of the messages from the State Counsellor and the Kayin State Chief Minister, the Kayin youths presented the origin of the Kayin National New Year in both Po Kayin, Sakaw Kayin and Myanmar languages and sang the song "Unity is



The 2760 Kayin New Year was celebrated at the Kayin State government office in Hpa-an on 13 January. **PHOTO: SAW MYO MIN THEIN (IPRD)**

strength". After the ceremony, the Speaker of the State Hluttaw and Cabinet Ministers visited the

homes of prominent Kayin grandparents who had served in the state and presented them with

New Year's gifts.—Saw Myo Min Thein (IPRD) *(Translated by Ei Phyu Phyu Aung)*

Stop COVID-19 Yellow Campaign poster erected in downtown Yangon

The Stop COVID-19 Yellow Campaign was conducted in front of Tourist Burma building on Sule Pagoda Road in Yangon, erecting a poster to raise public awareness on COVID-19 disease, yesterday.

Under the theme 'New Normal, New Living, New Yangon', the campaign was jointly organized by the Yangon Region government, the Yangon Region Transport Authority, and the Public Health Department of Yangon Region.

Those present at the event were Yangon Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein, Minister for Social Affairs U Naing Ngan Lin and officials, officers from



Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein unveils the 'Stop COVID-19 Yellow Campaign' poster on 13 January. **PHOTO: SOE MYINT AUNG**

the Public Health and Medical Services Department of Yangon Region, Secretary of YCDC Daw

Hlaing Maw Oo and Joint-Secretary U Than and committee members and YRTA officials.

The campaign aims to urge the public to wear masks, social distancing and reminding each

other about the risk of pandemic.—Soe Myint Aung
(Translated by Aung Khin)



Myanmar orchids mainly sold online in Kyaukpyu

AS the market demand of Myanmar orchids (Thazin flower) is declining due to the lack of ceremonial events amid COVID-19 pandemic, the commercial producers have opted

for an online platform in selling the flowers.

“During the huge bloom of flowers in the cold season, we could sell around 200 shoots each day and earn about K200,000,”

said U Than Hlaing, a commercial producer of Thazin flower in Kyaukpyu Township in Rakhine State.

The price of Thazin flower has decreased from K1,000 per shoot to K7,00 this season, and new markets are being searched for the flowers in nearby townships of Taungup and Yambye.

Thazin is an orchid species, and it usually blooms in Nadaw and Pyatho months. Myanmar regards it as a royal flower. It is donated to Buddha image, and women love to put Thazin flowers on their hair.—Tin Tun OO, Phyo Wai Lin (IPRD)



Thazin is an orchid species, and it usually blooms in Nadaw and Pyatho months. **PHOTO: PHYO WAI LIN (IPRD)**



Most of Myanmar women regard Thazin as a royal flower. **PHOTO: PHYO WAI LIN (IPRD)**



Waziyar cinema on Bogyoke Aung San Road in Yangon is seen, on 13 January, with decorations to mark the 100th Anniversary of Myanmar Film Industry. **PHOTO: SHWE INN THAR KHIN MAUNG WIN**

Himalayan Griffon vulture found in Peinzalote in Bago Region

A Himalayan Griffon vulture was captured in a yard of a resident in Myoma (1) Quarter, Peinzalote Town, Nyaunglebin Township, Bago Region (East) at around 10:30 am on 11 January, and the vulture had been looked after, said Ma Naw Bway Hpaw, a bird lover living in the town.

“This bird was injured by something. It no longer could fly and fell into the yard, that’s why we captured it to look after it. We feed it with fishes as food,” she said. Dr Thiri Dewi Aung, Executive Director of the Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association, said that the Himalayan Griffon vulture is not endemic to Myanmar; it is a winter migratory species

from northern India.

Residents and bird lovers said that forest officials and veterinarians should visit the town to inspect the bird. They said they want the bird to be released as soon as it can fly again and a safe condition is reached. The Forest Department has announced that if a per-

son finds an injured migratory bird or if a migratory bird is captured, the person should contact the nearest Forest Department and the Nay Pyi Taw Environmental and Wildlife Conservation Division.—Peinzalote Thein Nyunt

(Translated by Maung Maung Swe)



A Himalayan Griffon vulture, a winter migratory species, is being looked after. **PHOTO: PEINZALOTE THEIN NYUNT**

Nearly 50 Inwa-era pagodas in Kyaukpadaung Township need to be restored

MANY ancient pagodas of the Inwa period in Yaysone Village, Kyaukpadaung Township, Mandalay Region are in a state of disrepair, and nearly 50 pagodas still need to be restored, according to residents.

Some ancient pagodas in the village are being restored by the Department of Archaeology and National Museum (Bagan Branch) by using State Funds,

and some are being restored as before by using funds from donors.

“By observing situations of bricks of these pagodas and the structure of the pagodas, officials at the department said that the pagodas were built during the Inwa era. All restoration works are being carried out only under the supervision of the department,” said U Win Bo, a village

elder.

There are 94 ancient pagodas in Yaysone Village. With collective public donations, 24 ancient pagodas were restored and, other 21 pagodas were repaired by using State Funds. So, a total of 45 ancient pagodas have been repaired.

Yaysone Village-tract Administrator U Kyaw Win said, “They focus on getting original ancient style in restoring the an-



Almost 50 Inwa-era pagodas are yet to be restored in Kyaukpadaung Township. **PHOTO: U NAY AUNG**



Inwa-era Buddha images are seen. **PHOTO: U NAY AUNG**



Inwa-era pagodas are under restoration. **PHOTO: U NAY AUNG**

cient pagodas. If donors want to repair the ancient pagodas, they have to seek permission from the Department of Archeology and

National Museum.” —Ko Nay (Kyaukpadaung)

(Translated by

Maung Maung Swe)

Myanma Thanaka to be conserved as cultural value, heritage

ALL the elderly and young love applying Thanaka on their cheeks. There is no woman who does not like Thanaka. Even with the arrival of modern beauty products, Thanaka remains the reigning cosmetic of choice among women and children.

Features

Thanaka can cool the skin, provide protection from the sun, and its fragrance make the people fresh. The courtiers and female farmers wear Thanaka. Most of the Myanmar girls apply Thanaka after bathing, or they wear it whenever they go to pagodas or religious occasions.

Effects of Thanaka

Thanaka can protect the human body from heat-related problems. Those working under direct sunlight can use Thanaka as sun protection. The fragrance of Thanaka can also cure the headache, dull pain, neck pain and nasal congestion. If the women suffer from the menses, they can apply Thanaka with the turmeric. If they have high body temperature, they can take liquid Thanaka with the nectar of Mesua



The plants are grown in Ayartaw township with more than 100,000 acres and the township boasts 75 percent of Thanaka plantation of the country. **PHOTO: ZEYAR HTET (MINBU)**

Ferrea. If the men suffer from the headache, dull pain, toothache and blurred vision due to urinary disease, they can take liquid Thanaka by grinding the root of Thanaka.

Donation to Lord Buddha

Although Myanmar girls grind Thanaka in longitudinal, the courtiers grind in a vertical way to get the smoother Thanaka paste. Moreover, the girls dry Thanaka to

make powder. There is a tradition in the middle part of Myanmar to offer the Thanaka to the Buddha at the bonfire. Such culture emerged from the Bagan era.

Usefulness of Thanaka

Thanaka is hard and in yellow colour. The dried Thanaka weighs 61 pound per cubic foot. Therefore, the Thanaka is used as a driving lever in grinding oil

or paddy, in carving industry and as measuring tools.

Companion plants

The Thanaka is called *Limonia acidissima* in the botanical term, including in Rutaceae Family and is in the same group with *Aegle marmelos*, orange, lemon, lime and *clausena*. Thanaka trees can grow together with *Terminalia oliveri*, *Tectona Hamiltonian*, *Aca-*

cia leucophloea, Eastern gooseberry, *Acacia catechu*, *Diospyros burmanica* and so on. The stem of the tree is about 3ft.

Thanaka plantation

Although Thanaka trees can be seen across the nation, they are mostly grown in the country's central dry zone. The plants are grown in Ayartaw township with more than 100,000 acres and the township boasts 75 per cent of Thanaka plantation of the country. The Thanaka plantation is also expanded in Pakokku, Yes-aygo, Shwebo, Butalin, Yinmabin, Monywa, Myinmu and Pauk townships.

Working together for conservation

Therefore, the people should work together to ensure that Myanmar's Thanaka, which has been preserved as a traditional culture since the time of the ancient Myanmar Kings, exists as a gift and a symbol of Myanmar and remains a part of Myanmar's cultural heritage. —U Win Naing (Minbu, IPRD), Zeyar Htet (Minbu)

(Translated by Khine Thazin Han)

Domestic fish industry flounders due to COVID-19 pandemic

By Nyein Nyein

THE COVID-19 impacts resulted in less fish consumption, according to the Myanmar Fisheries Federation (MFF).

The coronavirus pandemic shut down the wedding, donation events, festivities and restaurants. It also poses difficulties in transportation. The restrictions caused a slump in fish consumption in the local market. Moreover, the individual income loses from heightened COVID-19 measures such as long-term restraining order. The fish consumption in

domestic market sharply fell.

“Local fish consumption is on the decline. The local consumption is heavily reliant on the restaurants, religious events, tourism industry, donation, festivities and wedding. Nevertheless, they are closed due to the COVID-19 restrictions. The disruption in the logistic sector added another reason,” MFF General Secretary U Win Kyaing affirmed.

Additionally, the market is bearish. The fish industry is moving a downward trend. The rohu price dropped by K500 per viss (a viss equals 1.6kg)

from about K1,300 a viss. Similarly, the cost of river catfish slipped to K300 from K500 per viss, freshwater pomfret price also sharply fell from K700 to K200 per viss, MFF stated.

Last 6 January 2021, the Ministry of Commerce discussed to promote local fish consumption through video conferencing. At the virtual event, Union Minister Dr Than Myint for Commerce delivered a message to encourage local fish consumption triggered by the COVID-19 impacts. He urged those stakeholders in the fish industry to exert concerted efforts to boost fish con-

sumption and tackle logistic sector problems.

The consumers in lower Myanmar; Ayeyawady, Yangon, Taninthayi and Mon and Rakhine, states highly demand the fish and fish production also has risen. Nevertheless, people in central and upper Myanmar, where there is small fish production, have less fish consumption. Therefore, the fish are required to be sent to those regions, U Win Kyaing elaborated.

“People in upper Myanmar and mountain regions experience high price of fish. Furthermore, fish quality de-

clined due to transportation delays.

“We need better logistics and supply chain management and faster distribution for the fish to reach Upper Myanmar at a fair price. This way, the local fish market can be expanded,” he added.

At present, breeders are floundering due to the COVID-19 impacts and decrease in price. Typically, Myanmar has daily consumption of about 600,000 visses of farmed fish. The local fish consumption plunged to 60-65 per cent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Chinese demand drives plum prices up

PLUMS from Singaing and Patheingyi townships are fetching a good price during plentiful harvest period on the back of China’s strong demand, growers said.

The maximum price of the best quality plums in the Muse border market is 40-50 Yuan per 16-kg box, while fair quality plums are priced 25-40 Yuan per box.

“The plums cannot be shipped to China due to the COVID-19 crisis in China during a year-ago period. This year, plum growers reaped fruitful results such as high yield, high demand and reasonable price. The order will grow more prominent during the Chinese New Year in February 2021,” said a grower U Myint Swe from Setawlay village from Patheingyi Township.

Myanmar’s local product

plums are mainly exported to China. Additionally, it is sold to local retailers and jam businesses. The growers also expect more export market potentials.

The plums are mainly delivered to lower Myanmar, including Yangon. The prevailing price is K6,000-7,000 per box, Naymahtiaung plum trading business in Singaing Township stated.

Earlier, plum growers heavily relied on festivals and religious events. This year, they turn to the retail market instead. The COVID-19 pandemic shut down Shwesettaw Pagoda festival and other events such as Nat Pwe (spiritual rituals), said growers from Minbu area.

The retail sales of plums from Laybin village in Minbu town are pretty good due to its taste.



Myanmar’s local product plums are mainly exported to China. Additionally, it is sold to local retailers and jam businesses. PHOTO: MIN HTET AUNG/ ZAYYATU

“I previously sent plums to shops displayed at Shwesettaw Pagoda festival and other events. I retail them at present. Some even purchase them at our farms. I have 200 plum trees in my farm and can earn about K400,000 a month,” said Ma

Khet Khet Wai, a plum owner explained.

The plum prices move in the range of K800-1,500 per pyi (2.13kg) in the domestic market.

The plums do not have other input costs. The plums are

ripe in December, and it can be harvested up to March-end, the growers said. The plums are famous local products for Shwesettaw pilgrims, a grower from Minbu said. —Min Htet Aung/ Zayyatu

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Coriander seeds selling well amid strong demand of Bangladesh, Pakistan



PHOTO: SUPPLIED

MYANMAR local spice coriander seeds are fetching high price during the early harvest season of January on the back of spike demand by Bangladesh and Pakistan, according to Mandalay traders.

The coriander seeds can be quickly grown, and the cultivation cost is not high. It is a lucrative agricultural crop. Bangladesh yearly purchases the seeds for making spice powder. This year, Pakistan traders are also buying them. The opening price touches a high of K14,500 per

8-viss basket (a viss equals 1.6 kg), Soe Win Myint depot stated.

“The selling price of coriander seeds rose from K10,000 registered a year-ago period. The strong demand from Bangladesh and Pakistan drove the price up to K14,500 per basket. The coriander seeds are used as a spice in foreign countries. Local masala businesses also demand it.

Myanmar spices such as coriander seed, fennel seed and black fennel seed have grasped foreign market share, Soe Win

Myint depot owner said.

The price of fennel seeds stands at K2,500 per viss, while the cost of black fennel seeds reached a record-high of K8,000 per viss.

Growing coriander seeds start in October. That winter crop is harvest in January. Growers in Mandalay and Magway regions mainly target those spices for the export market. — Min Htet Aung (Mandalay sub-printing house)

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Curb coronavirus spread before vaccination

WHILE witnessing unprecedented efforts by the Union Government to protect the people against COVID-19 with vaccines, we have found that the government is doing preparations these days to allow visitors to pagodas with health guidelines.

This is a right step towards revitalizing the travel sector which has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report of the inspection tour made by the Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko to some pagodas in Bagan yesterday came as a beacon of hope for revitalizing the travel sector.

According to the report, the pagodas in Bagan, the prominent attraction for local and foreign travellers, are now better prepared to welcome visitors when the travellers are allowed in line with the health guidelines depending on the progress of the containment on coronavirus infection in our country to ensure that our country's economy recovers quickly.

The number of people who can be handled by the space at a pagoda and people's participation in following health guidelines would be taken into consideration.

We would like to remind all of the people and authorities that the risk of spreading coronavirus or any other infectious disease is less when visitors are restricted.

We would like to remind all of the people and authorities that the risk of spreading coronavirus or any other infectious disease is less when visitors are restricted.

The pandemic would wind down in the coming months when the vaccinations begin in our country.

But, the vaccines have not yet arrived, so we need to double down on protection protocols.

We must revitalize our tourism industry with safe and responsible COVID-19 services, which can guarantee the highest levels of safety from our tourism industry, and people are urged to strictly follow the health and safety guidelines.

As the COVID-19 crisis continues, we still need to continue to take all necessary measures - COVID appropriate behavior by one and all - masks, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, physical distancing - and core public health measures by the authorities - detect, test, trace, isolate and treat - to prevent the virus from spreading and causing more infections and deaths.

Vaccines are on the way, but most of us have months to wait before we can get the shots.

Dear citizens, follow the health guidelines and the rules to curb the spread of the coronavirus until we see a light at the end of the tunnel and emerge from it.

Step up surveillance of emerging coronavirus variants, WHO urges

EFFORTS should be stepped up to quickly identify and study emerging variants of the COVID-19-causing SARS-CoV-2 virus, UN World Health Organization (WHO) scientists said on Tuesday.

Alongside monitoring, virus and serum samples should be shared via globally agreed mechanisms so that critical research can be promptly initiated each time, according to the agency.

"Our collective goal is to get ahead of the game and have a global mechanism to quickly identify and study variants of concern and understand their implications for disease control efforts," said Ana Maria Hena Restrepo, Head of WHO's R&D Blueprint.

She was speaking at a virtual meeting of scientists from around



Laboratory technicians work at a viral zoonoses research centre in Bangkok, Thailand. PHOTO: WHO/PHUTPHENG

the globe, convened by the UN health agency, attended by over 1,750 experts from 124 countries.

Participants noted the importance of research to detect and understand early on the potential

impact of emerging variants on diagnostics, treatments and vaccines, and highlighted the importance of integrating new SARS-CoV-2 variants research into the global research and innovation

agenda, according to WHO.

Normal for viruses to mutate It is normal for viruses to mutate, but the more the SARS-CoV-2 virus spreads, the more opportunities it has to change. High levels of

transmission mean emergence of more variants should be expected, according to WHO.

Of the significant variants reported so far, some are associated with increases in transmissibility but not disease severity. Research is ongoing to address whether the changes impact public health tools and measures.

"So far an astounding 350,000 sequences have been publicly shared, but most come from just a handful of countries. Improving the geographic coverage of sequencing is critical for the world to have eyes and ears on changes to the virus," said Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO Technical Lead on COVID-19.

New variants of the coronavirus have been detected in the UK, South Africa and Japan, which

appear to be more transmissible, although health officials have said that there is no evidence it is more deadly, or that it would not respond in the same way to the vaccines cleared for emergency use.

Information sharing critical Genomic sequencing has been critical in identifying and responding to new variants, and increasing sequencing capacity across the world is a priority research area for WHO.

Better surveillance and laboratory capacity to monitor strains of concern needs to be accompanied by prompt sharing of virus and serum samples via globally agreed mechanisms so that critical research can be promptly initiated each time, the agency added.

SOURCE: UN News

New COVID-19 variants

INFORMATION about the characteristics of these variants is rapidly emerging. Scientists are working to learn more about how easily they might spread, whether they could cause more severe illness, and whether currently authorized vaccines will protect people against them. At this time, there is no evidence that these variants cause more severe illness or increased risk of death.

Viruses constantly change through mutation, and new variants of a virus are expected to occur over time. Sometimes new variants emerge and disappear.

Other times, new variants emerge and persist. Multiple variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 have been documented in the United States and globally during this pandemic.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is a type of coronavirus, a large family of viruses. Coronaviruses are named for the crown-like spikes on their surfaces. Scientists monitor changes in the virus, including changes to the spikes on the surface of the virus. These studies, including genetic analyses of the virus, are helping us understand how changes to the virus might affect

how it spreads and what happens to people who are infected with it.

Multiple COVID-19 variants are circulating globally. In the United Kingdom (UK), a new variant has emerged with an unusually large number of mutations. This variant seems to spread more easily and quickly than other variants. Currently, there is no evidence that it causes more severe illness or increased risk of death. This variant was first detected in September 2020 and is now highly prevalent in London and southeast England. It has since been detected in numerous countries around the world,

including the United States and Canada.

In South Africa, another variant has emerged independently of the variant detected in the UK. This variant, originally detected in early October, shares some mutations with the variant detected in the UK. There have been cases caused by this variant outside of South Africa. This variant seems to spread more easily and quickly than other variants. Currently, there is no evidence that it causes more severe illness or increased risk of death.

Another variant recently emerged in Nigeria. CDC also is monitoring this strain but, at this time, there is no evidence to indicate this variant is causing

more severe illness or increased spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria.

What we do not know Scientists are working to learn more about these variants, and more studies are needed to understand:

- How widely these new variants have spread
- How the new variants differ
- How the disease caused by these new variants differs from the disease caused by other variants that are currently circulating

What it means Public health officials are studying these variants quickly to learn more to control their spread. They want to understand

whether the variants:

- Spread more easily from person to person
 - Cause milder or more severe disease in people
 - Are detected by currently available viral tests
 - Respond to medicines currently being used to treat people for COVID-19
 - Change the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines.
- There is no evidence that this is occurring, and most experts believe this is unlikely to occur because of the nature of the immune response to the virus.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Marking a decade since last polio case: WHO SEAR countries gear up for massive vaccination campaign – this time for COVID-19 virus



Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia

By Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia

ON this day in 2011, WHO South-East Asia Region reported its last case of wild poliovirus from West Bengal in India. A decade later, countries in the Region are gearing up for massive vaccination campaigns, taking lessons from polio programme, but surpassing its scale and size in a bid to end COVID-19 pandemic

"We are witnessing unprecedented efforts by Member countries to protect their vulnerable population against COVID-19 with vaccines," said Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia.

Indonesia rolled out COVID-19 vaccination today, while preparations are in full swing in India for one of the world's biggest vaccination programme beginning 16 January, and in other countries for their campaign in the coming months.

Safe and effective vaccines can be a game changer if accessible across the world and to all vulnerable population within the countries.

Vaccines will help to curtail the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they won't solve everything by themselves as initially they are

bound to be in limited supplies. As the COVID-19 crisis continues, we still need to continue to take all necessary measures - COVID appropriate behaviour by one and all - masks, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, physical distancing - and core public health measures by the authorities - detect, test, trace, isolate and treat - to prevent the virus from spreading and causing more disease and deaths

Community engagement and participation – both for continued COVID-19 appropriate behaviour and vaccination – will be critical to curtail the virus transmission.

WHO continues to work with all countries for COVID-19 vaccina-

tion planning and roll out, to have a robust National Deployment and Vaccination Plan covering all elements of planning and management needed to deliver a vaccine.

The network of surveillance officers in countries such as Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Nepal, which was the backbone of polio eradication programme, is now also in the forefront supporting coordination, preparedness and roll out of COVID-19 vaccination down to the district level.

Bringing in best practices from polio eradication, WHO has supported countries in the Region with development of operational guidelines and plans for COVID-19

vaccination; training of vaccinators; planning vaccine and logistics management; and monitoring key preparatory activities.

At the global level, the ACT-Accelerator partnership launched by WHO and partners, has supported the fastest, most coordinated, and successful global effort in history to develop tools to fight COVID-19. The vaccine pillar - COVAX - co-led by WHO, Gavi and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, aims to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines, and to guarantee fair and equitable access.

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Myanmar Daily Weather Report
 (Issued at 7:00 pm Wednesday 13 January, 2021)

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL NOON OF THE 14 January, 2021: Rain will be isolated in Nay Pyi Taw, Upper Sagaing, Mandalay, Ayeyawady Regions and Kayah State and scattered in Kachin, Shan States. Degree of certainty is (80%). Weather will be partly cloudy in the remaining Regions and States.

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

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

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 14 January, 2021: Partly cloudy.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 14 January, 2021: Partly cloudy.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 14 January, 2021: Partly cloudy.

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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.

Sino-Myanmar trade boosted as Manwain border post opened 24 hours



Myanmar primarily exports watermelon, muskmelon, rice, broken rice, green gram, sugar and other agricultural products, and it imports electrical equipment, machinery, motorcycles, motorcycle accessories, fertilizers and construction materials. **PHOTO : SALAI VEN RO HTAN (IPRD)**

THE flow of trade between China and Myanmar has improved significantly after opening Manwain border checkpoint for 24 hours, which is essential to the border trade, according to Muse-Namhkam Merchant Association.

Border authorities from both sides have agreed on opening the Muse-Manwain trading post for 24 hours on a 10-day

trial basis starting from 5 to 14 January to speed up the trade flow between the two countries delayed during the pandemic period.

"Before opening the Manwain crossing for 24 hours, more than 200 trucks with cargo entered China daily. After opening, over 400 trucks are crossing between China and Myanmar at Manwain checkpoint daily. Now,

the flow of trade is faster than earlier. The trucks that have been waiting for many days to enter China at Muse 105th Mile are also entering China these days," Muse-Namhkam Merchant Association Chairperson U Sai Nom said.

Myanmar primarily exports watermelon, muskmelon, rice, broken rice, green gram, sugar and other agricultural products,

and it imports electrical equipment, machinery, motorcycles, motorcycle accessories, fertilizers and construction materials.

"It would be better if we could open the crossing for 24 hours because it would be beneficial to the entrepreneurs and the people. The rental charges of the trucks will also drop. Also, the flow of trade will be faster. But, we need to assign the departmental staff mainly, and they will be busy during these days," said U Kyaw Myint Oo, a trader.

On the Myanmar side, the truck rental charges drop by 40 per cent. However, both counties will have to take responsibility for the truck drivers' safety and ensure that they comply with COVID-19 guidelines during the trial period.

In the trial period, the Manwain border crossing will be open for 24 hours until 14 January. Further coordination will be conducted between the two countries. The authorities will extend the opening hours or allow entry or exit for 12 hours of MST.—Salai Ven Ro Htan (IPRD)

(Translated by Hay Mar)

KBZ reopens 122 Yangon branches starting from 14 January

ACCORDING to a statement released by KBZ, Kanbawza bank will reopen its 122 Yangon branches beginning from 14 January.

The Ministry of Health and Sports released the statement in December, announcing that the pandemic will persist in the world for many years. For that reason, they must sur-

vive together with COVID-19 and strive for economic, education, health and socio-economic sectors. Otherwise, the development of the country will be delayed. Therefore, a new normal lifestyle needs to be carried out.

To access the banking service for their customers, KBZ resumed 122 Yangon branches

to continue providing customers with essential banking services during regular banking hours from 9:30 am to 3:00 pm effective 14 January 2021.

When the customers come to KBZ bank, they will need to adhere to COVID rules like washing their hands at a basin, wearing a face shield and mask as per the Ministry of Health

and Sports guidelines.

KBZ is also encouraging customers to explore contact-free digital banking services such as ATMs, KBZPay mobile wallet, KBZ iBanking and mBanking to safely manage their finances with no need to visit KBZ branches. —Thiri

(Translated by Hay Mar)

Myanmar ships seedless watermelon to Dubai for second time

By Nyein Nyein

MYANMAR exported the second shipment of its seedless watermelon weighing 20 tonnes and muskmelon weighing 200 kilos to Dubai on 14 January via sea route, according to the Myanmar Watermelon and Muskmelon Producers and Exporters Association.

"About 25 tonnes of Myan-

mar's seedless watermelons were also shipped on 11 December for the first time. It has yielded good results. We were worried about the freshness of the fruits because it took 17 days. But it was relieved now," said U Naing Win, the association chairperson.

Myanmar seedless watermelon has been planned to expand its new foreign markets to

Hong Kong, the UAE and Qatar, stated Myanmar Watermelon and Muskmelon Producers and Exporters Association.

The seedless watermelon is grown in Sagaing, Mandalay and Bago regions. The harvest season is from November to May. At present, the melons are primarily sent to China through the land border.

The COVID-19 impacts

cause difficulties in watermelon and muskmelon exports in the previous financial year. The growers and traders suffer a loss because of the drop in prices.

Last year, Myanmar exported over 600,000 tonnes of watermelon and about 150,000 tonnes of muskmelon to China, the association stated.

(Translated by Hay Mar)

MUTATION

British virus variant now in 50 countries: WHO

THE coronavirus mutation first found in Britain has now spread to 50 territories, according to the World Health Organization, while a similar South African-identified strain has now been found in 20.

The UN body also noted a third new coronavirus “variant of concern” found in Japan may impact upon immune response and needs further investigation.

“The more the SARS-CoV-2 virus spreads, the more opportunities it has to change. High levels of transmission mean that we should expect more variants to emerge,” said the WHO.

Since first being reported to the WHO on December 14, the British-identified variant VOC 202012/01 has been found in 50 countries, territories and areas, the agency said.

Test results showed the age and sex distribution was similar to that of other circulating variants, while contact tracing data revealed “higher transmissibility (secondary attack rates) where



Students at Hull University take swabs for lateral flow COVID-19 tests at the campus sports facilities on 4 January, 2021, as they return to the university. The University of Hull is a public research university in Kingston upon Hull, a city in the East Riding of Yorkshire, England **PHOTO: AFP**

the index case has the variant strain”.

The South African-identified variant 501Y.V2, first reported on December 18, has now been detected in 20 countries, territories and areas.

“From preliminary and ongoing investigations in South Africa, it is possible that the 501Y.V2 variant is more transmissible than variants circulating in South Africa previously,” the WHO weekly report said.

“Moreover, while this new variant does not appear to cause more severe illness, the observed rapid increases in case numbers has placed health systems under pressure.”

SOURCE: AFP

PRELIMINARY ISRAELI DATA

First Pfizer jab could curb infections by 50% within 14 days

FIRST data compiled from over 400,000 vaccinees that have received the BioNTech/Pfizer jab in Israel shows that the vaccine curbs infections by 50% 14 days after the first jab was administered.

A top health ministry official confirmed this to The Times of Israel on Tuesday. Re-

sults are still preliminary, and percentage drops have varied from different health providers. Clalit, Israel’s largest health provider, says the chance of being infected with coronavirus dropped by 33% two weeks after getting the vaccine. Another provider, Maccabi, said that the drop was 60%.

The cause for the discrepancy between the studies was not immediately clear.

Israel has already given a first dose of the vaccine to more than 1.5 million people, a pace Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has claimed is the world’s fastest. Netanyahu has also said all Israelis over the

age of 16 could get the vaccine by March. That also happens to be election month.

The article further states that 73% of Israelis who are over the age of 60 or who have other high-risk factors have already been vaccinated with at least one shot.

SOURCE: AFP

STRATEGY

Japan to expand virus emergency to seven more regions

JAPAN is set to expand a coronavirus state of emergency on Wednesday to seven more re-

gions including the major cities of Osaka and Kyoto, as infections surge nationwide.



Commuters wearing masks near Hakata Station in Fukuoka City, Fukuoka Prefecture, on January 13, 2021. The government plans to add Osaka, Kyoto, Hyogo Aichi, Gifu, Fukuoka and Tochigi prefectures to the current state of emergency. **PHOTO: AFP/THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN**

While the country’s outbreak remains comparatively small, with around 4,100 deaths overall, there has been a sharp spike in cases this winter and medics say hospitals are under heavy strain in the worst-affected areas.

The month-long emergency measure -- which unlike strict lockdowns elsewhere in the world carries no enforcement mechanism -- was implemented in the greater Tokyo area last week.

It asks restaurants and bars to close by 8 pm, with residents requested to avoid unnecessary outings and telework strongly encouraged.

“We want to have a declining trend in infections by February

7, by all means,” said Yasutoshi Nishimura, the minister in charge of Japan’s pandemic response, referring to the period’s planned end date.

The move, expected to be announced by Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga this evening, means that, from Thursday, 11 of the country’s 47 prefectures will be under the state of emergency -- accounting for about 60 per cent of its GDP.

They range from central Aichi, an industrial and commercial hub, to Fukuoka in the southwest and Osaka, which has reported record new cases in recent days along with neighbouring Kyoto and Hyogo prefectures.

SOURCE: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

“LEFT WITH NO CHOICE”

S.Africa police arrest thousands for not wearing masks

SOUTH African police have arrested more than 7,000 people caught without face masks in public since the end of December, the government said on Wednesday.

Officials made face coverings mandatory in May last year at the same time as they gradually eased movement restrictions imposed in March to stem coronavirus infections.

A partial lockdown was reinstated last month as the virus resurged, fuelled by a more transmissible variant. Officials at the time vowed to be more stringent in enforcing the regulations, which include an alcohol sales ban. Police Minister Bheki Cele on Wednesday said more than 20,000 people had been arrested or fined since December 29 for breaching the new rules, including 7,455 people detained for not wearing face masks.—SOURCE: AFP

THE SINOVAC AND SINOPHARM

WHO team working with Chinese vaccine producers ahead of potential emergency use: WHO director-general

THE World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has said that a WHO team in China is working with producers of the Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccines for potential emergency use listings.

“I’m pleased that a WHO team is in China currently working with producers of the Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccines to assess compliance with international quality manufacturing practices ahead of potential emergency use listing by WHO,” Tedros said at a recent media briefing.

He noted that WHO continues to ask vaccine manufacturers from around the world to move swiftly to provide necessary data that will allow the organization to consider them for emergency use listings.

SOURCE: XINHUA

EMERGENCY PROCLAMATION

Malaysian King declares state of emergency to deal with pandemic

MALAYSIAN King Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin declared a state of emergency Tuesday that could last until Aug. 1 to deal with a surge in coronavirus cases, a move that will also suspend parliament and elections, throwing a lifeline to embattled Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin.

The king consented to Muhyiddin's proposal to declare an emergency, the palace said. The measure follows the premier's announcement Monday of a tighter lockdown, including a 14-day "movement control order" from Wednesday to Jan.

26, in Kuala Lumpur and several states that are grappling with high numbers of infections.

The palace said the state of emergency could end earlier than Aug. 1 if the pandemic can be contained sooner.

"Al-Sultan Abdullah viewed that the COVID-19 pandemic is at a critical level," Ahmad Fadil Shamsudin, comptroller of the royal household, said in a statement.

Ahmad Fadil said the decision was made after Muhyiddin briefed the king on Monday on the dire situation faced by the country's health care system,

with daily infections notching four digits since November.

"I emphasize that Malaysia is open for business. In facing these challenging times, this period of emergency will give us much needed calm and stability, as well as enable us to focus on economic recovery and regeneration," Muhyiddin said in a televised address.

Under the emergency proclamation, the government can introduce laws without parliamentary approval but will require the king's consent to be enacted.

SOURCE: AFP



Pedestrians wait to cross a street in Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur on Oct. 7. PHOTO: AFP

DRASTIC ACTION

China places 5 million more under lockdown to stamp out virus cluster



A police officer stands guard at an entrance to the expressway in Shijiazhuang, capital of north China's Hebei Province, Jan. 7, 2021. Shijiazhuang started to conduct citywide nucleic acid tests covering all residents on Wednesday. The city has set up 5,011 sites to collect swab samples for the tests. PHOTO: XINHUA/YANG SHIYAO

CHINESE authorities sealed off a city of almost five million people and imposed strict travel restrictions on several others on Tuesday as they worked to quash a number of Covid-19 clusters near Beijing.

The country had largely curbed the spread of the coronavirus, which first emerged in Wuhan in late 2019, with small outbreaks swiftly snuffed out using mass testing, local lockdowns and travel restrictions.

But Hebei province in northern China has reported 560 new cases in recent weeks -- 234 of which are asymptomatic -- sparking a raft of new lockdowns and restrictions.

Residents of Langfang, a manufacturing hub around 55 kilometres south of Beijing, have been banned from leaving the city for seven days unless absolutely necessary.

"All family gatherings should be cancelled...all marriages postponed and funerals simplified until the epidemic situation has subsided," the Langfang city government said in a statement.

Officials will now rush to test all 4.9 million residents in two days, the local health bureau said, after one case was discovered in Langfang's Gu'an county.

Authorities last week launched a mass testing drive and closed transport links, schools and shops in the neighbouring city of Shijiazhuang -- the epicentre of the latest outbreak -- with its 11 million residents required to undergo two rounds of testing.

Neighbouring Xingtai, home to seven million people, has also been locked down since last Friday.

SOURCE: AFP

BRITAIN

Virus breaches 'costing lives' as police seek priority jobs

PEOPLE who flout coronavirus lockdown rules are putting lives at risk, the British government said on Tuesday, as cases surge to record highs and rumours swirl of potentially tougher restrictions.

Britain is currently in its third lockdown, with schools and non-essential shops closed, as a new strain of the virus spreads rapidly across the country.

Last week saw the country's worst daily case numbers and

death tolls since the start of the outbreak, and the government is considering even tougher rules, which could include increasing the distance people need to stay apart in public.

SOURCE: AFP

FRESH MOMENTUM

Pandemic's robot 'heroes' highlight their value at tech show

ROBOTS that helped people survive and stay safe over the past year are touting their value at the tech industry's annual extravaganza amid a pandemic which has given fresh momentum to the robotics sector.

The Consumer Electronics Show, which is being held online this year due to the global crisis, includes robots that have become "heroes" for many during the coronavirus pandemic.

Among those taking the virtual stage at CES are robot companions, concierges, cooks, delivery drones, medical assistants and those handling the perilous tasks of sanitizing workplaces and medical facilities.

Robot companions saw surging demand in recent months as pandemic lockdowns intensified problems of isolation, especially for people in senior living homes.

Amid a strict virus lockdown in France, the companion robot Cutii became a star in senior facilities.

"The pandemic completely changed our business model," said Antoine Bataille, chief executive of Cutii.

"We had envisioned Cutii at

people's homes. But today we are dealing with isolation on a collective level."

The startup based in the northern French city Roubaix delivered 30 robots for free to senior facilities during the lockdowns and used the experience to improve the technology and train its teams.

"Everything worked well. Every two weeks we would deliver software updates, which had to be done remotely. It's like

what Tesla does."

Cutii, which combines elements of a telepresence robot with a smart digital assistant, will be part of the show this year following its commercial launch in France and a marketing push in the United States.

Cutii's head of US operations, Richard Marshall, said the crisis has shown people need more than a smart assistant such as Google or Amazon Alexa.

SOURCE: AFP



An automated kitchen developed by the startup RoboEatz and launching at the 2021 Consumer Electronics Show prepares, cooks and serves an array of hot and cold food dishes from soups to salads to meal bowls. PHOTO: ROBOEATZ/AFP

Japan's expanded virus emergency to cut consumption by 2 tril. yen

JAPAN'S expanded state of emergency over the novel coronavirus pandemic is expected to dent consumer spending by more than 2 trillion yen (\$19.3 billion) as the declaration could lift unemployment and cut sales at eateries and retailers, economists said.

Takahide Kiuchi, executive economist at the Nomura Research Institute, estimates that consumption will be reduced by 2.3 trillion yen, as Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said Wednesday the state of emergency declared for Tokyo and three neighbouring prefectures last week was being extended to another seven prefectures.

The loss corresponds to 0.40 per cent of Japan's annual gross domestic product in nominal terms, with residents' income in

the capital and the other 10 prefectures including Osaka, Aichi and Fukuoka accounting for 60.6 per cent of the country's economy, Kiuchi said.

In the 11 prefectures, residents are asked to stay at home, restaurants are requested to close by 8 pm and firms are encouraged to have employees work from home or stagger their shifts until Feb. 7. Under the second state of emergency, declared nine months after the first, some service providers such as department stores and some entertainment facilities are also likely to cut their operating hours.

The expanded emergency "will increase the number of unemployed people by 373,000, and raise the jobless rate by 0.55 percentage point," Kiuchi said.



Japan's expanded state of emergency over the novel coronavirus pandemic is expected to dent consumer spending by more than 2 trillion yen (\$19.3 billion) as the declaration could lift unemployment and cut sales at eateries and retailers. File photo taken Aug. 4, 2020, shows the vegetable section at a supermarket store in Tokyo. **PHOTO: KYODO**

Toshihiro Nagahama, chief economist at the Dai-ichi Life Research Institute, said the Japanese economy will shrink by 2.5 trillion yen, or 0.4 per cent of its annual GDP, and up to 131,000 people will lose their jobs with the unemployment rate rising by 0.2 percentage point, due in part to the expanded emergency declaration. **SOURCE: KYODO**

INCOMING ADMINISTRATION

Tech giants hope for US data privacy law

GOOGLE, Twitter and Amazon are hopeful that Joe Biden's incoming administration in the United States will enact a federal digital data law, senior company officials said at CES, the annual electronics and technology show.

"I think the stars are better aligned than ever in the past," Keith Enright, Google's chief data privacy officer, told a discussion

Tuesday on trust and privacy.

The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which has applied since May 2018, has largely contributed to making consumers aware of the issues related to the data that they submit to large digital platforms on a daily basis.

SOURCE: AFP

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V GSS YANGON VOY. NO. (1130S/N)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V GSS YANGON VOY. NO. (1130S/N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **14-1-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **HPT** 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.
Phone No: **2301185**

**Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority**

Agent For:

M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA SHIPPING PTE LTD

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**Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority**

Agent For:

M/S BLPL SHIPPING LINE

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**Shipping Agency Department
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STATE TELEVISION

North Korea's Kim pledges to strengthen nuclear arsenal



Ballistic missiles are displayed on April 16, 2016 through Kim Il-Sung Square during a military parade in Pyongyang marking the 105th anniversary of the birth of late North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

NORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Un pledged to strengthen his country's nuclear arsenal as he delivered his closing address to a top ruling party meeting, state television showed Wednesday, days before Joe Biden takes office as US president.

Kim is looking to grab the attention of the incoming Biden administration, analysts say, with his country more isolated than ever after closing its borders to

protect itself against the coronavirus pandemic.

A nuclear summit between Kim and outgoing US President Donald Trump in Hanoi in February 2019 broke down over sanctions relief and what Pyongyang would be willing to give up in return.

"We must further strengthen the nuclear war deterrent while doing our best to build up the most powerful military strength,"

Kim told the Workers' Party congress, footage broadcast on Korea Central Television showed.

Thousands of delegates and attendees -- none of them wearing masks -- repeatedly rose to their feet in the cavernous April 25 House of Culture venue to interrupt his speech with applause.

Earlier in the eight-day meeting, which has lasted twice as long as the previous gathering in 2016, Kim called the US "the fundamental obstacle to the development of our revolution and our foremost principal enemy".

Its policy towards the North "will never change, whoever comes into power", he added, without mentioning Biden by name. The North had completed plans for a nuclear-powered submarine, he said -- a strategic game-changer -- and offered a shopping list including hypersonic gliding warheads, military reconnaissance satellites and solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

SOURCE: AFP

IMPEACHMENT VOTE IMMINENT

Trump, unapologetic but bleeding support, faces impeachment

A defiant Donald Trump rejected blame Tuesday for a deadly assault on Congress by his supporters, but cracks emerged in the president's Republican support with several now backing his removal on the eve of an all-but-certain historic second impeachment.

Vice President Mike Pence gave the besieged Trump a life-line by saying he would not invoke the 25th Amendment that allows him and the Cabinet to strip a sitting president of his powers.

"I do not believe that such a course of action is in the best interest of our nation," Pence wrote in a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

The House of Representatives delivered a stinging rebuke to Trump anyway, voting almost entirely along party lines to call on Pence to take action and remove the president.



Members of the National Guard patrol outside of the US Capitol in Washington, DC, January 12. **PHOTO: AFP**

But with the 25th Amendment avenue dead in the water, an impeachment of Trump on Wednesday appeared virtually assured.

Pelosi quickly announced her managers for the process, and a House impeachment vote has been scheduled for roughly 3:00 pm (2000 GMT).

The single charge of "incitement of insurrection" -- over Trump's January 6 speech in which he claimed he was the real winner of the November election, then urged supporters to march on Congress and "fight" -- is all but sure to get majority support.

SOURCE: AFP

NEWS

IN BRIEF

BEFORE BIDEN'S INAUGURATION

US envoy to South Korea to leave post next week

US ambassador to South Korea Harry Harris will leave his post next week, he said Wednesday, after nearly two years which have seen him at the centre of controversy on several occasions.

"As has been reported, my time as Ambassador is ending," Harris tweeted.

"I'll depart post next week. Bruni & I have enjoyed our lives here in South Korea immensely."

Seoul and Washington are security allies and the US stations 28,500 troops in the country.

But their relationship has been strained in recent years by differences in their approaches to North Korea and over cost-sharing responsibilities for the US deployment under President Donald Trump.

The tweet comes just days before Joe Biden's inauguration.

The retired US Navy admiral arrived in South Korea in July 2018 and has been in the headlines several times, sometimes accused of high-handedness, with even his facial hair becoming an issue of debate. The envoy's mother was Japanese and, with Koreans still bitterly resentful of Tokyo's 1910-45 colonization of the peninsula, commentators claimed the moustache alluded to the fashions of imperial governors-general from the period.

SOURCE: AFP

NOT IN THE "BEST INTEREST"

VP Pence rejects invoking 25th Amendment to oust Trump

US Vice President Mike Pence told House leaders Tuesday he does not support invoking the 25th Amendment process to remove Donald Trump, all but guaranteeing an impeachment vote against the besieged president.

"With just eight days left in the President's term, you and the Democratic Caucus are demanding that the Cabinet and I invoke the 25th Amendment," Pence wrote to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, referring to the process that would declare Trump unable to fulfill his duties and install Pence as acting president for the remainder of the term.

"I do not believe that such a course of action is in the best interest of our nation or consistent with our Constitution," he said.

Democrats mobilized rapidly to begin the process to have Trump removed after he encouraged his supporters last Wednesday to "march" to the US Capitol and "fight."

In a violent insurrection, the rioters stormed past outnumbered police, rampaged through and ransacked the building, and interrupted Congress as it was certifying Joe Biden's election victory.

Pence, who was presiding over the vote, as well as Pelosi and other lawmakers, were forced to take shelter. Five people died during the unrest including a US Capitol Police officer.

The vice president's letter came just hours before the House of Representatives was to vote on a resolution that calls on Pence to initiate the 25th Amendment process and "declare what is obvious to a horrified nation: that the President is unable to successfully discharge the duties and powers of his office."

SOURCE: AFP

SATURDAY VOTE

CDU to pick new leader in key vote for Merkel succession

CHANCELLOR Angela Merkel's conservative CDU party will elect a new leader on Saturday, in a key vote kicking off the race for Germany's top job as a deadly pandemic roils Europe's biggest economy.

With just nine months to go before a general election, no candidate stands out in the battle for the chairman post of the party that has dominated German politics for 70 years. Three men are vying for the job, but have strug-

gled to create momentum with their campaigns overshadowed by the relentless pandemic.

Yet Saturday's vote could lead to a dramatic departure from the middle-ground consensus politics that Merkel has come to

be known for internationally, with the veteran politician planning to leave the stage after September's general election.

In the running is Merkel ally Armin Laschet, the premier of Germany's most populous state

North Rhine-Westphalia.

But he is lagging in surveys against the chancellor's arch-conservative rival Friedrich Merz, who has indicated he wants a clean break from the Merkel era.

SOURCE: AFP

PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY

Pirate attacks surge in 2020: watchdog



The Gulf of Guinea is considered among the world's most dangerous waters for piracy. PHOTO: AFP

PIRATE attacks on ships worldwide jumped 20 per cent last year driven by a record spate of kidnappings off West Africa, a maritime watchdog said Wednesday,

urging increased sea patrols. A total of 195 incidents of piracy and armed robbery were reported, up from 162 in 2019, the International Maritime Bureau

(IMB) said in its annual report. Out of 135 sailors abducted globally last year, 130 of them were recorded in the Gulf of Guinea off West Africa – the highest

ever number of crew members kidnapped in the region.

The gulf stretches thousands of kilometres from Angola in the south to Senegal in the north, and its waters are considered among the world's most dangerous for piracy. IMB director Michael Howlett said the surge in kidnappings showed "the increased capabilities of pirates in the Gulf of Guinea with more and more attacks taking place further from the coast".

Pirates have shifted from hijacking tankers for oil to the more lucrative kidnapping of sailors for ransom in recent years, added Noel Choong, head of the Kuala Lumpur-based IMB piracy reporting centre.

Choong said the abductions were increasing at an "alarming rate" and appealed to West African countries to step up patrols.

The Gulf of Guinea has now eclipsed the Gulf of Aden, off Somalia, as Africa's piracy hotspot. SOURCE: AFP

OVER 350 ALLEGED MEMBERS

Major Italian mafia trial kicks off with hundreds in dock

ITALY'S largest mafia trial in more than 30 years opened Wednesday, as prosecutors seek to strike a blow against the 'Ndrangheta crime syndicate, whose tentacles reach worldwide.

More than 350 alleged members of the mafia and the politicians, lawyers, businessmen and others accused of enabling them face a judge in a specially converted courtroom in the southern Calabrian town of Lamezia Terme, in the heart of 'Ndrangheta territory. They are accused of a web of crimes dating back to the 1990s, both bloody and white-collar, including murder, drug trafficking, extortion, money laundering and abuse of office.

Anti-mob prosecutor Nicola Gratteri said it was an "important day", telling reporters outside court that the trial would "give the idea of what the Calabrian mafia is today – no longer a mafia of shepherds dedicated to kidnapping, but a major criminal corporation".

He later sat in the front row of the courtroom as Judge Tiziana Macri began reading out the names of the defendants, none of whom attended in person but who participated via video conference, their faces shown on dozens of televisions fitted over lines of grey desks.

In Italy, so-called "maxi-trials," which include scores of defendants and countless charg-



Italian anti-mafia prosecutor Nicola Gratteri arrives for the opening of the trial. PHOTO: AFP

es, are seen as the best judicial resource against the country's various organised crime groups, of which the 'Ndrangheta is now

considered the most powerful, controlling the bulk of cocaine flowing into Europe.

SOURCE: AFP

QUICKLY REPELLED

Rebels launch attacks close to C.Africa capital

REBEL forces in the Central African Republic on Wednesday launched two attacks close to the capital Bangui that were swiftly repelled, Interior Minister Henri Wanzet Linguissara said.

Armed groups opposed to President Faustin Archange Touadera carried out simulta-

neous raids on Bangui's outskirts at dawn, he told AFP.

It is the first time the rebels have struck so close to the city since elections on December 27, a vote preceded by accusations of an attempted coup. Fighting was still underway, said the spokesman for the UN peacekeeping

mission MINUSCA, Lieutenant-Colonel Abdoulaziz Fall, who only mentioned one attack. The attacks took place nine and 12 kilometres (five and seven miles) from the capital, targeting two army brigades, the minister said.

"Thanks to the bravery of our forces and bilateral support, we

were able to repel the assailants, who are now in disarray," he said.

Russia and Rwanda last month dispatched support, comprising heavily-armed Rwandan troops and Russian paramilitaries, to shore up Touadera's government under bilateral accords.

SOURCE: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS

Troops on Washington streets to begin carrying arms

NATIONAL Guard troops deployed on the streets of Washington began carry weapons late Tuesday in a major change of posture ahead of Joe Biden's inauguration as US president, according to an AFP photographer.

The Guard soldiers were originally mobilized to provide mostly logistical support to Washington police, and on Monday General Daniel Hokanson, Pentagon National Guard Bureau chief, said they had not been authorized yet to carry weapons. Authorizing Guard members to deploy in a law enforcement role, armed and empowered to make arrests, would be a "last resort" if the security situation got out of hand, Hokanson said. It was not clear what changed late Tuesday, and the city's National Guard had no comment.

SOURCE: AFP

AMONG THE WRECKAGE

Indonesia divers search for crashed plane's second black box

INDONESIAN investigators said Wednesday they were hopeful of retrieving a crashed passenger jet's second black box, as they seek to explain why the plane with 62 people aboard slammed into the sea minutes after takeoff.

Divers just off the coast of the capital Jakarta hauled the jet's flight data recorder to the surface Tuesday, with the hunt now focused on finding its cockpit voice recorder on the wreckage-littered seabed.

The devices could supply critical clues as to why the Sriwijaya Air Boeing 737-500 plunged about 10,000 feet (3,000 metres) in less than a minute before slamming into the Java Sea Saturday. "The search continues today and we're hoping for a good result," Rasman MS, head of the search and rescue agency's crash operations, told reporters.

SOURCE: AFP

YUFC signs Ayeyawady United defender Zaw Win



Defender Zaw Win is seen with the Yangon United FC banner after signing with the team for a two-year term. **PHOTO: YUFC**

YANGON United recently signed Ayeyawady United defender Zaw Win with a two-year contract, according to the team statement.

The 26-year-old defender assisted Ayeyawady United Football Club in securing third place position and has become one of the most favourite players of the Ayeyawady United football fans.

Upon joining the Yangon United, Zaw Win has expressed his cheerful words.

“I’m happy to return to my home club, and I was overwhelmed. I want to say to the fans that I will put double effort on the team and try my best,” Zaw Win said.

The young defender started

his professional career in Yangon United Youth Team in 2010.

After two years, he was selected for the Yangon United Senior Team and assisted the team in winning Myanmar National League Championship trophies. He stayed at the Yangon United till 2015. Next, he moved to Chin United in 2016 and he played for the team for one season.

Then he transferred to Rakhine United in 2017 for two years and arrived at the Ayeyawady United for 2020 Myanmar National League season.

The defender also participated in both Myanmar National youth teams and the senior team in the previous years.

—Lynn Thit (Tgi) ■

Milan beat Torino on penalties to reach Italian Cup quarter-finals

MILAN — Zlatan Ibrahimovic got his first start in over seven weeks but AC Milan had to battle into the Italian Cup quarter-finals with a 5-4 win on penalties over Torino after Tuesday’s match ended 0-0 after extra time.

Hakan Calhanoglu slotted in the winning penalty with Tomas Rincon missing from the spot for Torino in the San Siro after a stalemate following 120 minutes of play.

Ibrahimovic had made a brief late appearance last weekend in a 2-0 win over Torino in Serie A, having been sidelined with a left thigh injury since scoring a double against Napoli on November 22.

On Tuesday, the 38-year-old Swede played the first half before being substituted off for Calhanoglu.

Torino gave the hosts more

of a battle than last Saturday, with both sides missing chances in a clash between two former five-time former winners.

Ciprian Tatarusanu was in the Milan goal in place of Gianluigi Donnarumma with defender Mateo Musacchio playing for the first time in nearly a year. Tatarusanu did well to deny Simone Zaza and Amer Gojak, while Torino counterpart Vanja Milinkovic-Savic kept out Rafael Leao and Davide Calabria from a distance.

Milan’s Brahim Diaz had the best chance to finish off the game four minutes from time, but the Spanish forward sent over the bar on front of goal.

On the bench, Donnarumma even picked up a red card for protesting a penalty was not awarded for a clumsy Milinkovic-Savic intervention on Leao with 20 minutes to go.—AFP ■

Can Man Utd sustain Premier League title push?

LONDON — Manchester United are top of the Premier League table with nearly half the season gone but are they title contenders or mere pretenders?

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer’s men beat Burnley 1-0 at Turf Moor on Tuesday courtesy of a Paul Pogba goal to move three points clear of champions Liverpool after 17 games.

It was the first time United had ended the day top of the table so far into the season since their last title-winning campaign in 2012/13 under Alex Ferguson.

AFP Sport looks at whether United can win their first top-flight title for eight years as they prepare to travel to Anfield on Sunday.

Squad strength

Manchester United’s success in the transfer market has been more miss than hit since Ferguson guided them to a 20th top-flight title.

But a glance at the substi-



Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba is mobbed by teammates after scoring against Burnley. **PHOTO: POOL/AFP**

tutes’ bench at Turf Moor shows Solskjaer has quietly put together a powerful squad that gives him enviable options.

The Norwegian started with Paul Pogba, Nemanja Matic and Bruno Fernandes in midfield, with in-form Scott McTominay,

Fred and Donny van de Beek on the bench.

Edinson Cavani was back as the focal point in attack after a three-match ban, with academy graduate Mason Greenwood used as a late substitute.—AFP ■

Barcelona legend Samuel Eto’o names the player who can ‘take over’ from Lionel Messi

BARCELONA — Barcelona legend Samuel Eto’o claims Ansu Fati is the player capable of filling the void Lionel Messi will leave when he one day departs Barcelona.

Messi, 33, is out of contract this summer and time is quickly

running out for the Catalan giants to agree a new deal with their captain. Eto’o spent five glittering seasons playing alongside the Argentine and previously claimed Barcelona would need to change their name if Messi leaves.

But there is another prodigious

talent attracting attention at Camp Nou, as teenage sensation Ansu Fati burst onto the scene last season.

The 18-year-old is already capped four times by Spain and Eto’o believes he is the man who can succeed Messi.—AFP ■



AC Milan forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic got his first start after 51 days since injury. **PHOTO: MIGUEL MEDINA AFP**