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President accepts credentials of Brazilian Ambassador



President U Win Myint accepts credentials of Brazilian Ambassador Mr Carlos Antonio Da Rocha Paranhos on 18 January. PHOTO: MNA

U Win Myint, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, accepted the credentials of Mr Carlos Antonio Da Rocha Paranhos, the newly appointed Ambassador of the Federative Republic of Brazil, in the Credentials Hall of the Presidential Palace, Nay Pyi Taw at 10 am yesterday.

Present on the occasion were Union Minister for International Cooperation U Kyaw Tin and Director-General of the Protocol Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs U Wunna Han.—MNA

State Counsellor receives Chairman of Japan-Myanmar Association and former Member of House of Councilors of Japan



State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi receives Chairman of Japan-Myanmar Association and former Member of the House of Councilors of Japan Mr Watanabe Hideo on 18 January. PHOTO: MNA

DAW Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar received Mr Watanabe Hideo, Chairman of Japan-Myanmar Association and former Member of the

House of Councilors of Japan, at 2 pm yesterday at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nay Pyi Taw.

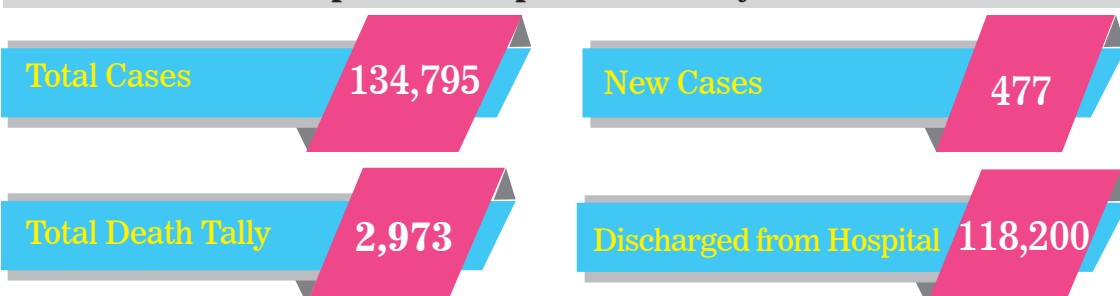
During the meeting, they had a frank and cordial exchange of views on matters

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477 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 18 January, total figure rises to 134,795

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 134,795 after 477 new cases were reported on 18 January 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these 134,795 confirmed cases, 2,973 died, 118,200 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Updated at 8 pm, 18 January 2021



Daily death toll until 8 pm 18-1-2021

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Ministry of Health and Sports

Cash contribution for COVID-19 Vaccination Fund can be made through MOPFI website

1. The contribution of cash for COVID-19 Vaccination Fund can be made via the website of the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry (<http://www.mopfi.gov.mm>) in the following ways.

- (a) MPU Debit/Credit Card of local banks
- (b) Visa/Master Credit of local banks
- (c) Visa/Master Debit & Credit Card of foreign banks
- (d) Mobile Wallets such as CB-pay, KBZ-pay, OK\$ through QR Code (more mobile wallets

- (e) Internet/mobile banking App of KBZ, CB, AYA, UAB and MAB (more internet/mobile banking Apps will be available)
- (f) Over-the-counter at Supermarkets such as City Mart, Marketplace, Sein Gay Har, Aeon, Orange; mini-marts and convenience stores such as Denko Mini Market, Fun Fun Mart, ABC and Oasis; Mobile Wallet agents such as M-Pitesan, True Money and MyTelPay; Mobile Phone shops such as Any Call, e-City,

Lu Gyi Min and My Fone; Wai Yan Electronics Sale Centre; the shops available Near Me logo.

2. Therefore, cash contribution can be made at the above-mentioned platforms electronically, in addition to the branches of Myanmar Economic Bank and Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank and other local private banks.

Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry

Announcement on fund establishment to purchase COVID-19 vaccines

1. 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 Myanmar Economic Bank in Nay Pyi Taw as follows:

- (a) 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.
- (b) 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.

2. 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 Myanmar Economic Bank (Nay Pyi Taw), and can donate Myanmar Kyat to the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund (Myanmar Currency Account No. OA 013733).

3. The potential well-wishers can contact the following phone numbers:
Director-General (067 3410156)
Treasury Department (067 3410158)

Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry

Myanmar seamen brought back home by relief flight

A total of 128 Myanmar seamen arrived back home by an MAI relief flight organized by Myanmar Embassy in Seoul and the Crew Change Supporting Committee (CCSC) via Incheon International Airport yesterday evening.

The group of Myanmar seamen included 103 from the ROK, 18 from Japan, 2 from Indonesia and 5 from Singapore.

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.

To bring back the Myanmar citizens and Myanmar seamen who are stranded in foreign countries by relief flights and chartered flights in accordance with the instructions from National-Level Central Committee on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs cooperated with the relevant ministries, companies and Myanmar embassies from respective countries.—MNA

Myanmar returnees are seen at the Yangon International Airport on 18 January 2021. **PHOTO: MNA**



Labourers are packing mangoes in the farm. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

Mandalay mango producers eye online market trend

PRODUCERS, wholesale centres and merchants are working to sell mangoes online in the upcoming season, according to U Kyaw Soe Naing, the Secretary of Myanmar Mango Market and Technology Development Association (Mandalay).

“The new trend will develop if the producers guarantee the

quality of the fruit on the online market,” he said.

At present, 30 per cent of the mango market is getting into the online platform during the outbreak of COVID-19.

Some advantages of the online market include no brokerage fee or service charges between the consumer and the producer

and possible direct payment between them.

However, the consumers will have to mention the size of the fruit they want to purchase, and the sellers will need to ensure the quality of their product.—Min Htet Aung (Mann Sub-printing House)

(Translated by Aung Khin)

President U Win Myint accepts Letters of Credence of Ambassador of Arab Republic of Egypt

U Win Myint, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, accepted the Letters of Credence of Mr Sherif Salah Eldin Elleithy, the newly appointed Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt, in the Credentials Hall of the Presidential Palace, Nay Pyi Taw at 10:30 am yesterday.

Those present on the occasion were Union Minister for International Cooperation U Kyaw Tin and Director-General of the Protocol Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs U Wunna Han.—MNA



President U Win Myint receives Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt Mr Sherif Salah Eldin Elleithy on 18 January. **PHOTO: MNA**



Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than receives Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt Mr Sherif Salah Eldin Elleithy in Nay Pyi Taw on 18 January. **PHOTO: MNA**

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker receives Ambassador of Arab Republic of Egypt

AMYOTHA Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than received the Ambassador of Arab Republic of Egypt to Myanmar, Mr Sherif Salah Eldin Elleithy, at the former's office in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday afternoon.

At the meeting, they discussed the enhancement of lasting and friendly relations between Myanmar and Egypt,

promotion of closer relations between the two parliaments and works on the development of Myanmar Hluttaws.

Deputy Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker U Aye Tha Aung and officials from Amyotha Hluttaw office attended the meeting.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Dawei SEZ Management Committee holds press conference on termination of contracts with Italian-Thai company

A press conference on the status of initial implementations of the Dawei Special Economic Zone (Dawei SEZ) Project was held yesterday morning at the Ministry of Electricity and Energy in Nay Pyi Taw.

During the ceremony, Deputy Minister for Electricity and Energy Dr Tun Naing, in his capacity as Chairperson of the Dawei SEZ Management Committee, explained the SEZ project implementations, a summary of project background, agreements signed for the undertaking, and cooperation with Thailand and Japan for the

project.

The committee has sent a letter of notification to the company formerly permitted to build the initial project, informing the company about the termination of the permit-contracts.

The Italian-Thai Development, which was initially awarded the right to build the project, repeatedly delayed it, failed to fulfil contractual financial obligations, and failed to submit financial documents for the project.

As a result, the Dawei SEZ Management Committee terminated all nine initial project contracts (2015) signed with the

Italian-Thai company by sending the letter of notification on

30 December last year about the termination of all contracts.

—MNA *(Translated by Maung Maung Swe)*



Dawei SEZ Management Committee holds the press conference on the contract termination with the Italian-Thai Company on 18 January. **PHOTO: MNA**

“People are the key”

State Counsellor receives Chairman of Japan-Myanmar Association ...

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related to the further expansion of Japanese investments in Myanmar during the next term of the government, the continued provision of socio-economic development assistance to the people of Myanmar including education and health sectors, the enhancement of mutually beneficial cooperation particularly in economic and investment sectors, and strengthening of people-to-people contacts, especially among the younger generation.

The meeting was also attended by U Kyaw Tin, Union Minister for International Cooperation and senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. —MNA



State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi receives Mr Watanabe Hideo, Chairman of the Japan-Myanmar Association and former Member of the House of Councilors of Japan at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw on 18 January. **PHOTO: MNA**



Union Minister U Kyaw Tin receives Egyptian Ambassador

U Kyaw Tin, Union Minister for International Cooperation received Mr Sherif Salah El-Din Elleithy, Ambassador of Egypt to Myanmar at 3:35 pm on 18 January 2021 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw.

During the meeting, the Union Minister congratulated the Ambassador for being appointed as an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipo-

Union Minister U Kyaw Tin receives Ambassador of Egypt to Myanmar Mr Sherif Salah El-Din Elleithy on 18 January. **PHOTO: MNA**

tentiary of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. They cordially exchanged views on matters pertaining to the strengthening of bilateral relations, expanding mutually beneficial cooperation in areas such as trade and investments, agricultural and tourism between Myanmar and Egypt. They also discussed on the possibility of the resumption of the Foreign Office Consultations between two countries and closer collaboration in the multilateral fora including the United Nations.—MNA

Three-storey vessel designed into floating entertainment centre at Botahtaung jetty bridge

TAW Win Chan Thar Co., Ltd. has rented a three-storey vessel named Pyigyidagun No 3 from the Inland Water Transport for a long term and has been refurbishing the vessel to establish it as a floating centre at Botahtaung Jetty Bridge No 5 in Yangon within six months.

“Since we rented the Pyigyidagun No 3 three-storey vessel

in November, we have been decorating it at a shipyard. Jetties are also being renovated,” said Inland Water Transport (Delta Area) Manager U Kyaw Htoo Aung. “The floating restaurant is a long-term lease from the department in order for the middle class to visit there. Construction is underway with the permission of the Port Authority at the

Botahtaung Bridge No 5.”

Managing Director of Taw Win Chan Thar said, “We will implement this three-storey vessel to provide public recreation at a reasonable price. As an ethnic business person, we are preparing the vessel. Families will be able to stay there. The vessel is repaired by the department. Our company has been renovating

the interior decoration for about two months. We are working hard to complete it early. The current plan is that we are allowed to open it as a bar and restaurant. If COVID-19 measures are lifted, we will be able to launch it within six months.”

In addition, since early January, the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism and the Union of

Myanmar Travel Association have rented two cruise ships from the Inland Water Transport and have been operating the two ships as a pilot project in order that the general public can go on vacation on holidays.—Thant Zin Win

(Translated by Maung Maung Swe)

We should not stumble just as our goal comes into view

What we are now focusing our attention on is the vaccine. To purchase vaccines for 15 million people, our delegation is now in India. We will get a clearer picture regarding the purchase of this vaccine within next week. We have already made necessary preparations to initiate the vaccination programme not long after the sales agreement has been signed and all the necessary preparations have been made. This is for the whole country. We will be carrying this out step by step in order of priority; for example, the first priority will be for the healthcare workers who are on the frontlines. After that, we will conduct the vaccination programme as needed for the country as well as for the people. This will be carried out step by step. Whatever the case may be, even after we have obtained the vaccines, the vaccination process for the whole country will take months. That is why we need to be very vigilant during this interim period. We should not stumble just as our goal comes into view.

(Excerpt from State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's report on COVID-19 containment measures, on 25 December 2020)



Union Minister Dr Pe Myint inspects MRTV Thabyaytaung Station in Pyinmana



Union Minister Dr Pe Myint inspects MRTV Retransmission Station (Thabyaytaung) in Pyinmana on 18 January 2021. PHOTO: MNA

UNION Minister for Information Dr Pe Myint inspected the broadcasting process of the MRTV Retransmission Station (Thabyaytaung), installation of equipment and duty assignments of the staff members in Pyinmana Township. During the Union Minister's visit, at the Transmission Room

No 1, MRTV Director-General U Ye Naing and officials explained digital television broadcasting, FM radio programmes and plans for the Myanmar Radio International (MRI) broadcasts. At the Transmission Room No 2, officials reported on broadcasting works, equipment, technologies, cooperation with the newsroom of the MRTV (Tatkon- Head Office), and live streaming with DSNG Van.

The Union Minister said that information technology is constantly developing, and that it is necessary to observe and install modern equipment in the stations to keep pace with the changing technologies. The Union Minister also inspected the places to take breaks and relax during the shift of the staff. He also instructed the officials and staff to perform their duties in accordance with COVID-19 preventive measures.

Hluttaw TV programmes and live broadcasts of ceremonies held in Nay Pyi Taw are sent to the MRTV Retransmission Station (Thabyaytaung) from the respective venues, and then the station sends the contents to MRTV (Tatkon) via a fibre link. In addition to the fibre link, a microwave link is used to connect between Pyinmana and Tatkon as a backup link. Moreover, TV contents and data files from Nay Pyi Taw and various ministries are sent to the MRTV (Tatkon) via satellite and internet connections.

The Thabyaytaung station is located in Pangin ward in Pyinmana Township, and production crews, audio engineers and station staff members are performing their duties there for 24 hours under the divided shifts.—MNA (Translated by Maung Maung Swe)

National ICT Awards (2019) winners honoured at virtual award ceremony

THE National ICT Awards 2019 (Educational Project & Skills Competitions) Award Ceremony, jointly organized by the Ministry of Education and the Myanmar Computer Federation (MCF), was held online yesterday morning.

During the ceremony, Union Minister for Education Dr Myo Thein Gyi said that the National ICT Award (Educational Project) competitions had been held since 2004 and the Skills Competitions were included since the 2016-2017 academic year.

The competitions are held at various levels: primary school level, middle school level, high school level, teacher-level and professional-level.

The competitions are aimed at promoting ICT skills of students and teachers, according to the Union Minister, who called on the teachers to use the award-winning projects as teaching aids. He said

that the teachers and students should study the projects well and make the best use of ICT.

He said that the competitions would enhance students' 21st-century competencies, skills and abilities. In the Asia Pacific ICT Alliance (APICTA) Award Ceremony 2019, a Myanmar team organized by the MCF won the Merit Award in the Junior Student Category, said the Union Minister.

He urged the contestants of the National ICT Awards 2019 to try their best not to miss the opportunity to advance to the international level. He continued that the MCF, education officials and teachers made great contributions to hold the competitions in order to promote students' 21st-century skills and their creativity.

The MCF Chairperson U Min Zeyar Hlaing also delivered a speech at the ceremony.

During the ceremony, a documentary featuring the National ICT Awards 2019 (Educational Project & Skills Competition) was shown, and the winners

were awarded online. During the event, the MCF's Capacity Building Committee Chairperson Daw Aye Aye Thin explained the competitions, and Director-Gen-

eral U Ko Lay Win from the Department of Basic Education expressed thanks to all stakeholders.—MNA (Translated by Maung Maung Swe)



Union Minister Dr Myo Thein Gyi participates in the National ICT Awards 2019 (Educational Project & Skills Competitions) Award Ceremony on 18 January 2021. PHOTO: MNA

MoLIP discusses EU Myan Ku Fund, future plans



Union Minister U Thein Swe chairs the online meeting on the EU Myan Ku Fund for garment sector and its future plans on 18 January. PHOTO: MNA

UNION Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe presided over the meeting via videoconferencing to conduct the year-end review on the EU Myan Ku Fund for garment sector in relation to COVID-19 and the future plans yesterday.

The meeting was also taken part by Deputy Minister U My-

int Kyaing, the directors-general and officials, EU Ambassador to Myanmar Mr Ranieri Sabatucci, Director of UNOPS Mr Andrew Kirkwood, Executive Director Dr Zaw Oo from the Centre for Economic and Social Development, employers' agents and employees representatives.

In his speech, the Union Minister expressed thanks for

Euro 5 million contributions of the European Union for rapid financial assistance to garment sector workers laid off amid the recent economic fallout from the COVID-19 epidemic, and over K4 billion cash assistance through EU Myan Ku Fund for over 60,000 workers in garment, footwear and textile industries.

The government is imple-

menting the Overcoming as One: COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan-CERP with the participation of ministries and working to adopt the Myanmar Economic Recovery and Reform Plan (MERRP), while putting emphasis on the social protection for the workers.

The ministry has given out more than K65 billion to over 1.5 million insured workers from

the suspended businesses from 20 April 2020 to 12 January 2021 during the first wave and the second wave of COVID-19.

The European Union has planned to provide an additional Euro5 million for the unemployed workers, while the Myanmar government is struggling to contain of the pandemic and economic recovery of the country simultaneously.

The EU Ambassador explained the financial assistance; the Director of UNOPS talked about the Myan Ku Fund, and the Executive Director of CESD presented the salient points in research findings on the workers who experienced the negative impacts of COVID-19 outbreak.

The employers' agents and employee representatives also discussed their problems during the pandemic.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

MoHS organizes 49th Myanmar Health Research Congress

THE Ministry of Health and Sports organized the opening ceremony of 49th Myanmar Health Research Congress via videoconferencing yesterday morning.

Followed by the opening remark by Professor Dr Zaw Than Tun, Director-General of Department of Medical Research, Union Minister Dr Myint Htwe delivered a speech and explained the reason of congress which will be held until 21 January under the theme of 'Fighting Together against COVID-19'.

The congress will share medical experiences in relation to the COVID-19 and will exchange views on the betterment of existing strategies and working processes in handling this pandemic.

The Union Minister advises the Department of Medical Research to hold online discussions among researchers of new medical generations, departmental officials and experts from universities, while the Department of Public Health is organizing the regular 'Friday Health Talk' every Friday evening.

He also highlighted some considerable success of the Department of Medical Research during the term of incumbent government from April 2016 to now.

The National Health Research Plan was adopted in 2017 based on the changing trend of Myanmar healthcare sector, research development, outbreak of various diseases and global situations.

The government has budgeted K4.696 billion for setting up the Training Centre for Research Capacity Building, and it is expected to be complete in September this year.

The Union Minister also suggested designing research curricula in the courses of 16 universities and 53 nursing and midwives training schools.

The 'Lesson Learnt from COVID-19 Pandemic Symposium' was presided by the Union Minister and the Director-General, and senior medical officials presented their topics in relation to medical treatments in COVID-19.

During the congress from 18 to 21 January, 28 basic research papers, 32 applied research pa-

pers, 29 healthcare system research papers and 75 research posters will be discussed.

The best research papers

at the congress will be given the awards of K1 million, K800,000 and K600,000.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)



Union Ministers Dr Myo Thein Gyi and Dr Myint Htwe, Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein join the 49th Myanmar Health Research Congress on 18 January 2021. PHOTO: MNA

COVID-19 Call Centre opens daily

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

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

1 mln tonnes of corn expected to export to Thailand this year

By Nyein Nyein

MYANMAR intends to reach the export target of one million tonnes of corns to Thailand this year, said U Min Khaing, chair of Myanmar Corn Industrial Association.

Myanmar will be allowed for corn export between February and August, under zero tariff, as Thailand has corn requirements.

“Thailand needs 2 million tonnes of corn as per its market data. We, however, do not know their purchase volume. Last year, Thailand partners asked if Myanmar corn suppliers can provide 3 million tonnes during negotiation with the association. We cannot

tell the exact volume. Nevertheless, about 1 million tonnes of corns are possibly to flow into Thailand,” he elaborated.

This year, Myanmar’s corns are demanded by Viet Nam, India, Malaysia and Laos. Typically, we expect to export 1 million tonnes of corns to Thailand. Yet, the market condition depends on the price, he continued.

“At present, Myanmar’s corns are primarily shipped to India. It is also sent to Viet Nam and Laos. The illegal outflow of corns to China via northern Shan State is also reported. As a result of this, the corn export volume of Thailand market is directly related to the market price.



A worker piles sacks of corn at a commodities warehouse in Myawady. **PHOTO: MANN THAN SHWE MYINT (IPRD)**

We will ship the corns to foreign markets which offer a high price, regardless of trade routes (sea or border),” the association chair affirmed.

Additionally, China is purchasing Myanmar’s corn that

substituted opium poppy cultivation, under a quota system.

The prevailing export price of corn stands at above US\$250 per tonne.

Corn is cultivated in Shan, Kachin, Kayah and Kayin states

and Mandalay, Sagaing and Magway regions. Myanmar has three corn seasons- winter, summer and monsoon. The country yearly produces 2.5-3 million tonnes of corns.

Myanmar exported 2.2 million tonnes of corns to the foreign market in the past financial year 2019-2020 ended 30 September, with an estimated value of \$360 million, the Ministry of Commerce’s data showed.

With the growing local corn consumption, Myanmar’s corn export to foreign markets is expected to reach 1.6 million tonnes in the current FY2020-2021 (Oct-Sep), the association stated.

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Kawthoung rubber farms earning healthy profit from high yield this year

RUBBER farms in Khamaukgyi town of Kawthoung District, Taninthayi Region are reaping high yield this year, allowing the farm owners and workers to increase income amid the COVID-19 pandemic, said rubber worker Ko Tun Naung.

“The rubber farm covering 40 acres in Khamaukgyi town produces 1,000 kilos per day, by tapping latex from about 3,000 rubber trees. Despite high yield, the profit is not that high due to transportation difficulties.

Earlier, a kilo of Myanmar’s rubber fetched only 35 baht in Thailand market. It is priced up to 45-50 baht per kilogramme (K15,000-20,000) this year,” said Daw Ohn Mar Shwe Dwe, a rubber farm owner. The growing demand for rubber products by Thailand causes the price to increase K900-950 per pound in Kawthoung market, market data indicated.

The growing demand

for rubber gloves during the coronavirus pandemic, shortage of natural rubber are the reasons for price rise, U Khaing Myint, secretary of Myanmar Rubber Planters and Producers Association (MRPPA) said. The COVID-19 pandemic caused rubber price to drastically plunge to K350-500 per pound in early May, incurring financial hardships to the growers.

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

“Myanmar’s rubber has raw material variability, and it may lead to quality compliance issues, process inconsistency, productivity problem and high input cost. Meanwhile, Thailand’s rubber is priced at a premium due to quality and consistency. Thailand’s rubber fetches US\$2,500 per tonne, while the global rate is at \$2,200 per tonne,

U Khaing Myint stated.

Thailand is buying Myanmar’s natural rubber at a good price through the black market in Payathonzu, Kawthoung and Myeik towns. Myanmar’s natural rubber is valued only K750-800 per pound in legitimate export, the MRPPA stated.

Rubber is primarily produced in Mon and Kayin states and Taninthayi, Bago, and Yangon 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 made 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 has exported about 200,000 tonnes of rubber worth around US\$240 million in the last FY2019-2020. The export volume is possible to reach below 200,000 tonnes amid the COVID-19 impacts, MRPPA guessed. —Nant Lay Lay (Khamaukgyi IPRD)/ Ko Khant *(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)*



Rubber is primarily produced in Mon and Kayin states and Taninthayi, Bago, and Yangon regions in Myanmar. **PHOTO: NANT LAY LAY**

EU Myan Ku Fund for garment workers extended amid coronavirus economic fallout

DOUBLING support to 10 million euro, the EU Myan Ku Fund has been extended to help the tens of thousands of mostly unemployed women migrant workers in the sector amid the global economic crisis.

The EU Myan Ku Fund’s extension phase is planned to operate from January 2021 until February 2022. Financial support for laid-off factory workers is still a key feature. It is always pivoting even further in assistance to unemployed, pregnant workers and unemployed workers with young children under age 10. Migrant workers and workers willing to complete skills training programmes will also be supported. The scope of expert nutritional support services is also expanding, with 2,000 women targeted to receive maternal counselling and direct dietary support from the project’s doctors.

“Phone consultation is very helpful for pregnant women, especially in this time due to the COVID-19 situation where medical care services are not easily accessible,” said Dr Khin Khin Kyawt, one of the medical doctors assisting the project in providing nutritional phone counselling to hundreds of pregnant workers.

Last year, the EU Myan Ku Fund disbursed 108,320 total cash assis-

tance payments to over 60,000 garment factory workers from every state and region of Myanmar. Eighty-four per cent of beneficiaries were women, and the most excellent support went to those who were pregnant and to those workers who received little or no severance pay. Ninety-nine per cent of cash payments were successfully distributed using Wave Money’s mobile money platform, a leading mobile financial services provider in Myanmar who agreed to cancel transaction fees to support the Myan Ku COVID response effort.

“With Myan Ku support, I could afford a maternal check-up at the clinic. We could afford food and pay our rent so that we did not get evicted,” said Chit Thae Wai, a garment factory sewing operator. Chit Thae is one of over 800 pregnant workers already supported by the Myan Ku project. The average payment size per beneficiary per month was K75,000 in 2020, with the payment range varying from K25,000 up to K125,000. Recipients often indicated this was the only income they received during critical points in the pandemic, such as during the first national lockdown in April and the second lockdown in September and October 2020.

“Myan Ku will continue support to the most

vulnerable, mainly pregnant workers and workers with young children and migrant workers. But as we are entering a recovery phase, the programme will also aim at getting more workers back to work by supporting unemployed workers to complete skills training programmes and to match-make unemployed workers with factories for jobs,” said EU Ambassador Mr Ranieri Sabatucci. Myan Ku was set up in April 2020 by the European Union as a rapid response measure to alleviate the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on predominantly female garment workers in Myanmar who lost their jobs due to the crisis. The initiative is implemented by the Nexus Response Mechanism, an EU-funded program managed the United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS), and sequa GmbH, together with Wave Money.

Local stakeholders and organizations supporting the successful implementation of the project include the Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar, the Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association, the Centre for Economic and Social Development, Pyi Gyi Khin, Opportunities NOW, and Thone Pan Hla. —GNLM *(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)*

Emergency mine risk activities should come first before demining

WITH 61 explosions of landmines and unexploded explosions in 2020, Rakhine State experienced the highest number of explosions in 2020. Rakhine becomes a state with mine-contaminated places threatening civilians including children.

The deaths and injuries by landmines and unexploded ordnance-UXO in Rakhine have been alarmingly increasing since 2018. In 2019, 53 explosions occurred, leaving 19 deaths and 39 injured. In 2020, 45 were killed and 89 maimed as a direct result of 61 explosions.

Children represent 35 per cent of casualties from landmine and UXO explosions countrywide and Rakhine State has the highest rate of child casualties with 47 per cent of the total. 17 children were killed in 2019 and 64 in 2020. Rakhine State has the highest number of landmines and UXO explosions in 2020 in Myanmar.

To respond to the alarming situation, we need to step up efforts for facilitating access for the provision of emergency Mine Risk Education activities; these should come first before demining activities so that children and other community members receive psychosocial support and mine risk education in schools and communities in all conflict-affected areas of Myanmar.

Meanwhile, it is of utmost importance to carry out humanitarian demining extensively in Rakhine State.

However, there are challenges for implementing humanitarian demining in Rakhine state. The situation calls for cooperation from all stakeholders to prevent deaths and injuries from landmines and UXO explosions, in addition to preventing other impacts on post-conflict communities.

Given that nearly 70 years of internal armed conflicts in Myanmar have halted regional development, the Union Government is prioritizing the national peace process and securing mine safety, raising awareness of the public, and rehabilitating victims of mines is crucial to sustainable development.

According to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, 52 townships in nine regions and states are contaminated with landmines, explosive remnants of war (ERW) and other improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The safety of civilians caught up in conflict areas must be the primary consideration in all contexts.

We need a broader strategy which includes community awareness programmes, victim support, mine education and demining.

Now, action should be stepped up to save people residing in areas contaminated by landmines.

... there are challenges for implementing humanitarian demining in Rakhine state. The situation calls for cooperation from all stakeholders to prevent deaths and injuries from landmines and UXO explosions.

Air travel down 60 per cent as airline industry losses top \$370 billion

WITH its latest economic impact analysis of COVID-19 now completed, the UN agency for civil aviation has confirmed that international passenger traffic suffered a dramatic 60 per cent drop over 2020, bringing air travel totals back to 2003 levels.

International Civil Aviation Organization reports that as seat capacity fell by 50 per cent last year, passenger totals dropped by 60 per cent with just 1.8 billion passengers taking to the air during the first year of the pandemic, compared to 4.5 billion in 2019.

Its numbers also point to airline financial losses of 370 billion dollars resulting from the COVID-19 impacts, with airports and air navigation services providers (ANSPs) losing a further 115 billion and 13 billion, respectively.

The pandemic plunge in air travel demand began in January of 2020, but was limited to only a few countries. As the virus continued its global spread, however, air transport activities came to a virtual standstill by the end of March.

With the wide-scale lockdown measures, border closures, and travel restrictions being set out around the world, by April the overall number of passengers had fallen 92 per cent from 2019 levels, an average of the 98 per cent drop-off



(FILES) This photo taken on August 27, 2018 shows an Airbus A319 of EasyJet as it flies above Toulouse, southern France. PHOTO: AFP

seen in international traffic and 87 per cent fall in domestic air travel.

Subsequent to the April low point being reached, passenger traffic saw a moderate rebound during the summer travel period.

That upward trend was short-lived, however, stalling and then taking a turn for the worse in September when the second wave of infection in

many regions prompted the reintroduction of restrictive measures.

Sectoral recovery became more vulnerable and volatile again during the last four months of 2020, indicating an overall double-dip recession for the year.

ICAO also reported that there has been a persistent disparity between domestic and international air travel impacts

resulting from the more stringent international measures in force.

It said that domestic travel demonstrated stronger resilience and dominated traffic recovery scenarios, particularly in China and the Russian Federation where domestic passenger numbers have already returned to the pre-pandemic levels.

Overall there was a 50 per cent drop in domestic passenger

traffic globally, while international traffic fell by 74 per cent or 1.4 billion fewer passengers.

As of late May 2020, the ICAO Asia/Pacific and North American regions led the global recovery in passenger totals, largely due to their significant domestic markets. Europe saw a temporary rebound but trended downward dramatically from September. Latin American and Caribbean traffic saw improvements in the fourth quarter, while recoveries in Africa and the Middle East proceeded less robustly.

Paralyzed revenue streams resulting from the plunge in air traffic has led to severe liquidity strains across the aviation value chain, placing the industry's financial viability in question and threatening millions of jobs around the world.

Cascading impacts have also been severe across tourism markets globally, given that over 50 per cent of international tourists formerly used air travel to reach their destinations.

The global 370 billion dollar drop in gross airline passenger operating revenues represented losses of 120 billion in the Asia/Pacific, 100 billion in Europe, and 88 billion in North America, followed by 26 billion, 22 billion and 14 billion in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Africa, respectively.

ICAO indicated that the near-term outlook is for prolonged depressed demand, with downside risks to global air travel recovery predominating in the first quarter of 2021, and likely to be subject to further deterioration.

It expects any improvement in the global picture only by the second quarter of 2021, though this will still be subject to the effectiveness of pandemic management and vaccination roll out.

In the most optimistic scenario, by June of 2021 passenger numbers will be expected to recover to 71 per cent of their 2019 levels (53 per cent for international and 84 per cent for domestic). A more pessimistic scenario foresees only a 49 per cent recovery (26 per cent for international and 66 per cent for domestic).

ICAO continues to provide recommendations and support for the aviation sector to weather through the crisis. Its new Guidance on Economic and Financial Measures summarizes a range of measures that can be explored by States and the industry to alleviate the imminent liquidity and financial strain, and to strengthen the industry's resilience to future crisis. —International Civil Aviation Organization

Israel-Pfizer vaccine deal points to 'data for doses' swap

ISRAEL has secured a significant stock of coronavirus vaccines partly by pledging to quickly share data on its impact with Pfizer, an agreement with the drug company seen by AFP Monday indicates.

The Jewish state has given the first of the two required Pfizer-BioNTech jabs to more than two million people, a pace widely described as the world's fastest, while some wealthy and many poor nations struggle with supply.

Some critics have voiced ethical concerns and raised the danger to medical privacy posed by a "data for doses" arrangement in what one expert termed "one of the most extensive studies of humans" in recent history.

Israel, which experts say has one of the world's most sophisti-

cated medical databases, had not concealed the fact that it agreed to share data with US-German pharma alliance Pfizer-BioNTech during its vaccination campaign.

Israel's health ministry released a partially redacted copy of the so-called "Real-World Epidemiological Evidence Collaboration Agreement" with Pfizer.

It does not state specific terms of trading the vaccine for medical information, but it does make clear that Pfizer understands Israel must remain well stocked in order to quickly generate quality data about the vaccine.

The deal defines the joint project as an effort to "measure and analyze epidemiological data arising from the product (vaccine) rollout".

It further says Israel's health ministry is relying "on the product delivery rate by Pfizer to allow maintaining (a) vaccination rate sufficient to achieve herd immunity and enough data as soon as possible".

"Both parties acknowledge that the viability and success of the project is dependent on the rate and scope of vaccinations in Israel."

Medical database Multiple media outlets have also reported that Israel paid Pfizer well above market price to ensure full supply.

The health ministry has declined to comment on those reports.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier this month said that Israel had agreed "to

share with Pfizer and with the entire world the statistical data that will help develop strategies for defeating the coronavirus".

Israel's arrangement with Pfizer would help make it "the first country in the world to emerge from the coronavirus," he predicted.

Health data in Israel is collected in part through four health maintenance organisations (HMOs), non-profit groups that collectively cover the country's nine million people.

They maintain meticulous information about their patients and have been credited with rapidly generating vaccination lists by priority, a factor that experts say has enabled Israel to inoculate so quickly.

But Israel's government also

maintains a centralised health-care database — known as "wag-tail," after the migratory bird — which augments HMO data with information from public hospitals and other sources.

Tehilla Shwartz Altshtuler, a data privacy specialist at the Israel Democracy Institute think-tank who spoke to AFP before the data sharing terms were published, described Israel's digitised medical data as "a very unique asset".

She said regulators had justifiably given emergency approval to Pfizer's vaccine because of the gravity of the pandemic — but that the company was also eagerly seeking more comprehensive data about its product.

"Israel can offer Pfizer, within a month or six weeks, data on a couple of million people," she

said. In a statement issued after the deal was released, she described it as so far "one of the most extensive studies of humans in the 21st century".

"While the agreement might be viewed as an achievement towards expediting Israel's race to be the first country to resume 'normal life' post-Covid, nevertheless it was still necessary to obtain... permission from the residents of Israel to use their health data," she said.

Altshtuler has also raised concern about data security and what she terms "sub-group analysis" — meaning information sharing with Pfizer based on categories that are more detailed than simply age and gender. — AFP

President's Office continues announcement of illegal drug arrests, seizures action on tip-offs

THE Office of the President issued Press Release 2/2021 yesterday, publicly announcing the Ministry of Home Affairs' arrests and seizures in the fight against illicit drug trafficking up till 16 January 2021.

The ministry made the arrests, acting on information, sent to the Drug Activity Special Complaint Department of the Office of the President as of 16 January. The full text of the press release will be reported in the 20 January issue of *The Global New Light of Myanmar*.—GNLM

Myanmar Daily Weather Report (Issued at 7:00 pm Monday 18 January, 2021)

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL AFTERNOON OF THE 19th January, 2021: Light rain are likely to be isolated in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin, Northern Shan States. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Yangon, Taninthayi Regions and (Southern and Eastern) Shan, Chin, Kayah States and generally fair in the remaining Regions and States.

STATE OF THE SEA: Strong easterly winds with moderate to rough seas are likely at times Gulf of Mottama, off and along Mon-Taninthayi Coasts. Surface wind speed in strong easterly winds may reach (30-35) m.p.h. Sea will be slight to moderate elsewhere in Myanmar waters. Wave height will be about (5-9) feet in Gulf of Mottama, off and along Mon-Taninthayi Coasts and about (4-6) feet in Deltaic, off and along Rakhine Coast.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of isolated light rain in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin, Northern Shan States.

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longer than 500 words please be
aware that your letter will be edited.

Certificate in Educational Management course batch 2 launched online

UNION Minister for Education Dr Myo Thein Gyi joined the opening ceremony of batch 2 of Certificate in Educational Management online course via videoconferencing yesterday afternoon.

The batch 1 of CEM online course was conducted for 8 weeks.

In his opening remark, the Union Minister said that the second course would include basic educational concepts, human resource management, research and planning, reform management and communication skill.

He continued to say that the course will be helpful for the trainee officers in practical management.

The Union Minister also explained the importance of responsibility and accountability with collective strength to ensure quality education that meets with 21st-Century situations, and that supports the establishment of a Democratic Federal Union for all-inclusive education in ethnic areas, while the government is working for the appointment of more teachers in line with the guidelines



Union Minister Dr Myo Thein Gyi delivers an opening remark at the opening ceremony of batch 2 of Certificate in Educational Management online course via videoconferencing on 18 January. **PHOTO: MNA**

and setting up more infrastructures.

The Ministry of Education is encouraging the capacity building of teachers, conducting applied research and writing research papers in journals, while conducting teaching-learning courses such as high-tech learning, high touch learning and blended learning.

The Union Minister emphasized that officials who are taking up the role of management are the key players in implementing of the education sector, and that these persons need to avoid bias and follow fair management to win the trust of teachers, students and all the people.

He also advised to have lov-

ing-kindness and sympathy in working for the academic and administrative sectors, to collaborate with each other in line with the existing laws and regulations.

The second batch of course will be conducted from 18 January to 18 March 2021.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

800-mile runner from Mandalay arrives in Yangon

A single runner arrived in Yangon from Mandalay yesterday morning, as he completed his half-way of an 800-mile round trip between the two cities.

The campaign running of Zaw Lin Than aimed to raise public motivation in response to COVID-19 and to honour doctors, nurses and volunteers at the hospitals and quarantine centres.

The Myanmar sailor was welcomed by the residents in Yangon and officials from the Myanmar Seamen's Federation at the corner of Dhamma Zedi and Thanlwin roads in Yangon by wearing the Stop COVID-19 Campaign T-shirts.

He said, "My running campaign is to donate cash for the doctors, nurses and volunteers at the COVID-19 centres and for the monks and nuns in Mandalay Region. I will also make donations to needy patients at the hospitals."

"This campaign is also to mark the birthday of my



Runner Zaw Lin Than arrives in Yangon yesterday morning for his 800-mile round trip campaign running from Mandalay to raise public motivation in response to COVID-19. **PHOTO: THANT ZIN WIN**

daughter," he added.

He has scheduled about 40 days for the round trip between the two cities.

He ran 5 hours for 20 miles in the morning. Then, he slept 5 hours before running another 3 hours for 5 to 7 miles in the evening.

Zaw Lin Than expressed his appreciation for the warm welcome of people in Yangon.

Captain U Soe Min Aung, Chairman of Myanmar Seamen's Federation, said, "Our federation has donated K1 million for his campaign. If other sailors want to contribute their

cash in it, the donation can be made via the bank account mentioned on the Charity Run 2021 Facebook page or directly to him."

He will make the return trip to Mandalay at 4 am on 20 January.—Thant Zin Win

(Translated by Aung Khin)

SETTLEMENT

UK 'seriously concerned' by Israeli expansion of W. Bank homes

BRITAIN on Monday expressed serious concern over Israeli plans to expand settlements in the West Bank, saying the construction of 780 new homes could threaten future peace negotiations.

The government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday directed authorities to approve construction of the new settler homes in the occupied territory, Israeli civil society group Peace Now said.

"The UK is seriously concerned by the Government of Israel's decision to approve the construction of 780 new settlement units across the Occupied Palestinian Territories," a Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office spokesperson said.

The inclusion of areas "deep within the West Bank" within the construction plans "could threaten future peace negotiations," the spokesperson said.

"Settlements are illegal under international law and risk undermining the physical viability of

the two state solution.

"We call for the construction of these in East Jerusalem and elsewhere in the West Bank to cease immediately." The UK and much of the international community have decried ongoing construction of settlement homes in areas claimed by Palestinians for a potential future state.

However, in 2019 the administration of outgoing President Donald Trump broke with decades of US foreign policy declaring that Washington no longer considered settlements construction broke international law.

Britain's position closely follows that of the European Union, which said Israel's actions "further undermines the prospects of a viable two-state solution".

In 2018, the Trump administration also broke with allies like Britain and the EU when it decided to move the US embassy to Jerusalem. The approval of new settlement units comes days before Trump's departure from



(FILES) Labourers work on the roof of a building under construction in the Israeli settlement of Karmel in the southern area of Hebron city in the occupied West Bank, on January 12, 2021. PHOTO: AFP

the White House. During his four years in office, the US president was viewed as a particularly close Netanyahu ally.

Peace Now has said the ex-

pansion of construction puts Israel on a "collision course" with the incoming administration of Joe Biden.

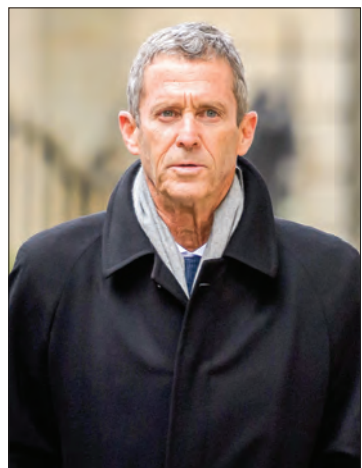
Biden, who will be sworn on

Wednesday, has indicated that his administration will restore Washington's pre-Trump policy of opposing settlement expansion.

SOURCE: AFP

TRAIL

Guinea mining bribery trial 'impossible': lawyer



(FILES) In this file photo taken on 11 January 2021 French-Israeli diamond magnate Beny Steinmetz comes back to Geneva's courthouse during his trial over allegations of corruption linked to mining deals in Guinea, in Geneva. PHOTO: AFP

THE trial of diamond dealer Beny Steinmetz for alleged corruption linked to mining deals in Guinea is "impossible" owing to the absence of key witnesses, his lawyer argued Monday.

French-Israeli magnate Steinmetz is on trial in Geneva, facing charges of bribery.

On Monday's final day of evidence, the 64-year-old's lawyer Marc Bonnant underscored the absence of Mamadie Toure, said by prosecutors to be the fourth wife of former Guinean president Lansana Conte.

Toure has admitted she

received payments, and has protected witness status in the United States.

Summoned to Geneva Criminal Court, she did not appear – nor did a dozen other defence witnesses.

"I hold this trial to be impossible," Bonnant told the court.

"All those who were to appear are not here, and all those which are here should not be.

"Mamadie Toure, who is the one who is corrupt, is not here."

He said Steinmetz should be acquitted, denying any "act of corruption" and insisting that it was too late to pursue a case.

In Switzerland, the limitation for bringing forward a case of bribing a foreign public official is 15 years.

But prosecutor Yves Bertossa said there was "no problem of limitation", because "payments stretch until 2012".

Steinmetz is accused of setting up a complex financial web, including a system of front companies, to pay bribes so that Beny Steinmetz Group Resources could obtain mining permits in Guinea's southeastern Simandou region.

The area is estimated to contain the world's biggest untapped iron ore deposits.

Conte's military dictatorship ordered global mining giant Rio

Tinto to relinquish two concessions to BSGR for around \$170 million in 2008.

Steinmetz insists he never asked anyone to pay money to Toure.

Prosecutors allege that about \$10 million (8.2 million euros) was paid in bribes between 2006 and 2012, in part through Swiss bank accounts.

Questions over wedding

Steinmetz, who lived in Geneva at the time of the alleged offences, accused Toure of lying.

His lawyers said she was not Conte's wife, but instead a mistress with no influence, and therefore, under Swiss law, did not fall within the scope of a corruptible official.

Steinmetz's legal team said no marriage certificate had been produced.

"She doesn't recall the date, the venue, nor the people who attended this wedding," said defence lawyer Camille Haab.

"No photos or video were taken on this supposed occasion," while Toure's diplomatic passport was not issued until many years after her "presumed marriage".

Furthermore, Toure "was not a public official", whether a legitimate wife or otherwise, added her colleague Bonnant.

SOURCE: AFP

US

FBI screens troops ahead of US inauguration

US law enforcement agencies are screening National Guard members to make sure they do not pose a security risk during President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration, a four-star general said in comments broadcast Sunday.

Following the January 6 riots at the Capitol building in support of outgoing President Donald Trump, it emerged that some of those involved had current or former ties to the military.

General Daniel Hokanson, who heads the National

Guard Bureau, was asked by CBS News on Sunday if troops were being checked as they arrived in Washington.

"In coordination with the Secret Service and the FBI, they're screening all the personnel that are coming in," Hokanson said. Much of Washington resembles a fortified compound in a war zone, with most of the downtown area blocked off, security fences topped by razor wire and about 25,000 National Guard troops deployed to the capital.

SOURCE: AFP

INTERNET

Twitter suspends QAnon-linked Republican lawmaker's account

A newly-elected Republican congresswoman known for promoting QAnon conspiracy theories accused Twitter of censorship on Sunday after her account was temporarily suspended for "multiple violations".

Marjorie Taylor Greene was hit with the 12-hour suspension after she tweeted claims of alleged election fraud in Georgia, her home state.

Twitter flagged at least two

tweets as "disputed" and prevented them from being shared or retweeted, saying they carried the "risk of violence".

The lawmaker's account was suspended due to "multiple violations of our civic integrity policy", a Twitter spokesman said.

Greene, an ardent Donald Trump supporter, has echoed his baseless claims of rigging in the 2020 election.

SOURCE: AFP

UPDATE

Coronavirus: Latest global developments



French singer and actress Line Renaud (L) receives an injection of a vaccine against the Covid-19 coronavirus at a vaccination centre in Rueil-Malmaison west of Paris on January 18, 2021 **PHOTO: AFP**

HERE are the latest developments in the coronavirus crisis:

Jabs for seniors

France and Britain join a growing list of nations starting mass vaccinations for the elderly with London extending its campaign to everyone over 70 and the French drive covering all people over 75.

Rich 'me-firsters' lashed

The World Health Organization denounces the "me-first" attitude of wealthy nations in obtaining vaccines and blasts manufacturers for chasing approval in rich countries rather than submitting their data to the WHO to green-light global use.

China growth at 40-year low

The pandemic has a "huge impact" on China's economy,

which grew at the slowest pace in more than four decades last year.

'Experiment on humans'

Israel has secured a huge stock of Pfizer jabs partly by pledging to share impact data quickly with the company, with one privacy specialist describing the rollout as "the biggest experiment on humans in the 21st century".

Aussie borders stay shut

Health department minister Brendan Murphy says he does not see normal travel being allowed to and from Australia this year.

Malawi lockdown

Malawi is set to roll out restrictions this week after overruling a decision by the High Court barring the government from confining citizens.

Save Eurostar

British business leaders call on the government to rescue cross-Channel train operator Eurostar after the firm said it was close to collapse following border closures.

Salesman spreader

Nearly three million people are under lockdown in China after a surge in cases linked to a travelling salesman in the country's northeast who gave healthcare workshops to middle-aged and elderly residents.

Slovakia mass testing

Slovakia begins a new round of nationwide screening -- a process aimed at easing curfew restrictions for people who test negative.

More than two million dead

The pandemic has killed more than two million people worldwide, according to a tally compiled by AFP on Monday at 1100 GMT based on official figures.

At least 2,031,048 people have died of the virus since it first emerged in China in late 2019. The US has suffered the highest death toll with 397,600 fatalities, followed by Brazil with 209,847 and India 152,419.

The number of deaths globally is broadly under-estimated. The toll is calculated from daily figures published by national health authorities and does not include later revisions by statistics agencies.

Japan PM under fire

Yoshihide Suga pledges to tackle surging cases and restore normal life "as soon as possible" as polls showed plunging support for his government.

Subdued ceremony?

Tokyo Olympics organizers say they will slash the number of athletes at the opening and closing ceremonies of this year's virus-delayed Games.

SOURCE: AFP

DANGER OF ME-FIRST ATTITUDE

World facing 'catastrophic moral failure' on vaccines: WHO chief

THE world is on the brink of a "catastrophic moral failure" if rich countries hog Covid-19 vaccine doses while the poorest suffer, the head of the WHO said Monday.

World Health Organization director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus denounced the "me-first" attitude of wealthy nations and also blasted vaccine manufacturers for chasing regulatory approval in rich countries rather than submitting their data to the WHO to green-light vaccine use globally.

In a speech in Geneva opening a WHO executive board meeting, he said the promise of worldwide equitable access to coronavirus vaccines was now at serious risk.

Tedros said 39 million doses of coronavirus vaccines had been administered so far in at least 49 higher income countries.

Meanwhile, "just 25 doses have been given in one lowest

income country. Not 25 million; not 25,000; just 25," he said.

"I need to be blunt. The world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure -- and the price of this failure will be paid with lives and livelihoods in the world's poorest countries."

He said even as some countries pronounced reassuring words on equitable access, they were prioritising their own deals with manufacturers, driving up prices and trying to jump the queue.

He said 44 such deals were struck in 2020 and at least 12 have already been signed this year.

"The situation is compounded by the fact that most manufacturers have prioritised regulatory approval in rich countries where the profits are highest, rather than submitting full dossiers to WHO," Tedros said.

"Not only does this me-first approach leave the world's poorest and most vulnerable people

at risk, it's also self-defeating.

"Ultimately, these actions will only prolong the pandemic, prolong our pain, the restrictions needed to contain it, and human and economic suffering."

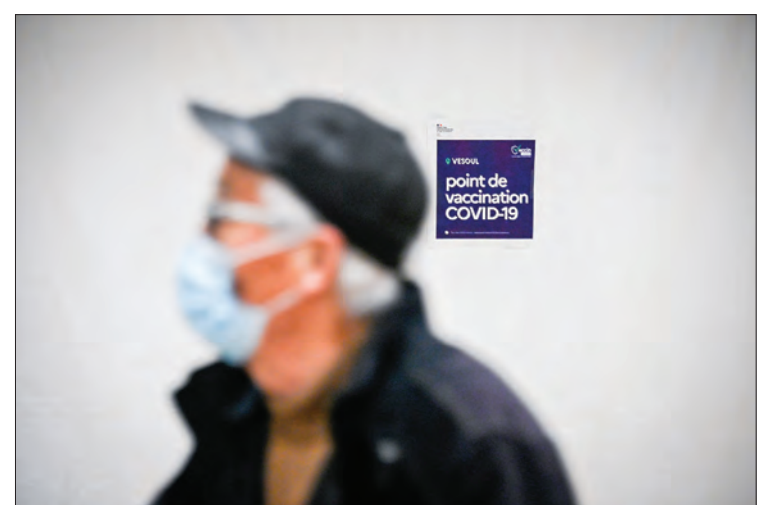
'Shot in the arm'

The WHO has only approved emergency use validation for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, and Tedros urged other manufacturers to come forward with their data for regulatory review.

Covax, the WHO co-led globally-pooled vaccine procurement and distribution effort, has struck agreements with five manufacturers for two billion vaccine doses.

It aims to secure vaccines for 20 per cent of the population in each participating country by the end of the year, with funding covered for the 92 lower- and lower-middle income economies involved.

"We aim to start deliveries in February," said Tedros.



A man passes by a sign reading "COVID-19 vaccination point" at a vaccination centre in Vesoul, eastern France, on 18 January 2021 amid the crisis linked with the Covid-19 pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus. **PHOTO: AFP**

He said the recent emergence of rapidly-spreading SARS-CoV-2 virus variants makes the swift and equitable roll-out of vaccines even more important.

"Vaccines are the shot in the arm we all need -- literally and figuratively," he said.

"There will be enough vaccine for everyone," Tedros insisted.

"But it's not right that younger, healthier adults in rich countries are vaccinated before health workers and older people in poorer countries."

SOURCE: AFP

EUROPEAN MARKET

European stocks steady amid Biden stimulus doubts

EUROPEAN stock markets steadied Monday amid doubts over the passage of US President-elect Joe Biden's flagship stimulus policy.

Nearing the half-way mark, London's benchmark FTSE 100 index was down 0.3 per cent, Paris flatlined and Frankfurt added 0.2 per cent.

Asia mostly closed lower following a recent rally, though Hong Kong and Shanghai rose on data showing China's economy expanded a forecast-beating 2.3 per cent last year.

While the reading was the weakest in four decades, it showed growth was picking up again after a devastating start to 2020 as swathes of the country were shut down to contain the deadly coronavirus.

The dollar traded mixed, Bitcoin held steady



(FILES) A screen displays the CAC 40 amongst stock tickers displayed at the headquarters of the Pan-European stock exchange Euronext, in La Defense district, near Paris, on 9 March 2020. PHOTO: AFP

and oil prices declined, while most US markets were shut for Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Focus is turning to Biden's inauguration on Wednesday and hopes that his massive spending plan

can get through Congress.

Stimulus concerns

"European markets have stumbled into a new week, with Biden's stimulus promises doing little to help sentiment given

doubts over just how much of that package will be approved in Congress," said Joshua Mahony, senior market analyst at online traders IG.

"With the US markets closed for Martin Luther

King day, today provides a gentle entry into a week that will be dominated by the US.

"While US trading activity will be minimised today, speculation over whether Biden will be able to garner enough support to pass his full stimulus package remain a key concern for markets," Mahony added.

While broadly welcomed on trading floors, Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus proposal was unable to fuel fresh gains with the spending spree largely priced in. Concern about a frightening spike in new virus cases was also keeping a lid on buying sentiment as governments are forced to impose fresh lockdowns while battling to roll out vaccines.

On the corporate front, shares in French supermarket Carrefour tanked

5.5 per cent to 15.69 euros after Canadian convenience store chain Couche-Tard dropped a mega takeover bid.

Elsewhere, newly-created European carmaker Stellantis motored its way Monday onto the Paris and Milan stock exchanges.

Stellantis -- created by the merger of France's PSA and US-Italian rival Fiat Chrysler -- is the world's fourth-biggest automaker by volume.

Its brands include Peugeot, Citroen, Fiat, Chrysler, Jeep, Alfa Romeo and Maserati. On Monday, its shares gained 4.41 per cent to 13.44 euros in Paris in midday trades, and were 6.87 per cent higher at 13.43 euros in Milan.

The group will make its New York stock market debut on Tuesday.

SOURCE: AFP

GDP

China GDP grows at slowest pace in more than four decades in 2020

CHINA'S GDP grew at the slowest pace in more than four decades in 2020, official data showed Monday, but it was still expected to be the only major economy to grow at all after a strong rebound from the coronavirus crisis.

Covid-19, which has ravaged the world economy, first emerged in central China in late 2019. But the world's second-largest economy also became the first to bounce back after

imposing strict lockdowns and virus control measures.

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said last year was a "grave and complex environment both at home and abroad" with the pandemic having a "huge impact".

The 2.3 per cent expansion in 2020 was a marked slowdown from 2019's revised growth of 6.0 per cent -- itself already the lowest in decades -- with

the country hit by weak domestic demand and trade tensions.

But it is better than that forecast by an AFP poll of analysts from 13 financial institutions, who had predicted a 2.0 per cent expansion. In the last three months of 2020, China's economic rebound continued with a better-than-expected 6.5 per cent growth on-year, a sustained improvement since the second quarter.

This brings it back to a pre-pandemic trajectory, although full-year 2020 growth is still its worst performance since a 1.6 contraction in 1976, the year Chairman Mao Zedong died. That was two years before former leader Deng Xiaoping set in motion a shift away from communist-style central planning, turning China into an industrial, trade and tech powerhouse.

SOURCE: AFP

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V TR PRINCESS V.2

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V TR PRINCESS VOY. NO. (2)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **19-1-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **IBTT** 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: **2301928**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S BEN LINE AGENCIES (S'PORE) PTE LTD

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V IAL 001 VOY. NO. (089N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V IAL 001 VOY. NO. (089N/S)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **18-1-2021** 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 INTER ASIA LINES

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V MTT SENARI VOY. NO. (002N)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V MTT SENARI VOY. NO. (002N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **19-1-2021** 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 REGIONAL CONTAINER LINES

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V XETHA BHUM VOY. NO. (1153W/E)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V XETHA BHUM VOY. NO. (1153W/E)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **19-1-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **MITT/MIP** 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 REGIONAL CONTAINER LINES

RUSSIA

Kremlin critic Navalny decries ‘mockery of justice’ at hearing

RUSSIAN opposition leader Alexei Navalny said Monday his treatment was beyond a “mockery of justice” as he was brought before a hastily organised court a day after his dramatic airport arrest.

With calls growing in the West for Navalny’s release, he was brought into a courtroom set up at a police station in Khimki on the outskirts of Moscow where he was taken following his detention on Sunday night.

Police seized Navalny, President Vladimir Putin’s most prominent opponent, at a border control post at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport less than an hour after he returned to Russia from Germany for the first time since he was poisoned with a nerve agent in August.

In a video posted by his team from inside the hearing, an incredulous Navalny said he did not understand how a court ses-

sion could take place at a police station and why no one had been notified until the last minute.

“I’ve seen a lot of mockery of justice, but the old man in the bunker (Putin) is so afraid that they have blatantly torn up and thrown away” Russia’s criminal code, Navalny said.

“This is ultimate lawlessness.”

‘Amazing absurdity’

In another video, Navalny called for the hearing to be open to all journalists, after only pro-Kremlin media were allowed to attend.

“I demand that this procedure be as open as possible, so that all media have the opportunity to observe the amazing absurdity of what is happening here,” he said.

About 100 people, mostly journalists, had gathered in the snow outside the police station

and several police vans were waiting nearby with their engines running.

Russia’s FSIN prison service said Sunday that it had detained Navalny, 44, for violating the terms of a suspended sentence he was given in 2014, on fraud charges he says were politically motivated.

Navalny is also facing potential new criminal charges under a probe launched late last year by Russian investigators who say he misappropriated over \$4 million worth of donations.

The leading Kremlin critic emerged a decade with his Anti-Corruption Foundation publishing anti-graft investigations that often reveal the lavish lifestyles of the Russian elite.

He has repeatedly led large-scale street protests against Putin, most recently in the summer of 2019, and was gearing up for another challenge to authorities



Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny is seen at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport upon the arrival from Berlin on 17 January 2021. PHOTO: AFP

during elections to the lower house State Duma in September.

He was evacuated to Germany after falling violently ill on a flight over Siberia in August from what Western experts eventually concluded was a poisoning with Soviet-designed nerve

agent Novichok.

Navalny accused Putin of ordering the attack, a claim the Kremlin vehemently denies. Russian police have not opened an investigation citing a lack of evidence.

SOURCE: AFP

MEXICO

Guatemala police fire tear gas, disperse US-bound migrant caravan



Honduran migrants travel on a police patrol to voluntarily return to Honduras, in Vado Hondo, Guatemala on January 17, 2021.

PHOTO: AFP

GUATEMALAN police fired tear gas Sunday to disperse thousands of Honduran migrants trying to reach the United States on foot, with soldiers beating back a group trying to push through barricades, AFP journalists witnessed.

Security forces surrounded the migrant caravan on a road in the southeastern Guatemalan town of Vado Hondo, near the border with Honduras.

Amid the deafening explosions of gas and smoke canisters, many migrants retreated, with some waiting nearby to make a new attempt later, while others fled into nearby mountains.

Several dropped their sparse

belongings as they rushed from harm’s way.

Uniformed soldiers with clubs and plastic shields beat back one group trying to break through a fence.

A regional health official, who did not give her name, said several migrants were struck and injured.

In the name of curbing the spread of the coronavirus, security forces are under strict orders not to let anyone through.

Saying they are desperate to escape poverty, unemployment, gang and drug violence and the aftermath of two devastating hurricanes, the migrants set out from Honduras last week, aiming to cross Guatemala and

Mexico and reach the US – an arduous journey of thousands of kilometers.

“They have no heart, we are risking our lives,” lamented Dixon Vazquez, 29, who begged the Guatemalan authorities to let the group continue.

“There is no work in Honduras,” he said.

‘No work, nor food’

Dania Hinestrosa, a 23-year-old domestic worker travelling with her daughter, said she had left behind another child of three and twins aged four.

“We have no work, nor food, so I decided to go to the United States,” Hinestrosa said.

But Guatemala migration head Guillermo Diaz insisted Saturday the group “will not be able to pass” and urged the migrants to turn back.

Anyone wishing to enter Guatemala would need legal travel documents and a negative Covid-19 test, he said in a video, and claimed to have intelligence information suggesting that members of organized crime gangs had infiltrated the migrant group.

Migration authorities said nearly 1,400 people in the caravan had been returned to Honduras by Sunday, including 192 children.

SOURCE: AFP

SECURITY COOPERATION

Japan, Britain ministers to hold security talks in February

JAPAN and Britain plan a video-conference of their foreign and defence ministers in February to boost security cooperation, amid China’s rising assertiveness in the East and South China seas, sources close to the matter said Monday.

If realized, the ministers will likely agree to work closely on Britain’s plan to dispatch an aircraft carrier strike group, centered on the warship Queen Elizabeth, to the western Pacific for joint naval exercises, the sources said.

They are expected to share concerns about China’s unilateral attempts to change the status quo in those bodies of water and send a clear message to the international community that maintaining a free and open maritime order is vital, they said.

The so-called two-plus-two meeting will be attended by Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi and their British counterparts Dominic Raab and Ben Wallace.

Japan has opposed Chinese vessels’ repeated entries into its territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, which are claimed by China, where they are known as the Diaoyu.

Japan has welcomed the dispatch of the aircraft carrier Queen Elizabeth, the British navy’s largest warship, commissioned in 2017, to the west Pacific, including the East China Sea.

The British strike group is expected to carry out joint exercises with Japan’s Self-Defence Forces and the U.S. military during its stay in the waters.

The online ministerial meeting is being planned at a time when China’s crackdown on pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong, a former British colony, has soured relations between Beijing and London.

The ministers may also discuss Britain’s interest in joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade deal grouping 11 Pacific Rim countries, including Australia, Canada and Japan, but not China.

Japan and Britain initially aimed to hold the two-plus-two meeting in April 2019 but had to postpone it due to London’s handling of Brexit and the novel coronavirus pandemic.

During an online meeting earlier this month, Kishi and Wallace agreed to hold the meeting of the two countries’ foreign and defence ministers in the near future.

SOURCE: KYODO

JAPAN

Suga vows to bring COVID-19 under control in Diet speech

PRIME Minister Yoshihide Suga on Monday pledged to bring the coronavirus pandemic under control in Japan “as soon as possible” and continue preparations to host the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics this summer.

In a policy speech marking the start of this year’s ordinary parliamentary session, Suga also vowed to promote green technology and digitalization as drivers of economic growth while laying out his foreign policy agenda.

Suga said the government is taking “effective measures” to contain the spread of coronavirus infections under a state of emergency covering 11 prefectures including Tokyo, asking the public to cooperate with requests to stay home and for restaurants and bars to close early.

“I will stand on the frontline of this battle (against the virus)... and with the people’s help, I am resolved to overcome this difficult situation,” he said.

Suga reiterated the government will prepare for coronavirus vaccinations to begin in Japan by late February following procedures to confirm their safety and efficacy. The 72-year-old leader said he will “set an example” by taking the vaccine himself to dispel any skepticism among the public.

The government will step up support for hospitals treating COVID-19 patients, the premier said, adding, “What is important is that everyone requiring medical care receives the treatment they need.”

During the 150-day parliamentary session through June 16, the government hopes to pass legislation making it possible to punish people and businesses that refuse to comply with its coronavirus measures.

The penalties include a maximum fine of 1 million yen (\$9,600) or a prison sentence of up to one year for people who test positive for the virus yet refuse to be hospitalized, and a maximum fine of 500,000 yen for businesses that fail to comply with government requests to adopt shorter hours or temporarily shut down.

Success in dealing with the coronavirus is crucial for Suga to retain his grip on power after his current term as leader of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party ends in September.

His Cabinet’s approval ratings have plummeted amid widespread dissatisfaction with his pandemic response, narrowing his options for when to dissolve the House of Representatives for a general election.



Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga delivers a policy speech at a House of Representatives plenary session on 18 January 2021. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

Opposition parties have accused the government of sitting on its hands while Japan has been gripped by its sharpest spike in infections.

“This is a once-in-a-century crisis, yet I don’t get any sense of urgency from the prime minister’s speech,” Yukio Edano, leader of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, told reporters. The opposition is also expected to ramp up their criticism in the Diet over separate scandals involving Suga’s

predecessor Shinzo Abe and a former farm minister who was indicted last week on a charge of accepting bribes.

In his speech, Suga apologized for making what turned out to be false statements defending his boss over spending on dinner functions held on the eve of the government’s annual cherry blossom viewing parties. Suga was chief Cabinet secretary under Abe.

SOURCE: KYODO

BRIBERY CHARGE

Samsung chief jailed for 2.5 years over corruption scandal



Lee Jae-yong (C), vice-chairman of Samsung Electronics, arrives at a court for a trial in his bribery scandal involving former South Korean president Park Geun-hye in Seoul on 18 January 2021. PHOTO: AFP

THE de facto chief of South Korea’s Samsung business empire was convicted Monday over a huge corruption scandal and jailed for two and a half years, in a ruling that deprives the tech giant of its top decision-maker.

Lee Jae-yong, vice-chairman of Samsung Electronics, the world’s biggest smartphone

and memory chip maker, was found guilty of bribery and embezzlement in connection with the scandal that brought down president Park Geun-hye.

Lee “actively provided bribes and implicitly asked the president to use her power to help his smooth succession” at the head of the sprawling conglomerate,

the Seoul Central District Court said in its verdict.

“It is very unfortunate that Samsung, the country’s top company and proud global innovator, is repeatedly involved in crimes whenever there is a change in political power.”

It jailed him for two and a half years, concluding a retrial that was the latest step in a long-running legal process that has hung over Samsung for years.

The multi-billionaire Lee – who had earlier walked into court grim-faced and wearing a face-mask, without responding to reporters’ shouted questions – was immediately taken into custody.

He has effectively been at the head of the entire Samsung group for several years after his father was left bedridden by a heart attack, finally dying in October.

“This is essentially a case where the freedom and property rights of a company were violated by the former president’s abuse of

power,” Lee’s lawyer, Lee In-jae, told reporters.

“Given the nature of the matter, I find the court’s ruling regrettable.”

Samsung is by far the biggest of the family-controlled conglomerates, or chaebols, that dominate business in the world’s 12th-largest economy.

Its overall turnover is equivalent to a fifth of the national gross domestic product and it is crucial to South Korea’s economic health.

Its rise has been driven by a willingness to invest billions in strategic bets on key technologies.

But experts say the sentence will create a leadership vacuum that could hamper its decision-making on future large-scale investments.

“It’s really a huge blow and a big crisis for Samsung,” said Kim Dae-jong, a business professor at Sejong University.

SOURCE: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Death toll in Indonesian quake rises to 84

THE death toll from last Friday’s 6.2 magnitude earthquake on Indonesia’s Sulawesi Island has risen to 84 with 932 others injured, authorities said Monday.

More bodies were recovered in Mamuju, the capital of West Sulawesi Province that was hard hit by the quake, according to the National Disaster Mitigation Agency. Bodies have also been recovered in the nearby Majene Regency.

SOURCE: KYODO

12 workers alive underground after Jan. 10 blast at Chinese mine

TWELVE workers have been confirmed to be still alive, though four of them are injured, after they were trapped underground following an explosion at a gold mine in China on Jan. 10, state-run media reported Monday.

The blast occurred at the mine in Shandong Province, and 22 people were working more than 600 meters underground from the entrance, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

SOURCE: KYODO

China, ROK ink memorandum on translation, publication of classics

CHINA and the Republic of Korea (ROK) on Monday signed a memorandum on translation and publication of classics, initiating a new step in people-to-people and cultural exchanges between the two countries.

China and the ROK have agreed to translate and publish 50 classic works from the two countries in the next five years in a bid to provide more outstanding cultural and intellectual resources for the two peoples, according to the memorandum.

SOURCE: XINHUA

ISPE Defender Soe Moe Kyaw joins Yangon United



DEFENDER of the ISPE FC Soe Moe Kyaw has recently signed a two-year contract with Yangon United, according to a statement with the YUFC.

Upon joining the football club, Soe Moe Kyaw expressed his joyfulness.

“It’s my great honour to be here with one of the great clubs in the Myanmar National League. I am thrilled to be part of the team to raise the image of the club. One more thing that I want to say is to hold the trophies that I haven’t got in my former club Ayeyawady United, and I am sure I can do that,” Soe Moe Kyaw said.

The 21-year-old defender studied his football education from the Institute of

Sports and Physical Education (Mandalay) from 2011 to 2015.

In 2017, he was selected in the Myanmar National League U-18 team and ISPE Junior football club.

Owing to his performance, Myanmar football authorities selected him to participate in the U-21 Myanmar National Team in the same year.

With his best assist, ISPE U-21 team won the very first Championship trophy of Myanmar National U-21 League in 2018.

Consequently, the defender moved to Ayeyawady United with two years loan and performed like an apple of everyone’s eyes in there with his smart tackling and accurate assist.

Soe Moe Kyaw was selected for Myanmar National U-22 men’s football team in 2019 SEA Games, and his team bagged the bronze medal.—Lynn Thit (Tgi) ■

Defender Soe Moe Kyaw (Right) holds the insignia of the Yangon United Football Club after signing his two-year contract. **PHOTO: YUFC**

Tokyo to cut back on athletes at Olympics opening ceremony

TOKYO Olympics organizers said Monday they will slash the number of athletes at the opening and closing ceremonies of this year’s coronavirus-delayed Games, as a report said thousands fewer will attend.

More than 11,000 athletes are expected to compete at the Tokyo Games, but anti-virus measures limiting the time they can spend in the Olympic Village mean not all will be able to attend the opening and closing festivities.

Organizers said they would also “reconsider” how many athletes can take part in the ceremonies, and how to get them into the stadium safely.

“In order to ensure the safety and security of the athletes and simplify operations at the Tokyo 2020 Games, we believe

it is necessary to reconsider the number of participants at the opening and closing ceremonies and how they will enter the stadium,” the organizing committee said in a statement.

A report in Japan’s Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper on Monday said the International Olympic Committee expects only 6,000 athletes to take part in the July 23 opening ceremony, citing unidentified sources.

Tokyo 2020 organizers said the details are still being worked out in discussions with the IOC and other organisations, and “a specific approach has not been decided yet”.

‘Anything can happen’

The organizing committee has insisted the Games can go ahead even if the virus has not

been brought under control, and unveiled a raft of anti-virus measures in a 53-page interim report in December.

Athletes cannot check in to the Olympic Village — which can accommodate 18,000 people — more than five days before their event, and must leave two days after finishing their competition.

A surge in infections in Japan and elsewhere around the world has cast fresh doubt over the Games, just over six months before the opening ceremony.

A Japanese cabinet minister last week admitted “anything can happen” with the Games, while reports at the weekend said a former IOC vice-president suggested the United Nations could be consulted on whether the event should go ahead.

Public support for the Games has plummeted in Japan, with a poll earlier this month finding that more than 80 per cent believe the event should be cancelled or postponed again.

Japanese government spokesman Katsunobu Kato said Monday that Japan is committed to holding the Games as scheduled. “There is no change in the government’s stance on the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics,” he said.—AFP ■



A person stands in front of the Olympic rings on display at the Odaiba waterfront in Tokyo on 15 January 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

‘No special treatment’ - Australia rebuffs tennis stars’ quarantine complaints



Men’s world number one tennis player Novak Djokovic of Serbia gestures from his hotel balcony in Adelaide on January 18, 2021, one of the locations where players have quarantined for two weeks upon their arrival ahead of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne. **PHOTO: AFP**

DOZENS of tennis stars stuck in hotel quarantine ahead of the Australian Open were told Monday they would get no “special treatment” to leave their rooms to train, despite complaints from some players.

Australian health authorities rejected demands for tough isolation rules to be eased, as players resorted to hitting balls off windows, walls and upturned beds in the hope of being ready for the year’s first Grand Slam.

The Australian Open is due to make a delayed start in Melbourne on February 8, but its troubled build-up hit further problems after positive coronavirus cases were detected on three of the 17 charter flights that carried players and staff.

The 72 players on the three

planes have been deemed close contacts of the four Covid-19 cases and barred from leaving their hotel rooms for 14 days, as largely virus-free Australia tries to prevent community transmission.

Health authorities said they discovered two more cases linked to the tournament on Monday, bringing the total for the Australian Open cluster to six.

Several players have taken to social media to complain about conditions.

World number one Novak Djokovic — who arrived on a virus-free flight and is being allowed to train in a bio-secure bubble — reportedly sent a list of demands to tournament organizers that included allowing players to move to private homes with tennis courts.—AFP ■