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Tuesday, 9 February 2021

## Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing makes speech to public

### Esteemed national people in the Union,

The Tatmadaw is an organization that holds the high opinion “People are the parents” while following the leading role in national politics steadfastly and adhering to the provisions of the 2008 Constitution. First, I would like to say that the Tatmadaw could implement the “multiparty democracy system” expected by the people in successive eras through some forms of political cultures such as negotiation, law and regulations.

Free and fair elections are fundamental to strengthen the democratic system. In my 2020 New Year Message to the country, I said that ‘the Year 2020 is an important year for the country. It is important to strengthen the multiparty democracy system this year with the holding of the general elections. For ensuring free and fair elections and for prioritizing the national interest sincerely in the politics, I said during the 3rd anniversary of Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement on 15 October 2018 that ‘Nothing is as important as the ethnic affairs and the national interests, and only the politics with sincerity and fairness’.

During the 4th meeting of Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong, held on 20 August 2020, I also said that the concept ‘no one is above the law’ in establishing the demo-



cratic system as a fundamental rule in laying the democratic foundation, and ‘no one or no organization is above the national interest in state-building and nation-building’. These concepts of the Tatmadaw are aimed to foster the multiparty democracy

expected by the people.

On the way to the multiparty democracy, our country has already organized the elections and by-elections four times in 2010, 2012, 2015 and 2020. Despite some common controversies in the polls, except in 2020, the Un-

ion Election Commission could solve the arguments in free and fair manners, pleasing both sides involving in the arguments and leading to the democratic way. In 2020 General Election, the UEC censored policy speech of political parties before being

broadcast on the MRTV, a wide range of announcement for advance voting with the reason for COVID-19 outbreak and the lack of fair canvassing for votes. Such situations were controversial manners before the elections. Meanwhile, the Tatmadaw managed to ensure correct voter lists of Tatmadaw personnel at the front lines and in duties outside the respective military depots and units for more than 90 days. The UEC announced voting of Tatmadaw members and their families at the polling stations outside the military depots and units. The Tatmadaw followed this announcement, and we all cast votes at the respective polling stations together with the people.

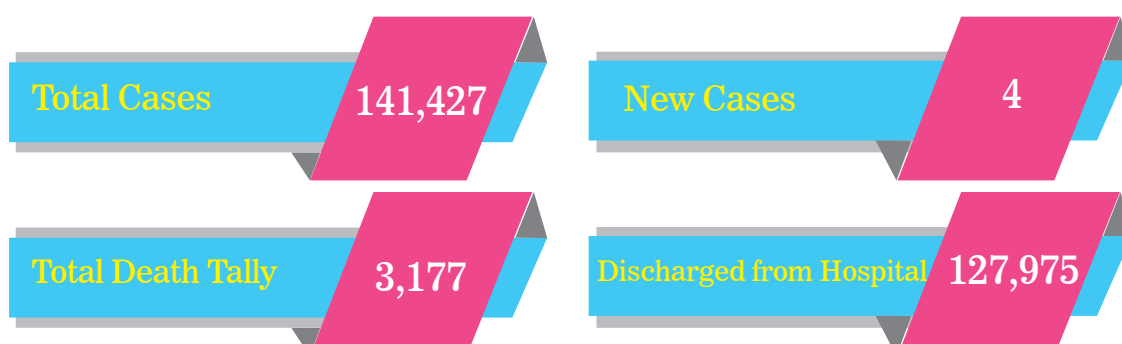
A series of controversies happened after the general elections. There were 84 political parties contested in the 2020 General Elections. A total of 217 letters of complaint were submitted. The UEC failed to take the complaints into consideration for many times. Political parties sought the assistance of the Tatmadaw, which is taking part in the leading role of national politics. The Tatmadaw then checked the voter lists and found 10,482,116 (over 10.4 million) fraud votes with overlapping in different townships, regions and states and some forms of possible irregularities.

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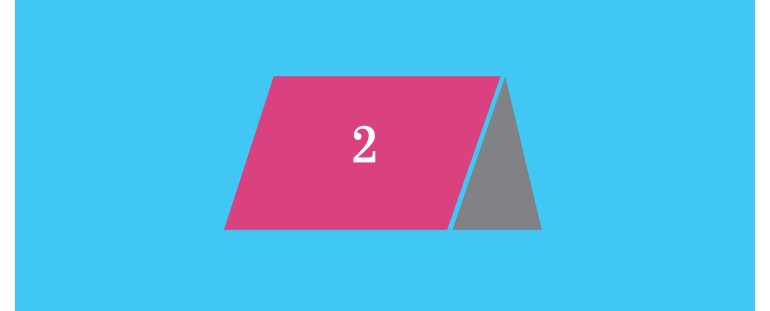
## 4 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 8 February, total figure rises to 141,427

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 141,427 after 4 new cases were reported on 8 February 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these 141,427 confirmed cases, 3,177 died, 127,975 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Updated at 8 pm, 8 February 2021



Daily death toll until 8 pm 8-2-2021



Ministry of Health and Sports

# Republic of the Union of Myanmar

## State Administration Council Chairman

### Senior General Min Aung Hlaing makes speech to public

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It was also found 11,943 ineligible voters under 18-year of age, 4,648,270 (over 4.6 million) without national scrutiny cards and 18,356 voters were the 100 years and above. The voter lists of UEC were also inconsistent. Its announcement on 25 July 2020 mentioned the number of eligible voters was 37,572,521 (over 37.5 million), 38,529,198 (over 38.5 million) on 2 October. After the elections, the reports of township election sub-commissions to township Immigration and Population offices have shown the 39,277,214 (over 39.2 million), eligible voters. The different figures were to be reconsidered. According to the population theory based on the actual number of people in the 2014 census, the number of persons with 18-year old and above on 1 October 2020 was estimated at 36,963,659 (over 36.9 million). However, the number of eligible voter lists announced by the UEC after the elections were 39.2 million. It was 5.4 million persons more than the figures of immigration and population ministry in October 2020, and over 2.3 million persons more than the estimated figures from the population calculating technology. These are pragmatic situations. It is advised to follow the pragmatic figures, rather than emotion if we have a genuine desire for disciplined democracy and development of the country.

A survey of post-2015 elections has shown that about 69.63 per cent of the country's population voted in the 2015 General Election. In the 2017 by-election, the number of voters has decreased to 50 per cent. In 2018 Yangon City Development Committee Election, just over 14 per cent of the eligible voters cast their votes in the election. In the 2020 General Election, about 71.06 per cent of eligible voters reportedly cast their votes in the General Election. Unlike from other General Elections, the 2020 General Election was held amidst Covid-19. Review it.

It is found how people viewed the administration and management of the authorities. No Vote campaigns against the 2020 General Election also occurred. Wherever I visited,

I urged the eligible voters to cast their votes in the General Election as I believe that a free and fair election is the lifeblood of the multiparty democracy system.

Authorities concerned for voting fraud are under investigation now. Incorrect voting results and the results came out from the statistics, which can be fraud, can bring obstacles for the strengthening of a democratic system inspired by the people.

The Tatmadaw, in accordance with the 2008 Constitution, has demanded the Union Election Commission, Hluttaw and the President to settle the voting fraud issue. However, they all failed to carry out their responsibilities. Until the last minute, the Tatmadaw upheld the negotiation process in line with the law. The situation was also reported to the people and the world through the press conferences of the Tatmadaw. Authorities concerned failed to take their responsibility and accountability. Therefore, we announced the state of emergency and have taken the responsibility of the State in accordance with the 2008 Constitution.

After the formation of the State Administration Council, we have already announced the five-point Road Map on 1 February. Let me report the five points and our undertakings to the ethnic people.

(1) To carry out necessary measures, including reformation of the Union Election Commission and inspecting the voting lists in accordance with the law. A new UEC has been formed, and the voting lists are being inspected. We will release the findings as soon as possible. What a terrible point is that UEC said it announced the third voting list. But, when we inspected the third list practically, still we did not find it. If we find it, we can approve it. We have found that the third voting list is the reproduction of the second voting list.

(2) To continue the preventive measures against the COVID-19 pandemic with added speed and effective ways. We are doing it practically. The second vaccination has been successfully conducted. Whichever chal-

lenges we face; we will tackle them together with the people. We systematically continue to manage the COVID-19 fund donated by the people. I also invite further donors. We will spend the fund in fighting the disease beneficially and effectively. We will speed up the efforts for prevention and treatment on the disease. We will continue to get further vaccines. We will continue vaccination, without leaving anyone, including people in the rural areas and monks. I would like to request the entire people to cooperate and participate in this drive.

(3) To remedy the economy damaged by the COVID-19 pandemic with possible ways as soon as possible. Forty-eight hours after I took the responsibility of a chairman of the State Administration Council,

I, together with the members of the council, met with the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and chairmen of private banks and discussed for recovery of our country's economy. We welcome and invite domestic and foreign investments. I would like to say that we welcome cooperation from our country's partner countries and interested countries. We will follow the existing

There will be no change in the foreign policy, government policy and economic policy of the country during the periods we are temporarily taking the State responsibility.

agreements in accordance with the law. We will work on giving permits to businesses which have been approved in policy by the previous government as soon as possible. As our country is relying on agriculture and livestock breeding, we will focus on the development of this sector through the resumption of export as quickly as possible.

(4) Works are being carried out to obtain eternal peace throughout the nation, according to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). Our strong desire is to attain lasting and sustainable peace in the entire country. We will continue implementing towards

it without fail. The Tatmadaw Peace Negotiating Committee was extended on 1 February. We shall perform our responsibility to achieve eternal peace in as many ways as possible while taking over the State. We invite collaborative participation of the EAOs and all nationalities in this practical implementation. (5) State power will be handed over to a winning party according to the democratic norms after the state of emergency provisions have been carried out to hold a free and fair multiparty democracy general election. The State Administration Council was formed with 16 members -- eight senior military officers, including me, and eight nationalities' and political parties' leaders. Union ministers have also been appointed with their competencies in the respective sectors. The states/regions, districts and townships administration councils have been set up with local elders relevant administrative personnel. That is different from the previous 1962 and 1988 Tatmadaw governments. We are taking the State responsibility based on unavoidable reasons. We shall perform the duties in accordance with the provisions stipulated for the state of emergency in the Constitution. We

shall build a genuine and disciplined democratic system. I like to stress the emergence of a clean government according to the multiparty democratic system.

There will be no change in the foreign policy, government policy and economic policy of the country during the periods we are temporarily taking the State responsibility. We shall carry the same path as before. Foreign policy is also keeping in line with the 2008 Constitution. We shall continue establishing friendly relations amongst world nations. I will repeat it. We shall continue establishing friendly relations

with all countries. We invite foreign investments. In this regard, I like to reaffirm that there would be any possible effect as the foreign investments will be implemented under the existing laws. Business people are urged not to take opportunities in such an unlawful way. The 2008 Constitution was emerged out of constitutional conventions composed of over 700 representatives from eight stratum of life for many years to build a multiparty democratic system. We will unwaveringly defend the Constitution and multiparty democratic system. Pagodas and religious buildings have also been reopened nationwide today for the convenience of the public. I'm pleased to announce that all citizens should keep disciplined in line with the COVID-19 rules and regulations. For students' education, we shall also reopen schools in the earliest possible times according to the COVID rules. Students, our future generation, can prepare to get back to schools. We will make our utmost efforts for smooth transportation and communication links if they are not contrary to the rule of law. We shall create employment opportunity within the country and reopen the factories and workplaces following the COVID-19 protocols. We will start repatriating our nationals stranded abroad due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will continue receiving the displaced persons in Bangladesh in accord with the bilateral agreement. Resettlement work for the internally displaced persons from IDP camps will also be implemented immediately.

In conclusion, in collaboration with the people, Tatmadaw has been taking the leading role in national politics during the 10-year multiparty democratic system. Now we are building a genuine and disciplined multiparty democratic system. The State Administration Council employs collective coordination and problem-solving tactics to perform Myanmar political, cultural and historical duty. I would like to request all ethnic national people to view pragmatic figures rather than emotion and work together.

*Thank you all.*

## Request to Public

1. Democracy practices have granted the public for freedom of speech, practices and living. Such freedoms should not harm others. Diverse views of others should be understood, but should not be disturbed or harassed. However, with the reason of human rights, some persons are now under pressured, harassed and threatened in breaching the laws. Undisciplined acts could lead to tarnish the image of democracy.
2. For preventing destructive actions against stability of the state, safety of the public and rule of law, it is also required to proper actions in line with the law.
3. All the people who favour justice, freedom, equality and safety are requested to oppose breaching the laws and prevent such actions for the benefit of country and people.

## State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets Council Members



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing holds meeting with members of his State Administration Council on 8 February. PHOTO: MNA

State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met the Council Members yesterday morning at the meeting hall of the Office of the State Administration Council Chairman and clarified the matters about political, economic, social, administration, peace and the rule of law.

Vice-Chairman of the State Administration Council Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Soe Win, Council Secretary Lieutenant-General Aung Lin Dway and Council Joint-Secretary Lieutenant-General Ye Win Oo, Council Members General Mya Tun Oo, Admiral Tin Aung San, General Maung Maung Kyaw, Lieutenant-General Moe Myint Tun, Mahn Nyein Maung, U Thein Nyunt, U Khin Maung Swe, Daw Aye Nu Sein, Jeng Phang Naw Taung, U Moungh Har, U Sai Lone Saing and Saw Daniel were also present at the meeting.

In his opening remark, the Chairman of the State Administration Council said that the various matters arisen before, during and after the election could not have been settled in accordance with the rules; it resulted in the state of emergency; Tatmadaw explicitly expressed to perform

the duty according to the laws; a multiparty democratic system will be fully established in the country; political maturity is necessary for security and stability and thereby create peace; political culture should be built systematically; there would be no same views in politics, but political stability should be systematically developed on the basis of political culture; so all can move forward with a political culture in the wide world of politics.

He further said that democracy is based on the wishes of the majority and those wishes should be genuine; there has been a parliamentary democracy in the past; the Burmese-way-to-socialism system was then practised; after the Tatmadaw took over the power, a multiparty democratic system has been carried out; Tatmadaw handed over the State responsibility to the winning party in 2011 according to the 2008 Constitution; so lessons can be learned from these past experiences.

The State Administration Council has composed of the more senior and experienced persons; it is necessary to have an honest and genuine political culture; political stability can be obtained only when a multiparty democratic system can be built according to the real circumstances of the country; political

stability entails security in the country.

The election is the lifeblood of a democratic system; people votes are essential and should be accurate; it is challenging to say the righteousness of the people wishes unless the polls are accurate; there have been 2010 and 2015 general elections and by-elections; a few complaints have arisen and people accepted as they were properly settled.

It is found that huge controversies were emerged before, during and after the recent third general election; some political parties sent letters arguing about the election; it is necessary to hold a free and fair election; there were no such incidents in the 2010 and 2015 general elections; there were 70 per cent voters in 2015; people were becoming frustrated in the undertakings of the government in 2016; it resulted in 'no vote' movement; only 14 per cent voters turned out for the election of the Yangon Region Development Committee; that is an example of the weak representative ratio - 14 out of 100.

There were some problems in the advance voting of the 2020 election; it is found that advance voting-related orders and directives were issued on the reason for COVID-19, but they were not in conformity with the election laws; there were mistakes in the

voters' lists and advance voting; Tatmadaw has all the eligible voters' list for every election booth in every township; it is found that there were no national scrutinization cards for some eligible voters in the list according to the candidates; then UEC was asked to explain the errors; instead UEC issued announcements; the Hlut-taw was also notified with a letter.

Voter lists will be rechecked after the assumption of the State duties and will continue all the necessary procedures in accord with the law. The election commission plays an important role in rechecking the voter list. The Union Election Commission is legally dissolved since the declaration of the state of emergency. So, there will be the new one. The former UEC announced the issuance of the third voter list. During the initial check, it could not be found. There may be, but it would not be a comprehensive one. Most of the candidates complained about the absence of the third voter list. Till now the third list is not found although initial check has been started with the involvement of officials. If it is found, it will be rechecked. Tatmadaw checked the first voter list, and when it checked the second list, the two were not so different from one another. First, efforts must be made to approve the ballot results. Afterwards, they

will be announced. It would not just be a rough figure; all the relevant committees will be informed about the signed list of results.

The second is that Covid-19 is so powerful. A meeting was held with the relevant ministers before the appointment of all the committee members. Strenuous efforts are needed as the Covid-19 is the most troublesome virus in the world. The world has over 100 million positive cases and there are also deaths. But it is controllable. What we need is efforts and discipline. So, preventive measures will be carried with the participation of the people. There are local and foreign donations for Covid-19 prevention, and they are kept systematically. The way to spend the donations must be reviewed. In some cases funds were allotted for regions and states from the State budget, and the amounts are in a billion. People will be invited to partake in the fight against the virus. The virus prevention will be carried effectively and transparently. Prevention and treatment will be carried out with greater momentum. Not a single person of the country will be left behind by the vaccination programme. Police members who are dealing with people of all walks of life will also be vaccinated. Vaccination programme will reach the grassroots and rural people including farmers who represent 70% of the population soonest.

The third is the assistance to remedy the business that is hit by Covid-19. Means will be sought to provide financial assistance through loans. Experienced persons have been appointed and assigned at the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry and Central Bank of Myanmar. All should work for the resurgence of economy, and local and foreign investments are invited. We give green light to the ongoing and approved projects. Some projects are approved in principle, but not yet permitted. Permits will be

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## Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services delivers speech at management meeting

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, in his capacity as Chairman of the State Administration Council, delivered a speech at the management meeting held in his office yesterday.

At the meeting, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing explained the works of his council to return back to normality, maintaining the regular works during the state of emergency, appointment of the Union Ministers who were believed to have suitable qualifications to perform their duties successfully, the duty of government to serve for the public, adopting policies of the council and the roles of ministries in implementing the works effectively and efficiently.

He added that the previous government which took office from 2016 to 2021 could not finalize some works for various reasons and the present administration will implement some remaining works which could benefit to the public in accordance with the existing rules and regulations of the relevant ministries without hesitation.

The Senior General said that the ongoing situations were resulted from the electoral problems such as voter lists, many weaknesses during the election period; as an interim organiza-



Chairman of the State Administration Council Senior General Min Aung Hlaing presides over the management meeting on 8 February. PHOTO: MNA

tion, the State Administration Council will work for both long term and short-term projects to help the next government with paving a way.

He also advised to help in livelihood of the public for their satisfaction, to operate appropriate businesses for the public for peace, stability and security of the country to strengthen the power of each citizen.

The Senior General added the ministries not to hesitate in

implementing their works and to coordinate with other ministries.

The Union Ministers and officials from the Union-level organizations reported on the ongoing situations and plans of the relevant organizations, including COVID-19 vaccination programme, trade, ethnic affairs and legal affairs.

Regarding the discussions, the Chairman of State Administration Council gave guidance to serve for the public in their

benefits, to narrow the gaps between the rich and the poor, between the rural and urban developments and between the states and regions in terms of development.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing also said to finalize the enactment of pending laws and called for the civil service staff to refrain from party politics, and to perform their duties without political bias regardless of their favourable votes in the elections.

He finally said that the Tatmadaw will never deviate from the multiparty democracy path selected by the people, and that is managing to ensure the correct way; officials from the relevant ministries are advised to work for the country and people, for the development in transportation and development programmes in the regions and states and to try for ensuring a reliable government for the public.—MNA

## State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets Council Members

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issued soonest after holding group-wise meetings with the relevant ministries. Inclusive suggestions are invited. Measures will be taken to launch the formally approved projects of the waiting list. Especially, the momentum of agriculture and livestock undertakings will be maintained. Export promotion will be prioritized. There are restrictions from some quarters because of the doubts on the government.

Trade with neighbouring countries will be increased. Another important point is the eternal peace. A country needs political and security stability. The NCA has already been signed, and there will be no change. The NCA path will be followed as usual. The road will be towards the Union based on democracy and federal system. Negotiations will be made to realize the NCA. It will be reinforced to the most possible degree during the one-year period of the state of emergency. A committee has already been set up for the non-signatories to participate in the NCA as signatories. They will lead the discussions. I will also

meet with them. Unity is required to reach the destination of democracy together. The council members are requested to render continued assistance.

When the voter lists were checked, a large number of under-age voters and people without NRC were found, and their numbers are in millions. When the immigration minister was summoned and asked, he said many of the people living in Yangon were migrants settling down in the city under various reasons after the Nagis disaster; they has no NRC. So efforts should be made to issue NRCs for the nationalities. A large number nationalities in states have no NRC. The ministry has been told to launch a special project for this matter. All citizens must have the NRC and household list. Another important issue is the displaced persons living in Bangladesh. Agreements will be realized through talks if there is not any harm to the national interest. Acceptable cases will be given green light in accordance with the 1982 citizenship law after the talks.

Swift action is required during the

emergency period, as the general elections will be held after the accomplishment of the mission. The ongoing fight against Covid-19 will be continued. Transport and communication is a task that cannot be stopped, and the Tatmadaw will render assistance. Other departments are also formed with experts. They are serving all the key duties. This roughly shows the systematic lead towards democracy. As regards the international relations, there will be no policy change. The Constitution has already stated the policy which is based on the peaceful co-existence. As an ASEAN member Myanmar will always observe the pledges. And as a UN member, the country will observe all the objective UN principles. All the council members are informed that the country will abide by all the principles including UN principles that are in accord with its situation. The main thing is to restore the normal path in a short period. All must go straight on the path. The members must provide cooperation, advice and leadership in the necessary areas.

Next, Council Members U Thein Nyunt, Jeng Phang Naw Taung, Mahn Nyein Maung, Daw Aye Nu Sein, U Mounng Har, U Khin Maung Swe discussed the matters pertaining to the provisions stipulated in the Constitution for the political parties, immediate and systematic formations and duty assignments of the administration bodies at the townships, wards, village-tracts-level, promulgation of the State security-related laws, State pardon for the political prisoners, implementation of the peace processes, the extension of members for the states/regions administration councils, holding of election in some areas of Rakhine State, stability, tranquillity and the rule of law in Rakhine State, the establishment of the ministries for ethnic affairs at States/Regions-level, and Hluttaw, political parties and elections laws.

State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing added coordination and instruction for State pardon for the political prisoners and the rule of law.—MNA

Republic of the Union of Myanmar  
State Administration Council

Order No 37/2021

12<sup>th</sup> Waning of Pyatho 1382 ME  
8 February 2021

Appointment and Duty Assignment of  
Union Minister

U Aung Than Oo is appointed as Union Minister for Electricity and Energy in accordance with the right to exercise the powers under Article 419 of the State Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

By order

Sd/ Aung Lin Dway  
Lieutenant-General  
Secretary  
State Administration Council

Republic of the Union of Myanmar  
State Administration Council

Order No 38/2021

12<sup>th</sup> Waning of Pyatho 1382 ME  
8 February 2021

Appointment and Assignment of  
Chairman and members of Constitutional  
Tribunal of the Union

The following persons are appointed by the State Administration Council as the Chairman and members of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union in accordance with Article 419 of the State Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

1. U Than Kyaw	Chairman
2. U Nyan Tun	Member
3. U Khin Maung Oo	Member
4. U Saw San Lin	Member
5. U Myo Chit	Member
6. U Kyaw Hsan	Member
7. U Kyaw Min	Member
8. Dr Mar Lar Aung	Member
9. Daw Nan Sander San	Member

By order

Sd/ Aung Lin Dway  
Lieutenant-General  
Secretary  
State Administration Council

Republic of the Union of Myanmar  
State Administration Council

Order No 39/2021

12<sup>th</sup> Waning of Pyatho 1382 ME  
8 February 2021

Appointment and Duty Assignment of  
Union Civil Service Board members

The following persons are appointed and assigned as members of Union Civil Service Board, in accordance with the right to exercise the powers under Article 419 of the State Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

1. U Sit Aye
2. U Tin Oo
3. U Hsan Myint
4. Daw Khin Myo Myint
5. U Ye Naing

By order

Sd/ Aung Lin Dway  
Lieutenant-General  
Secretary  
State Administration Council

Republic of the Union of Myanmar  
State Administration Council

Order No 40/2021

12<sup>th</sup> Waning of Pyatho 1382 ME  
8 February 2021

Appointment and Duty Assignment  
of Region Administration Council  
Chairmen

The following persons are appointed and assigned as chairmen of Region Administration Council shown against each of their Region, in accordance with the right to exercise the powers under Article 419 of the State Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

- |               |                  |
|---------------|------------------|
| 1. U Hla Soe  | Yangon Region    |
| 2. U Ye Myint | Ayeyawady Region |

By order

Sd/ Aung Lin Dway  
Lieutenant-General  
Secretary  
State Administration Council

Public Announcement

8 February 2021

Local banks are providing daily services with helps in livelihoods and businesses of the people. Regular banking services are fundamental to economy of the country. The Central Bank of Myanmar is supervising the systematic operation of banking services in the country. People are requested to take part in this process for ensuring economic stability of the country.

Central Bank of Myanmar

## Section 144 of Criminal Procedure imposed in some townships

The Section 144 of Criminal Procedure have been imposed in some townships of Yangon, Mandalay, Sagaing Regions and Kayah State on 8 February.

The areas for Section 144 has covered Sanchaung and Kamayut townships in Yangon Region; Chanmyatharzi, Pyigyitagon, Mahaangmyae, Chanayethazan, Aungmyaythazan, Patheingyi, Myingyan and Amarapura townships in Mandalay Region; Magway and Pakkoku townships in Magway Region; Sagaing, Shwebo, Monywa and Kalay townships in Sagaing Region; Waimaw, Bamaw, Moekaung, Shwegu, Mohnyin and Phakant Townships in Kachin State; Loikaw township in Kayah State; Mawlamyine, Thanbyuzayat, Ye and Kyaikhto townships in Mon State; Kengtung, Taunggyi, Tachilek, Nawngkhio, Lashio, Kalaw, Hsipaw, Muse and Kyaukme townships of Shan State.

Under this section, it is prohibited unlawful assembly, talks, using vehicles or in persons in marching around, protests, destroying and violent acts. The assembly of five or more than five persons are banned at the public areas and the curfew is also imposed from 8 pm to 4 am in the above-mentioned townships. —MNA

## Request to health workers

1. It is appreciated for the strenuous efforts of the medical doctors, nurses, medical experts and other health works at the respective departments under the Ministry of Health and Sports at the front-line in the fight against prevention, containment and treatment of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).
2. As the vaccination programme of COVID-19 is being conducted for the public and the real-time healthcare services are required for the people, all the staff members at the respective departments under the Ministry of Health and Sports are strongly urged to return to their duties with taking the well-being of patients into consideration.

Ministry of Health and Sports  
8 February 2021

## Consecration, recitation of Maha Pathana ceremonies held at Shwedagon pagoda

UNION MINISTER for Religious Affairs and Culture U Ko Ko attended the ceremonies of Buddha consecration and recitation of Maha Pathana at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon yesterday.

Senior monks of State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee led by Dr Bhaddanta Candima Bhivumsa, the patron of Thanlyin Minkyaung monastery, and the senior members of Shwedagon Pagoda board of trustees.

Offertories were donated to the members of Sangha, who then recited Maha Pathana Pali verses.

In the afternoon, the Union Minister held a meeting at the office of Religious Affairs and Culture in Yangon with the leaders of religious organizations from Christian, Islam and Hindu.

The Union Minister explained possible supports to the religious organizations in line with the State Constitution, and the leaders of organizations made the discussions. —MNA



Union Minister U Ko Ko holds meeting with leaders of religious organizations in Yangon on 8 February. PHOTO: MNA

## MoALI minister inspects rural development projects

UNION MINISTER for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation U Tin Htut Oo, accompanied by his Permanent Secretary U Kyaw Min Oo and the directors-general, inspected the GAP model farms in Pyinmana Township, poverty reduction model project at Ayechantha village in Tatkon Township, poultry farm in Paytaw village and irrigation system of Nga-leik dam.

During the inspection tour, the Union Minister discussed rural development programmes, capacity building for self-management, creation of livelihoods for income, employment opportunities for the local young people and production of quality products.



Union Minister U Tin Htut Oo inspects the poultry farm in Paytaw village on 8 February. PHOTO: MNA

He also talked about modern agricultural practices such as GAP, GAqP and GAHP, food

safety, cultivation of alternative crops for more profits, and products for foreign markets

by establishing modern agricultural and livestock farming with the participation of state

departments, private sectors, financial organizations, and farmers.

The Union Minister also explained popularity of GAP and organic farming among the farmers and higher demand of markets for the produce from it.

He stressed that the model farms could yield information about investment, benefits, quality crops, and market situations for the farmers.

He also discussed preventing the waste of irrigation water, the formation of water utilizer groups to prevent, safety measures for old dams, the maintenance of water canal and participation of rural people in developing income sources.—MNA



## MoEA Union Minister meets with departmental officials

UNION MINISTER for Ethnic Affairs U Saw Tun Aung Myint organized a meeting with the staff members at the ministry's headquarters yesterday afternoon.

He talked about his previous experiences in ethnic affairs as a member of Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee and his ambition to the development of

ethnic people. The Union Minister also said that the civil service staff need to stay away from politics in line with the rules, following disciplines and rules and self-confidence in identity of civil service staff.

The Union Minister coordinated the discussion of officials before concluding the meeting.—MNA

Union Minister U Saw Tun Aung Myint discusses development plans for ethnic people on 8 February. PHOTO: MNA

## MoC discusses works of trade department

UNION MINISTER for Commerce Dr Pwint San held a meeting on the works of Department of Trade yesterday.

At the meeting, the Union Minister discussed trade promotion, the role of commercial attachés in foreign countries in expanding new markets, support in e-commerce, economic development and welfare of the staff members.

Deputy Director-General

U Myint Thura from the Trade Department reported on the ongoing situations and future plans, and Permanent Secretary U Min Min made additional discussions.

The meeting was also attended by the permanent secretary, the directors-general, deputy permanent secretary, deputy directors-general and the directors.—MNA



Union Minister Dr Pwint San chairs meeting of the Trade Department on 8 February. **PHOTO: MNA**



## MoSRR holds coordination meeting on work plans

UNION MINISTER for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Dr Thet Thet Khaing held a Zoom meeting with officials from local offices, rehabilitation camps and the training school for natural disaster management in Nay Pyi Taw Council Area and regions/states yesterday.

At the meeting, the Union Minister talked about the implementation of the

ministry's projects in accordance with its policy, law, bylaws and procedures through public-oriented system, and she also invited discussions of officials about their difficulties. She also emphasized the importance of civil-military relations for the success of projects.

Officials reported on the works of different departments under the ministry.—MNA

Dr Thet Thet Khaing meets with officials of her ministry via Zoom meeting on 8 February. **PHOTO: MNA**

## CBM holds coordination meeting with its branches in Yangon, Mandalay

BRANCHES of Central Bank of Myanmar from Yangon and Mandalay held a coordination meeting via videoconferencing yesterday.

U Than Nyein, the Governor of CBM, joined the online meeting from his office in Nay Pyi Taw.

At the meeting, the Governor called for effective cooperation among the banks and financial organizations in loan programmes and employment opportunities for the economic development of the country impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

He also discussed capacity building in management role of CBM, human resource and research developments, better digital payment system, smooth working processes among banking and financial sectors. The Governor also instructed stability of financial system and commodity prices in the country.—MNA



CBM Governor U Than Nyein presides over a meeting with officials from branches in Yangon and Mandalay on 8 February. **PHOTO: MNA**

## 137 courses for diploma, postgraduate in medical education to be conducted

A total of 2,082 trainees will be allowed for 137 courses of diploma and postgraduate at medical universities and related universities under the Ministry of Health and Sports in 2021 academic year.

The applications for these courses shall be submitted commencing 2<sup>nd</sup> week of February.

Sr	University	Diploma	M.Sc	Doctorate	Total
1	Universities of Medicine	7	31	47	85
2	Universities of Dental Medicine	2	10	9	21
3	Universities of Nursing	1	9	1	11
4	Universities of Medical Technology	1	3	3	7
5	Universities of Pharmacy	-	4	4	8
6	University of Public Health	1	2	1	4
7	University of Community Health	-	1	-	1
Total		12	60	65	137

# Act now to find strategies for helping farmers sustainable

THE unseasonal rain in upper Myanmar on 7th October has alerted us that we are in a pattern of increasingly frequent and severe weather.

Under the influence of multiple weather systems acting in tandem, untimely rain always causes damage to the standing crops as well as the harvested produce

Extreme weather conditions and changing patterns of precipitation are serious threats to agriculture and food security and lead to a decrease in the crop productivity.

As the weather is uncontrollable, we must identify and manage yield-limiting factors in the field, and this will help us improve the overall resilience of crops to the vagaries of Mother Nature.

Agriculture sectors of Myanmar, which is an agro-based country, are frequently affected by natural disasters such droughts, excessive rainfall, floods, flashflood, unseasonal rains etc. They got the weather warning from the Meteorology and Hydrological Department, but simply, they can not prevent the disasters.

The farmers are facing a big loss of income. It is the same elsewhere in other parts of the world when the disaster hits there.

But, for Myanmar farmers who are not familiar with the crop insurance is difficult to recover from the loss.

A once-in-a-century event seemingly occurs every year. The extreme is the new norm.

Although Mother Nature doesn't always follow the rules, the weather in Southeast Asia is somewhat predictable.

As the weather is uncontrollable, we must identify and manage yield-limiting factors in the field, and this will help us improve the overall resilience of crops to the vagaries of Mother Nature.

Farmers are closer to the weather and they have been hit with extreme weather event after extreme weather event — floods, drought, hailstones, etc.

We believe that farmers are more aware and more concerned about climate-change induced extreme weather events.

Hence, the extreme weather events has signaled an openness to strategies that help make individual farms more sustainable while also addressing the climate crisis.

There's no argument here. The peoples of the 21st century are facing harsh impacts from the climate change. It's obvious — we must find ways or implement systems to relieve from the extreme weather patterns and disasters.



## Container shipping sector navigates Covid pandemic



LONDON: Maritime container freight shipping is steaming ahead through the Covid-19 pandemic, boosted by strong demand for Chinese exports and a shortage of vessels according to industry experts.

The Freightos Baltic Global Container Index (FBX), which tracks the price of container shipping, has nearly quadrupled since early November to face at

\$7,827 on Friday. The FBX studying for containers from China certain for the west coast of the United States has practically tripled since late May to \$4,286 on Friday.

"The costs of shipping goods from China to Europe by water have hit unprecedented highs recently," mentioned UniCredit Bank economist Andreas Rees.

That is because of rampant

demand for China's manufactured merchandise, notably for medical gear in the course of the international well being emergency — but additionally for client items from lockdown-bound populations.

### 'Exponential' demand improve

"First, demand of medical goods produced in China have been strongly rising. Second,

and probably more important, consumers have been re-allocating their demand," mentioned Rees.

"Instead of going to restaurants and travelling, they have been demanding more durable goods such as electronic equipment, furniture, etc, to have a nice home. And many of these goods are produced in China."

That has had a knock-on impact on demand for the large

container ships that transport huge quantities of products from the Asian powerhouse.

"Container shipping costs are soaring from Asia, not just to the UK but to most destinations for shipments out of China and Asia," Braemar analyst Jonathan Roach advised AFP. "With increased durable demand, container demand has increased exponentially."

Nevertheless, the pandemic did additionally spark a general 4.1-per-cent decline in world maritime commerce final 12 months, based on latest estimates from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Bottlenecks have nevertheless been created throughout the sector because of strict Covid-19 hygiene and sanitation measures in ports, logistics centres and storage depots worldwide.

The turnaround time between unloading a container ship and returning has subsequently elevated considerably, based on Roach. That additional limits the obtainable pool of vessels.

"When there is a delay in shipping empties back to loading hubs and the same time as a cargo surge, availability of empty container equipment will

tighten," Roach added.

"We expect this imbalance (between supply and demand) to continue while strict Covid-19 restrictions remain in place."

### Inflation fears

Rising transportation prices can in the meantime feed by into greater client costs and spark concern amongst international central banks, which preserve shut tabs on constructing inflationary pressures.

"There is still the question of whether and to which extent companies can pass on higher prices to consumers," famous Rees.

"As of today, only a moderate cost-push to consumer price inflation seems likely. But the pattern certainly needs to be closely monitored."

Turning to the outlook, Roach stays upbeat as a result of rising international Covid-19 vaccination drive.

"We do expect (consumer) spending to normalise as the vaccine rollout gathers pace — and a correction in the spending switch should normalise freight demand. We expect that to happen towards the middle of 2021."



## Seoul launches Covid tests for pets

SEOUL—Pet cats and dogs with a fever, cough or breathing difficulties will be offered coronavirus tests if they have been exposed to carriers, the Seoul metropolitan government said Monday.

The programme in the sprawling South Korean capital comes weeks after the country reported its first case of Covid-19 infection in an animal, involving a kitten.

"Starting today, the Seoul metropolitan government will offer coronavirus tests for pet

dogs and cats," Park Yoo-mi, a Seoul city official handling disease control, told reporters.

Tests will be limited to pets that show symptoms -- including fever, coughing, breathing difficulties and runny noses -- after coming into contact with humans who have tested positive, she added.

The test will be conducted near the animal's home by a team of health workers including a veterinarian, Park said.

Animals that test positive will

be required to be kept isolated at home for 14 days, but where owners have the virus their pets will be sent to separate kennels or catteries -- human patients in South Korea are generally confined in central quarantine facilities if they do not need hospital treatment.

Around the world several animals -- including dogs and cats -- have tested positive for the coronavirus, which has killed more than two million people worldwide.



South Korea reported its first case of Covid-19 infection in an animal weeks ago

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## Union Day Objectives 74<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Union Day - 2021

1. To work on the Union Peace Conference – 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong, till the success of the internal peace process is achieved.
2. Development of the socio-economic life of the ethnic nationals.
3. To work for the emergence of a constitution that is in alignment and harmony with the Democratic Federal Union.
4. All ethnic nationals to work for the preservation and protection of non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national unity, and perpetuation of national sovereignty.
5. To nurture and develop new generations endowed with high skills and capabilities imbued with strong Union spirit.

## Union Day slogans for 2021 (74<sup>th</sup> Anniversary)

1. Equal opportunities and equal responsibilities, living in a peaceful, prosperous and stable Union.
2. Unity is strength, solidarity is power That is the heart of the Union.
3. Many fruits sprouting from one stem, this is our brotherhood of the Union.
4. Our Union built with brotherhood, Never forget Union day.
5. Drinking the same water, living on the same land, we are Union nationals of the same blood.

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## Cleaning works done at pagodas, temples before reopening

CLEANING works were done at the pagodas and temples which were opened to the public on 8 February.

Platforms and buildings of the pagodas were cleaned by the Tatmadaw personnel and their family members, members of Myanmar Police Force and fire brigade departments.

Commanders of northern command, northeast com-

mand, east command, central east command, southeast command, coastal region command, southwest command, northern command, northeast command, central command, southern command and their families recited paritta and Pathana Pali verses, according to the report of Office of Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services.—MNA



Cleaning works are done by Tatmadaw personnel, police and firemen on a platform of pagoda before reopened to public. **PHOTO:MNA**

## Military hospitals provide medical services to people



Patients receive medical treatments at military hospitals. **PHOTO: MNA**

MILITARY hospitals in the townships of regions and states are providing medical treatments to the people to solve their difficulties in healthcare services.

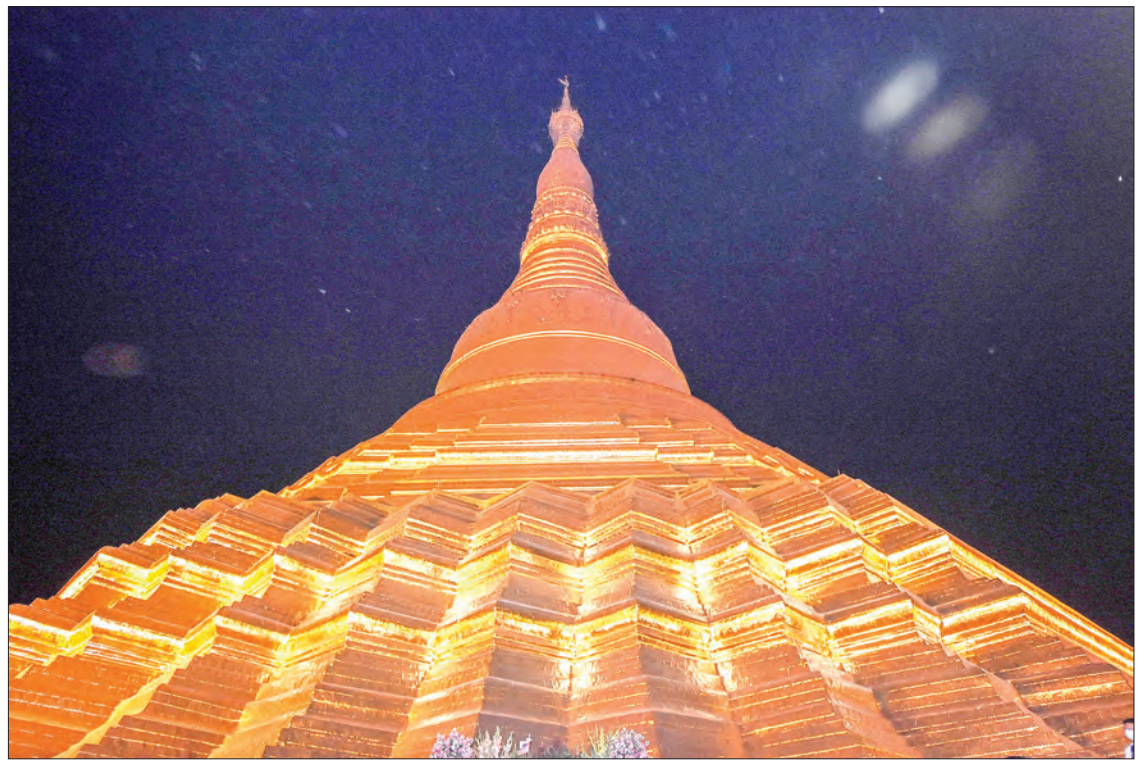
A total of 1,200 outpatients and 616 inpatients reached these hospitals from 5 February to date.

Senior medical experts, medics and nurses conducted 40 major operations and 20 minor operations, and the serious

cases are treated by the senior doctors.

These hospitals managed for the birth of 70 babies, while 120 pregnant women were taken to the respective military hospitals.

Officials from the respective commands also provided the patients with foods, according to the report Office of Commander in Chief of Defence Services.—MNA



Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon.

## Pagodas reopened to public under COVID-19 rules

SHWEDAGON pagoda in Yangon, Maha Muni Buddha Image in Mandalay and Up-patthanti Pagoda in Pabbathiri Township of Nay Pyi Taw

were reopened for the public yesterday.

Buddhist monks, nuns and laypersons visited these pagodas in line with the COV-

ID-19 rules after the cleaning works of Tatmadaw members, police and firemen at these pagodas.—MNA

## CBM issues announcement on public rumours about monetary issue

THE Central Bank of Myanmar released an announcement on 3 February to wipe out rumours among the public about the monetary issue and possible closure of banks.

The announcement said, "There were false rumours that K5,000 and K10,000 banknotes would be demonetized and banks would close in relation to the current situations in the country. It was also learnt that some people were worried because of the rumours and were reportedly withdrawing their money from the banks.

The Central Bank of Myanmar has been working hard to stabilize the financial system, and the banks have been providing proper services in accordance with the rules and regulations.

The general public can continue using the banknotes and banking services without any worries, and all the banks have been instructed to provide regular banking services."—MNA

## Tatmadaw True News Information Team: Healthcare services offered at military hospitals

THE Tatmadaw True News Information Team released a statement on 4 February 2021 that healthcare services are offered to all the national people at the military hospitals.

The statement said that some persons who are creating disturbances, aiming to destabilize the administrative mechanism and stability of the State, have incited Civil Disobedience Campaign through social networks, causing failure to perform duties among the health workers.

Doctors have vowed during their convocation that "Health and well-being of the patients will be our own issues as the first priority ; I will practice my profession with conscience and dignity and in accordance with a good medical practice; I will serve my medical profession regardless of nationality, race and social status; and I will maintain the utmost respect for human life".

It is also advised all the health workers not to follow the incitement that can jeopardize the interest of country and people, and keep their professional vows to the public.

The Tatmadaw has received the permission of the State Administration Council to solve the current healthcare problems of people across the nation by the military medics.

Therefore, people can get proper medical treatments at the nearest military hospitals.—MNA

## First sitting US congressman dies after Covid diagnosis

A Republican congressman from Texas who was being treated for Covid-19 has died, his office said Monday, the first sitting member to lose his life after battling the coronavirus.

House of Representatives lawmaker Ron Wright, 67, who had also suffered from cancer in recent years, died Sunday in a Dallas hospital, where he and his wife were taken after catching the virus. His death comes after House member-elect Luke Letlow lost his life on 29 December to the disease, just days before the 41-year-old Republican was to be sworn in.

Wright announced on 21 January that he had tested positive for the Covid-19 but was “experiencing minor symptoms”. “I feel okay and will

continue working for the people of the 6<sup>th</sup> District from home this week,” his statement said at the time. But his condition took a turn for the worse and for the past two weeks, he and his wife Susan were hospitalized for treatment. He died with his wife at his side, according to a statement from his office.

Republican congresswoman Liz Cheney expressed her condolences in a statement for her “friend & colleague.” “Ron’s commitment to public service, his tremendous work ethic & his commitment to conservative values inspired us all,” she wrote. The United States has battled the world’s largest outbreak of the virus, with 463,000 people succumbing to the disease.—AFP ■

## Hyundai, Kia deny Apple car talks, sending shares tumbling

SOUTH KOREAN automaker Hyundai and its affiliate Kia on Monday denied news reports they were in talks with Apple for a joint project to make autonomous vehicles, sending their shares tumbling. The announcement came about a month after the country’s cable broadcaster Korea Economic TV said the iPhone maker had approached Hyundai to discuss a potential partnership to develop electric vehicles and batteries, sending the car maker’s shares soaring. Reports last week suggested they could produce cars in the US state of Georgia.

But on Monday Hyundai and Kia said in regulatory filings they were “not discussing autonomous electric car development with Apple”. Kia shares slumped 14.98 per cent at the close in Seoul on Monday, while Hyundai fell 6.21 per cent. Both automakers added that they had talked with multiple firms about such projects, but no decision had been made. Hyundai said those talks were in their “early stages”. The company, South Korea’s biggest automaker, has already rolled out fully electric cars, including the Ioniq and the Kona Electric, as it seeks to win a slice of the growing market.—AFP ■

## Japan to draw up guidelines on how to transport COVID-19 vaccines



Japanese health minister Norihisa Tamura speaks in a session of the House of Representatives Budget Committee in Tokyo on 8 February, 2021. PHOTO: KYODO

THE Japanese government will draw up guidelines on how to safely transport COVID-19 vaccines, health minister Norihisa Tamura said Monday, as it steps up preparations to distribute shots to the country’s population of 126 million. Vaccines developed by various pharmaceutical firms have different characteristics and logistical challenges. The one developed by Pfizer Inc., for example, is believed to be highly effective but must be stored at about minus 75 C.

“We aim to quickly communicate information to local governments, including how to transport and handle (the vaccines),” Tamura said during a meet of the House of Representatives Budget

Committee.

The first batch of the Pfizer vaccine could arrive in Japan from Belgium as early as Sunday, a day before its use is expected to be approved by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

The government plans to begin inoculating 10,000 health workers this month before expanding the pool to other health workers, people aged 65 and older, and those with pre-existing conditions. Japan is hoping to contain the spread of the virus, having extended the state of virus emergency over 10 prefectures including Tokyo, the hardest hit among Japan’s 47 prefectures, beyond the initial 7 February end date. The current emergency will

last until 7 March. A research team of the health ministry plans to verify the safety of the Pfizer vaccine by collecting weekly data on symptoms that appear in medical workers after they are inoculated, government sources said Monday.

Around 20,000 doctors and nurses from 100 hospitals across the country are to participate in the study, which aims to track potential symptoms and the frequency in which the symptoms occur regardless of whether the vaccine is the cause. The government plans to administer the Pfizer vaccine to participants in two doses 21 days apart, with their physical condition recorded every day from the first shot to four weeks after the second shot. The research team will collect data on a weekly basis on the symptoms and serious reactions that are expected to occur in one in every several thousand people.

“Vaccines are the key to our coronavirus measures,” Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said during the committee session. “The government will work with prefectures and municipalities to ensure all of the people will be able to be safely vaccinated.”

The government has agreements in place to receive enough vaccine doses for 157 million people, 72 million of which are to come from Pfizer. The remainder will be provided by AstraZeneca Plc and Moderna Inc.

About 20,000 ultra-cold freezers are slated to be set up at medical facilities across Japan to store the Pfizer vaccine, which was 95 per cent effective in clinical trials. The AstraZeneca vaccine can be stored at 2 to 8 C, making it easier to handle, but is only around 70 per cent effective.—Kyodo ■

## Sanctions hurt Venezuela economy, US government study says

US sanctions have likely contributed to Venezuela’s economic deterioration and have caused obstacles for humanitarian workers, a study by a US government watchdog said Monday.

The assessment by the Government Accountability Office, requested by Democratic lawmakers, comes as President Joe Biden looks set to fine-tune Venezuela policy but largely preserve his predecessor’s unsuccessful goal of toppling leftist leader Nicolas Maduro.

“The US sanctions likely contributed to the decline of the Venezuelan economy, mainly by further limiting its revenue from crude oil exports,” the report said.

It pointed to the sanctions Donald Trump imposed by Donald Trump’s administration on state oil firm PDVSA, saying that buyers of Venezuela’s key export shied away

or were able to negotiate lower prices.

But the report did not quantify a figure and noted that there were plenty of other factors behind Venezuela’s economic collapse, including mismanagement by the government. It did not directly say if sanctions hurt ordinary Venezuelans rather than the government and noted that the United States has emphasized that it is not restricting humanitarian goods.

“However, despite US agency efforts to mitigate the negative humanitarian consequences of sanctions, humanitarian organizations assisting Venezuelans are still experiencing some challenges delivering assistance, including delays in processing financial transactions and transfers,” it said.

The report recommended that the Treasury Depart-

ment do more to track complaints from humanitarian workers to address recurrent problems.

Representative Andy Levin, one of the lawmakers who requested the report, said it “makes clear that sanctions imposed by the United States made a dire situation worse”.

“With this new administration, we have an opportunity to pursue foreign policy guided by our values,” he said. “Let us take the lessons of this report to heart and use them to craft a more thoughtful, humane and effective approach moving forward.”

The Biden administration plans one key shift by shielding Venezuelans in the United States from deportation — a step refused by the anti-immigration Trump despite his tough talk against Maduro.—AFP ■

# Dutch hit by first snowstorm in a decade as Europe shivers

THE Netherlands and parts of Germany were blanketed on Sunday by a snowstorm that disrupted planes and trains and put some coronavirus testing on hold.

Britain was also bracing for heavy snow from what Dutch meteorologists have called Storm Darcy, which is packing winds of up to 90 kilometres (55 miles) an hour.

People rushed outdoors to enjoy sledding and playing in the snow in Dutch and German cities despite the bitterly cold conditions with temperatures as low as minus 5 degrees Celsius (23 Fahrenheit).

But Dutch authorities declared a rare “coderead” emergency for the entire country as it was hit by its first proper snowstorm in more than a decade.

Weather forecasting website Weer.nl said that overnight a force-eight wind was measured in combination with snowfall, adding: “This officially means a snowstorm in our country”.

“It is the first snowstorm in a long time: the last snowstorm took place in January 2010,” it said.

Dozens of flights were de-



A Deutsche Bahn train (L) is seen in a depot close to Berlin's Ost Bahnhof railway station during snowfall in Berlin on February 8, 2021. Snowfall, heavy gusts of wind and sub-zero temperatures in north and western Germany have caused travel interruptions on road and rail. **PHOTO: AFP**

layed or cancelled at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport while Eindhoven airport in the south of the country scrapped all services.

All trains were cancelled in the Netherlands, including international services to Germany. Trams were halted in Amsterdam, while a tram derailed in

the snow in The Hague, an AFP reporter saw.

Motorists were advised to avoid travelling and more than 80 cars were reported to have skidded off the road.

Most parts of the country had between five and 10 centimetres (two and four inches) of snow but

some areas received 30 centimetres, public broadcaster NOS said.

The conditions were so severe that the Dutch government had closed all coronavirus testing centres for several days.

## 'Beast from the East'

Up to 10 days of sub-zero daytime temperatures are expected

in the Netherlands, raising hopes in the skating-obsessed country that canals will freeze over.

Prime Minister Mark Rutte has said ice skating will be allowed if the canals freeze for the first time since 2018, but warned Dutch people to observe social distancing and to try not to fall over and end up in already over-stretched hospitals.

Hopes that a 200-kilometre (125-mile) ice-skating marathon through 11 cities called the Elfstedentocht could be held for the first time since 1997 are however on ice because of coronavirus restrictions.

All four football matches in the Dutch top-flight Eredivisie on Sunday were cancelled, as was a German Bundesliga game.

In Germany, snowfall caused major disruption to trains and cancellations of services between cities including Hamburg and Hanover.

Thick snow of up to 30 centimetres meanwhile disrupted road traffic, with hundreds of accidents and part of a motorway in North Rhine-Westphalia closed by police after it turned into an ice rink.—AFP

## Germany, Poland, Sweden expel Russian diplomats in tit-for-tat move

GERMANY, Sweden and Poland on Monday each threw out a Russian diplomat in retaliation for Moscow's expulsion last week of their diplomats for allegedly taking part in protests in support of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

The three EU countries announced the tit-for-tat moves in coordinated statements, drawing an angry response from Russia which accused them of meddling in its internal affairs.

The diplomatic spat comes at a time of heightened tensions between the European Union and Russia, exacerbated by the arrest and jailing of leading opposition figure Navalny.

Russia humiliated the European Union on Friday by announcing the expulsions during a rare meeting in Moscow between EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

European governments strongly condemned the shock expulsions, with Berlin warning that it would respond in kind.

Moscow's decision to expel the three diplomats “was in no

way justified”, the German foreign ministry said Monday, adding that the German staff member had been doing his job of “observing developments in Russia by lawful means”.

Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde said Stockholm had “informed the Russian ambassador that a person from the Russian embassy is asked to leave Sweden”. “This is a clear response to the unacceptable decision to expel a Swedish diplomat who was only performing his duties,” she wrote on Twitter.

The Polish foreign ministry likewise condemned the “groundless expulsion” of a Polish diplomat from Saint Petersburg and said it had declared “persona non grata” a Russian consular official in Poznan, western Poland.

The Russian foreign ministry immediately hit back.

“Today's decisions by Poland, Germany and Sweden are unfounded, unfriendly and are a continuation of the very series of actions that the West is taking with regard to our country and which we qualify as interference

in our internal affairs,” spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on state channel Rossiya 1.

## 'Reviving relations'

The Kremlin earlier on Monday defended the expulsion of the EU diplomats during Borrell's high-profile visit, and insisted it remained interested in reviving relations with Brussels. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the declaration of the three foreign diplomats as personae non gratae was a “consequence of the actions of some diplomatic missions in Moscow against the backdrop of illegal riots”.

Peskov added that Moscow did not initiate “the collapse” of the relationship with the EU.

“Russia has been and remains interested in reviving relations between Moscow and Brussels,” he told reporters.

Navalny, a fierce critic of President Vladimir Putin, was arrested upon arrival in Moscow on January 17 after spending several months in Germany recovering from a poisoning attack the West believes was ordered by the Kremlin.—AFP

## EU chief urges states to donate vaccines to Ukraine

THE European Commission chief said on Monday she had called on EU member states to donate some of their coronavirus jabs to Ukraine, which is trying to launch a vaccination campaign.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has faced criticism at home for failing to source Western-made jabs and has called on the EU to help Ukraine source vaccines.

Zelensky said on Monday that Ukraine, one of the poorest countries in Europe, would begin the first phase of the vaccination campaign later this month.

The country of some 40 million is awaiting delivery of eight million doses promised under the United Nations Covax programme and up to five million doses of the Chinese CoronaVac jab.

“On top of Covax, I have also asked our member states to donate part of their doses to Ukraine,” European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said in a video address at a conference held in Ukraine's capital Kiev.

“Thanks to Covax, Ukraine's doctors and nurses will receive the first vaccines already this month,” she said, adding that “millions of other doses will reach Ukraine by the summer”.

Ukraine has not registered any vaccine so far and Zelensky has rejected calls from pro-Moscow politicians to approve Russia's Sputnik V jab.

Last week, the post-Soviet country said it had also secured 12 million doses of vaccines developed by AstraZeneca and Novavax.

The total amount of the already secured doses is not enough to meet the needs of the country, however.

Speaking at the same conference on Monday, Zelensky also pointed to Ukrainians' “mistrust” of vaccines, saying a “large part of the population” did not want to get vaccinated.

According to a recent poll conducted by the non-government Rating Group, more than half of Ukrainians said they were not ready to get inoculated, even for free.—AFP

# Tokyo stocks end at 30-yr high on global economic recovery hopes

TOKYO —Tokyo stocks rose sharply Monday, with the key indexes closing at 30-year highs, as hopes for a global economic recovery grew after the United States made progress in preparing a massive stimulus package to deal with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average ended up 609.31 points, or 2.12 per cent, from Friday at 29,388.50, its highest close since 3 August, 1990. The broader Topix index of all First Section issues on the Tokyo Stock Exchange was up 33 points, or 1.75 per cent, at 1,923.95, the highest since 5 June 1991.

The total market capitalization of companies listed on the First Section reached a record 712 trillion yen (\$6.7 trillion). Gainers were led by iron and steel, mining and marine transportation issues.

But the robustness in the market also stoked fears that share prices have been rising at a pace that does not reflect the fundamentals of the economy, which is still struggling with the fallout from the pandemic.

Analysts have warned that ample liquidity provided by major central banks under their massive monetary easing campaigns has triggered such an excessive



A roadside financial data board in Tokyo shows the Nikkei Stock Average closing above 29,000 on 8 February, 2021. PHOTO: KYODO

rise in the market.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year Japanese government bond hit the highest level in over 10 months at 0.065 per cent, up 0.010 percentage point from Friday's close, as the safe-haven debt was sold on a sharp rise in Tokyo stocks.

The US dollar fluctuated narrowly in the mid-105 yen range throughout the day as Friday's disappointing US jobs data for January pressed market players to await further developments on the stimulus package.

At 5 pm, the dollar fetched 105.48-49 yen compared with 105.32-42 yen in New York and 105.49-50 yen in Tokyo at 5 pm Friday.

The euro was quoted at \$1.2040-2041 and 127.00-04 yen against \$1.2045-2055 and 126.92-127.02 yen in New York and \$1.1963-1965

and 126.20-24 yen in Tokyo late Friday afternoon.

Tokyo stocks kept an upbeat tone throughout the day.

The Nikkei topped the psychologically important 29,000 level threshold early in the morning, accelerating the pace of increase toward the end of the session. Investor sentiment also improved on gains in U.S. stock futures in after-hours trading and solid Asian stock markets.

"Market players are growing optimistic that the US stimulus plan would be enacted in the next two to three weeks," said Yutaka Miura, senior technical analyst at Mizuho Securities Co.

But he also said, "It was an uncomfortable rise in stocks, given the recent rapid increase in stock prices."

On Friday, US lawmakers approved a budget outline that will allow President Joe Biden and his Democratic allies in Congress to move forward on the economic relief plan without Republican support, beginning the process of turning the proposal into legislation.

Brokers project that the upward trend will continue for a while, underpinned by positive earnings in Japan and overseas, with many companies upgrading their profit estimates.

"Now it is well within our sight that the Nikkei will reach the 30,000 level," said Masahiro Ichikawa, chief market strategist at Sumitomo Mitsui DS Asset Management Co.

On the First Section, advancing issues outnumbered decliners 1,710 to 429, while 52 ended unchanged.

Steelmakers and shippers climbed on expectations of recovering demand amid the improving global economic outlook.

Kobe Steel soared 94 yen, or 17.5 per cent, to 632 yen, while its rival JFE Holdings jumped 74 yen, or 7.4 per cent, to 1,078 yen.

Among shipping firms, Nippon Yusen climbed 164 yen, or 5.9 per cent, to 2,950 yen and Kawasaki Kisen gained 83 yen, or 4.4 per cent, to 1,969 yen.—Kyodo

# BP enters UK offshore wind sector

BRITISH energy major BP on Monday entered the UK offshore wind sector alongside German peer EnBW, after authorities awarded rights to build wind farms to help cut carbon emissions.

The oil giant and German power firm Energie Baden-Wuerttemberg AG (EnBW) have been selected as preferred bidder for two 60-year leases in the North Sea.

"This marks BP's entry to the UK's offshore wind power sector, currently the largest in



Scroby Sands offshore wind farm is pictured on 27 August 2008. Located 2 miles into the North Sea off the east coast of Britain Scroby Sands wind farm is one of the UK's first commercial offshore wind farms. PHOTO: AFP

the world, and is further progress towards BP rapidly building a world-

class wind energy business," a statement said. "Once operational,

this generating capacity would be sufficient to power more than 3.4 million UK households with clean electricity."

BP itself is targeting "net zero" carbon emissions by 2050 as part of broader plans to offset declining oil and gas production with greater output from sustainable energy sources, such as electricity and wind.

Monday's announcement was confirmed by the Crown Estate, which manages Queen Elizabeth II's property.—AFP

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Dated: 9 February 2021

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Consignees of cargo carried on M.V TAN BINH 277 VOY. NO. (20230) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 9-2-2021 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of MITT where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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## French health minister encourages use of AstraZeneca jab

FRENCH Health Minister Olivier Veran sought to boost confidence in the AstraZeneca vaccine on Monday as he received a dose in front of TV cameras and reporters at a hospital southwest of Paris.

South Africa has delayed the start of its inoculation programme using the jab from the British-Swedish pharmaceutical group over concerns it does not work on a new variant of Covid-19 that originated in the country.

Veran said that the South African variant had not been widely detected in France.

“I continue to rec-



French Health Minister Olivier Veran receives a dose of the AstraZeneca-Oxford Covid-19 vaccine at the South Ile-de-France Hospital Group (Groupe Hospitalier Sud Ile-de-France), in Melun, on the outskirts of Paris, on 8 February 2021 during an AstraZeneca vaccine injections campaign for people under the age of 65. **PHOTO: AFP**

ommend vaccination by the AstraZeneca vaccine, which protects against 99 per cent of the viruses that are present in our country,” Veran said from a hospital in the town of Melun.

France received 270,000 doses of the jab on Saturday and would take delivery of another 300,000 in the next few days, he added.

The vaccine is to be used as a priority for all care workers, including hospital and nursing home staff, as well as domestic workers.

“I encourage all care-workers to get themselves

vaccinated in their hospitals, health centres and all available places in order to protect themselves as fast as possible,” Veran said.

The jab distributed by AstraZeneca and developed by the University of Oxford is set to be discussed by WHO experts on Monday amid doubts about its efficacy against the South African variant and against disease in the over-65s.

French President Emmanuel Macron said at the end of January that the shot was “quasi-ineffective for people over 65.” — AFP

## WHO experts discuss AstraZeneca Covid vaccine

THE World Health Organization’s vaccine experts were deciding Monday on their usage recommendations for the AstraZeneca-Oxford Covid-19 vaccine —including for older adults.

The 15-member Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) was spending the day in a virtual extraordinary meeting discussing the two-shot vaccine.

The WHO said the recommendations on who it should and should not be used for would be made public later this week.

The regulatory authorities in several European nations have not authorised the vaccine for use among the over-65s — by far the most vulnerable age group for serious Covid-19 disease.

According to the SAGE meeting’s agenda, “assessment of the critical evidence, including data and draft recommendations related to vaccine use in older adults” will form a key part of Monday’s talks.

The meeting will also discuss recent evidence on new coronavirus variants of concern.

South Africa said Sunday it would suspend the start of its Covid-19 vaccinations with the AstraZeneca jab after a study showed the drug failed to prevent mild and moderate cases of the virus variant that has appeared in the country.

### AstraZeneca to present findings

During Monday’s SAGE meeting, AstraZeneca was due to make a 25-minute presentation about the safety and efficacy data on the jab, also known as AZD1222, plus results from the three phases of human testing, from the first jabs to mass trials.

The UK-Swedish pharmaceuticals giant was also to discuss risk management plans and other implementation considerations, before facing questions.

The meeting was also to get an outline of ongoing and planned studies.

The SAGE working group was then to present evidence including data and draft recommendations relating to the vaccine’s use in older adults.

The four-and-a-half-hour meeting was due to wrap up with a presentation of the remaining draft recommendations.

In a separate process, the UN health agency is also set to decide on February 15 whether to give the vaccine emergency use listing for the versions produced in India and South Korea.

If granted, doses from those sites could start to be distributed to some of the world’s poorest countries via Covax, the global vaccine procurement and distribution pool.

Many low-income countries are relying entirely on the AstraZeneca jab to start immunising

their most vulnerable populations, but cannot receive their first doses until the WHO grants emergency authorisation.

### SAGE advice

SAGE advises the WHO on overall global policies and strategies, ranging from vaccines and technology, research and development, to delivery of immunisation and its links with other health interventions.

Chaired by Mexican doctor Alejandro Cravioto, the group is comprised of 15 experts from around the world representing a broad range of expertise.

SAGE has already issued advice on the usage of the Pfizer-BioNTech and the Moderna vaccines.

So far, the WHO has only given emergency use listing to the Pfizer jab, though several other manufacturers have started the evaluation process, including AstraZeneca and Moderna. Covax is almost entirely dependent on the AstraZeneca jab in its first wave of distribution.

Some 145 countries are set to receive 337.2 million doses — enough to immunise 3.3 per cent of their collective population by mid-2021. Of those, 336 million are AstraZeneca vials.

The first Covax deliveries are expected to take place in late February.

However, the AstraZeneca vaccines cannot start being shipped until the WHO signs them off. — AFP

## Coronavirus: Latest global developments

HERE are the latest developments in the coronavirus crisis:

### WHO verdict on AstraZeneca

World Health Organization experts are deciding who the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine should best be given to, as doubts are raised about its usefulness for older people and against the South African strain.

It will deliver its verdict later this week.

### ...But S.Africa halts rollout

South Africa is suspending vaccinations with the jab after a study showed it failed to prevent mild and moderate cases of the variant that has appeared in the country.

But the Anglo-Swedish drug company insists that its shot could stop people getting severely ill and says it’s working on a version to combat the new strain.

### Tanzania on a prayer

Dissent in the east African country mounts after President John Magufuli claimed the virus had been chased from the country by the power of prayer.

With more and more deaths being put down to “pneumonia”, official denial is wearing thin as politicians begin to fall ill.

Magufuli said God had eliminated the virus but the Catholic Church, to which he belongs, begs to differ. “We are not an island,” it said.

The president, who is also against vaccinations, had earlier claimed that Covid tests were not to be trusted.

He said a goat and a papaya fruit had tested positive in secret tests of the kits he ordered.

### S.Korea tests sneezy pets

Dogs and cats in Seoul with a cough or a fever are to be tested.

The move comes after a kitten became the country’s first animal case of the virus. Pets that test positive will be kept isolated for 14 days or sent to kennels or catteries if their owners come down with Covid.

Experts say the chances of a pet giving a human the virus are low.

### More than 2.3 million dead

The virus has killed at least 2,316,812 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP Monday.

The United States is the worst-affected country with 463,470 deaths followed by Brazil with 231,534, Mexico with 166,200, India with 155,080, and the UK with 112,465. — AFP

# Japan submarine collides with private ship off Shikoku, 3 injured

TOKYO — A Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force submarine collided Monday with a commercial vessel in the Pacific Ocean off the western main island of Shikoku but no major damage was reported, government officials said.

The 84-metre-long Souryu scraped the hull of the vessel as it was surfacing, the Defence Ministry said, adding three crew members on the submarine were slightly injured.

Top government spokesman Katsunobu Kato said at a press conference that a ship believed to be the commercial vessel, when contacted by the Japan Coast Guard, reported that no impact was felt and it does not appear to have sustained any damage.

The collision occurred at around 10:58 am off Cape Ashizuri in Kochi Prefecture. The ministry said the submarine's antenna mast and other upper parts were slightly damaged but it was able to continue sailing.

Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi said the submarine, which was undergoing routine training, saw the commercial vessel through



Photo from the website of Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force shows submarine Souryu. PHOTO: KYODO

its periscope as it rose but was unable to avoid it in time. The submarine's communications equipment was damaged in the accident, causing an hours-long delay in reporting the incident by mobile phone, he said.

Kishi told reporters he had been instructed by Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga to confirm the

safety of the commercial vessel and provide rescue if necessary, but that the MSDF was unable to confirm the details regarding the ship because it left the scene soon afterward.

The collision, which came on the heels of an MSDF destroyer hitting a Chinese fishing boat in March last year, was "truly regret-

table," he said.

The Japan Transport Safety Board said it has launched an investigation into the collision.

The Souryu is a diesel-electric submarine with a standard displacement of 2,950 tonnes and a crew of about 65. It entered service in 2009 as the first of its class. —Kyodo

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### At least 24 dead in Morocco underground factory flood: media

At least 24 people died after heavy rain flooded an illegal underground textile workshop in a private house in Morocco's port of Tangiers, the state news agency reported Monday. Rescue workers recovered 24 bodies from the property and rescued 10 survivors who were taken to hospital, the MAP agency said citing local authorities. A search of the premises was continuing.

Local media outlets indicated at least some of the victims may have been electrocuted as the incoming water interfered with power facilities, but there was no immediate confirmation of those reports.

Morocco has experienced heavy rains in recent weeks, after a long period of drought. In early January, the inclement weather caused several dilapidated buildings to collapse in Casablanca, the country's economic capital, causing at least four deaths, according to local media.

Poorly maintained drainage systems often exacerbate flooding in cities.

Fifty people died in floods in 2014 caused by heavy rains in the south of Morocco. — AFP

### Glacier break in India leaves at least 20 dead, more than 170 missing

At least 20 people have died and more than 170 are missing after a Himalayan glacier broke in the northern state of Uttarakhand on Sunday, causing massive flooding, local police reported Monday.

The natural disaster, which took place in the Chamoli district of the state, caused massive flooding in the Dhauli-ganga and Alaknanda rivers, damaging the nearby Rishiganga and NTPC power plant projects.

According to local media, most of the missing are labourers who were working on projects when the incident occurred, while many villagers living downstream of the rivers are also missing. — Kyodo

# Israel's Netanyahu denies corruption charges as trial resumes

ISRAEL'S Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied corruption charges against him in a brief court appearance Monday, as his graft trial resumed weeks before a fourth national election inside two years.

Netanyahu, the first Israeli premier to be indicted in office, was formally charged last year over allegations that he accepted improper gifts and sought to trade regulatory favour with media moguls in exchange for positive coverage.

He had been compelled to appear to deliver an in-person response to the charges, after last month formally submitting his innocent plea in writing.

"I confirm the written answer submitted in my name," Israel's longest-serving premier said, after Jerusalem court judge Rivka Feldman Friedman read out the charges against him.

Netanyahu was referring to a January 18 court filing from his defence team which said "the prime minister denies all charges" in each of the three separate cases against him.

The combative 71-year-old



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (R) talks to his lawyers ahead of a hearing in his corruption trial at the Jerusalem district court, on 8 February 2021. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied corruption charges against him in a brief court appearance, as his graft trial intensifies weeks before a fourth national election inside two years. PHOTO: REUVEN CASTRO / POOL / AFP

premier, who has previously blasted the charges as "fabricated and ludicrous", spent just 20 minutes inside the courtroom on Monday, entering and exiting amid a heavy security deployment and dozens of protesters.

The hearing continued in his absence for several hours, with Netanyahu's lawyers Boaz Ben Zur and Amit Hadad accusing Israel's Attorney General Avi-

chai Mandelblit — a Netanyahu appointee — of mishandling the case.

They argued that elements of the investigation into the premier were opened without required authorizations.

### 'Election meddling?'

Netanyahu has repeatedly charged that he is the victim of a witch-hunt, with the allegations

against him trumped-up.

The trial schedule has not yet been set but it may force the prime minister to appear in court multiple times a week, as he campaigns ahead of Israel's 23 March elections.

His lawyers asked for a delay of several months saying they needed more time to prepare due to the complexity of the case, but judges did not rule on that request before the hearing ended.

When Netanyahu last appeared in court nine months ago, he had just won a political victory by forming a coalition government with election rival Benny Gantz, following three inconclusive national polls.

But that fraught coalition proved short-lived and collapsed in December, with Gantz branding Netanyahu as serially dishonest.

It is unclear whether the cloud of the trial will hurt the premier's re-election chances in March.

Israel's parliament speaker Yariv Levin, loyalist of Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, insisted the court must "postpone" the trial's upcoming phase. — AFP

## 'Flawless' Djokovic crushes Chardy in Australian Open warning

MELBOURNE — Defending champion Novak Djokovic said he played "flawless and dominant" tennis to blast past Frenchman Jeremy Chardy Monday in an ominous start to his bid for an unprecedented ninth Australian Open title.

The Serbian world number one, who clinched his 17th Grand Slam in last year's gripping Melbourne final against Dominic Thiem, wasted little energy in the 6-3, 6-1, 6-2 romp in just 91 minutes on Rod Laver Arena.

The writing was on the wall with Chardy failing to take a set off the Serb in 13 previous meetings.

"It felt great. I mean, I started the match really well, broke his serve and was pretty much a flawless match," he said, adding that he felt "relaxed and comfortable".

"Especially on my service games, I was very dominant. Just overall, I think every shot that I



Serbia's Novak Djokovic hits a return against France's Jeremy Chardy during their men's singles match on day one of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on February 8, 2021. **PHOTO:**

executed tonight was really good and on a high level.

"I'm very pleased with the way I opened up the Australian Open."

Djokovic, chasing an 18th Slam crown to close in on the 20 held by Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, has likened his relationship with the Australian Open to

"a love affair".

And he clearly enjoyed himself, dishing up a masterclass for the socially-distanced fans in the stadium.

"It feels great, so great to see people back in the stadium," he said.

"I'm really glad to see a lot of people actually — this is the most

I've seen on a tennis court in 12 months."

"Sometimes we take these things (crowds) for granted, but very very grateful to see you all," he added.

### 'Sticking to the game plan'

The 33-year-old broke Chardy in the opening game and was never troubled, racing through the set in 32 minutes, with the Frenchman winning just two points off the Serb's service game.

It was similar scenario in a lopsided second set, which only lasted 22 minutes, as Chardy struggled to cope with the ferocity of Djokovic's serving, which routinely clocked in at more than 200 kph (124 mph).

Chardy, who made the semi-finals of the warm-up Murray River Open tournament, surrendered meekly, with Djokovic winning the match with his ninth ace.

"Of course, you are expected to win most of the times as a top

player and kind of ease your way through the first rounds," said Djokovic.

"But, you know, I don't see it that way, obviously. You still have to do your job on the court. So I was sticking to the game plan."

The Serb has won a record eight times in Melbourne, the scene of his maiden Grand Slam triumph in 2008, and is unbeaten on the famous blue courts since his shock defeat by South Korea's Hyeon Chung in the 2018 round of 16.

He next faces American Frances Tiafoe in a tricky side of the draw with 2014 champion Stan Wawrinka and former world number three Milos Raonic potential obstacles en route to the quarter-finals.

"It's the first time I will face him, he's definitely one of the up-and-coming American tennis players," Djokovic said of Tiafoe. "I'm looking forward to the next challenge." — AFP

## Hamilton signs one-year deal with Mercedes F1 team



(FILES) In this file photo taken on November 15, 2020 Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton gives an interview after winning the Turkish Formula One Grand Prix at the Intercity Istanbul Park circuit in Istanbul. Lewis Hamilton has ended his long-running contract saga with Mercedes by signing a new one-year deal, the Formula One team announced on February 8, 2021. **PHOTO: CLIVE MASON / POOL / AFP**

LONDON — Lewis Hamilton has ended his long-running contract saga by signing a one-year deal with Mercedes for the 2021 season, the Formula One team announced on Monday.

The British driver will be competing for an unprecedented eighth world title when the new season gets under way in Bahrain next month.

The 36-year-old equalled Michael Schumacher's championship haul with his seventh

title in 2020 and already has more race wins, pole positions and podiums than any other driver in the sport's history.

Hamilton said the team had "achieved incredible things together", while team principal Toto Wolff said the partnership had "written itself into the history books". Hamilton had been out of contract since his previous deal expired on the final day of December.

But after several weeks of

negotiations with Mercedes, his future has finally been settled, albeit with both parties agreeing to only one extra year.

Despite the delay, both driver and team always insisted it was a matter of when, not if, a new contract would be agreed.

Hamilton said he was "excited" to be heading into a ninth season with the Silver Arrows.

"Our team has achieved incredible things together and we look forward to building on our success even further, while continuously looking to improve, both on and off the track," he said.

"I'm equally determined to continue the journey we started to make motorsport more diverse for future generations and I am grateful that Mercedes has been extremely supportive of my call to address this issue," he said.

"I'm proud to say we are taking that effort further this year by launching a foundation dedicated to diversity and inclusion in the sport."

The Mercedes driver has become an outspoken supporter of equality, diversity and the environment, making several forthright statements on human rights and racism.—AFP

## Gundogan's Man City must stay 'humble' despite winning streak

LONDON — Ilkay Gundogan has urged Manchester City to stay "humble" despite their eye-catching winning run as they close in on a third Premier League title in four years.

Sunday's 4-1 win over Liverpool at Anfield made it 14 victories in a row in all competitions, equalling the record for top-flight sides set by Preston and Arsenal.

Their five-point gap at the top of the table could become eight if they win the game in hand they have over the chasing pack.

But Gundogan, who scored twice at Anfield despite miss-

ing a first-half penalty, said Pep Guardiola's men could not take anything for granted.

"Probably the most important thing now is to stay humble and to approach every game like we did in the last few weeks and months," he said.

"Every single game brings a new challenge, but it is always about taking these challenges and trying to make the best out of it."

The 30-year-old Germany midfielder said the current coronavirus-shortened season had been unusually competitive.—AFP



Manchester City's German midfielder Ilkay Gundogan passes the ball during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Manchester City at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on February 7, 2021. Manchester City won the game 4-1. **PHOTO: JON SUPER / POOL / AFP**