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Senior General Min Aung Hlaing delivers speech at coordination meeting of State Administration Council



Chairman of the State Administration Council Senior General Min Aung Hlaing presides over the coordination meeting of the State Administration Council in Nay Pyi Taw on 15 February 2021. **PHOTO: MNA**

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing presided over the coordination meeting of the State Administration Council yesterday morning.

Those present at the meeting were Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services and Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Soe Win, and the council members.

At the meeting, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said that officials who are responsible for the stability of the State, the rule of law, lives and property of the public are handling the ongoing problems with care; the State Administration Council have never deviated from the multiparty democracy path since it took the administrative power and measures are being taken in line with the 2008 State Constitution; the Council does not change politic, administrative, economic, social, peace and international relation policies of the country; the emerging situations have re-

... legal actions against voter list errors, the systematic holding of elections after the State of Emergency, priority on the livelihood, peace, stability, the rule of law and peace processes and interest of individuals through peace and stability of the country.

sulted from voter list fraud in the previous elections; the Council is working together with prominent persons from civil societies as it focused on the civilian administrative sector.

He continued to say about legal actions against voter list errors, the systematic holding of elections after the State of Emergency, priority on the livelihood, peace, stability, the rule of law and peace processes and interest of individuals through peace and stability of the country.

The Senior General also talked on the recovery of economy impacted by COVID-19,

continuing its vaccination programme, being patient with CDM of civil service personnel, breaching the vows of medical professionals with failure to perform their duties of healthcare services at the public health centres, difficulties of people as they have to get medical services from private clinics and taking legal actions on these cases, issuing permits to the private sector to import COVID-19 vaccine for the public with the approval of Food and Drug Administration.

He also discussed measures related to smooth commodity flows through public transpor-

tation of train, car, waterway and flight, and providing security assistance to the banks for ensuring regular currency flow.

The Senior General said security forces are hardly working in their duties in line with international rules; other countries, except the western states, have advised solving the internal problems in line with democratic practices; fraud voter lists are being scrutinized at present and will be announced worldwide; full cooperation of the council members is needed for democratic practices in the countries.

The attendees at the meeting discussed legal actions against the attempts on disturbing the establishment of multiparty democracy in the country, the role of foreign advisors, ensuring true information of media through the Press Council, awards to dutiful civil service personnel, taking legal action against the civil service personnel who breached the rules, generating low-cost hy-

dropower, legal actions against the formation of 'a parallel government', security measures at the checkpoints of townships, wards and villages, the resettlement of internally displaced persons from armed conflicts, peacemaking processes, incitement for the lack of stability and security measures and resumption of the public transport sector and the extended plan.

In his concluding remark, the Chairman of the State Administration Council coordinated the discussion of Council members on the issues such as the order of State pardon and remitting prison sentences of the inmates for their peaceful living not to lose their rights in line with democratic practices, false news on this issue, the role of media as the fourth pillar of the country, the need of accurate news and information, and the joint security measures of Tatmadaw personnel, police forces and fire brigade members.—MNA

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
State Administration Council

Order No. (65/2021)

4th Waxing of Tabodwe 1382 ME
15 February 2021

Substitution of Magway Region Administration Council Member

The State Administration Council has substituted Dr San Hlaing, the member of Magway Region Administration Council, with U Aung Chein, as per Section 419 of the State Constitution.

By Order

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

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

Request to Public

1. Democracy practices have granted the public 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 for human rights, some persons are now under pressure, harassed and threatened in breaching the laws. Undisciplined acts could lead to tarnishing the image of democracy.
2. For preventing destructive actions against the stability of the State, the safety of the public and the rule of law, it is also required to take 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.

Mandalay Region Administration Council's Announcement to Public

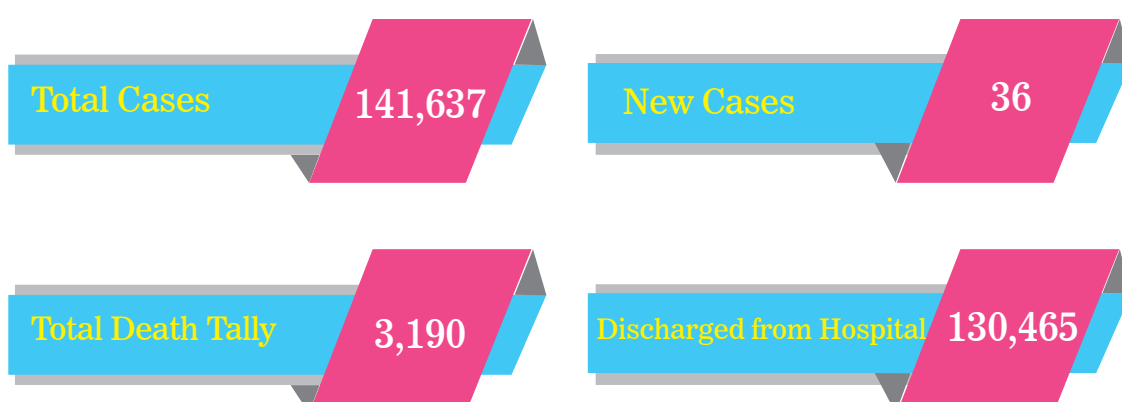
Some unscrupulous persons are putting various forms of pressures and posing threats to civil service personnel in performing their duties at present. The civil service personnel who have encountered such pressures and threats shall contact the following phone numbers. Strong legal actions will also be taken against those who make such pressures and threats.

Contact phone numbers	-02 403 9635	-02 403 6869	-09 797 144 144
	-02 403 7199	-02 403 6978	-09 694 740 311

36 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 15 February, total figure rises to 141,637

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 141,637 after 36 new cases were reported on 15 February 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these confirmed cases, 3,190 died, 130,465 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Updated at 8 pm, 15 February 2021



Daily death toll until 8 pm 15-2-2021



Ministry of Health and Sports

MRTV holds celebrations of 75th Anniversary



State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing spoke on the occasion of the MRTV 75th Anniversary, and the dignitaries, officials and staff are seen present at the event yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF of Defence Service and Chairman of the State Administration Council Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attended the celebration of the 75th anniversary of Myanmar Radio and Television yesterday.

The ceremony was held at the headquarters of MRTV in Nay Pyi Taw-Tatkon, and attended by General Mya Tun Oo, Lt-Gen Moe Myint Tun, Union Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Soe Htut, Union Minister for Information U Chit Naing, Commander of Nay Pyi Taw Command Maj-Gen Zaw Myo Tin, Deputy Ministers U Ye Tint and Brig-Gen Zaw Min Tun and MRTV officials, while its staff members in Yangon joined the event online.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing cut the ceremonial ribbon to open the 75th-anniversary museum of MRTV and sprinkled scented water on the plaque of museum.

The museum displays radios from successive eras, broadcasting machines, programme arrangement, news and information, different brands of television sets used in different periods, green screen virtual, transmission and receivers, repairing machines, cameras of successive generations, talk-show settings, newsroom settings, microphones, telephones, instruments, seats from the time of BBS and boards.

The Chairman of the State Administration Council made instructions on conserving the historic and antique materials at the museum.

The MRTV staff members presented the performance



The Senior General looks around the MRTV Museum. The Union Minister and Deputy Ministers are launching the new channel. **PHOTO: MNA**



The MRTV staff members are presenting the performance to mark the MRTV 75th Anniversary in Nay Pyi Taw on 15 February 2021.

PHOTO: MNA

with the song to honour the 75th anniversary of MRTV, followed by the documentary about the anniversary.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing delivered a speech, saying the great occasions of anniversary for the staff members, the history of Myanmar media started with Yadanabon Newspapers published on 9 March 1874, the first establishment of broadcast media in 1937 and turning it into an independent and national broadcast media in March 1945.

He also talked about the history of MRTV with the

... the history of Myanmar media started with Yadanabon Newspapers published on 9 March 1874, the first establishment of broadcast media in 1937 and turning it into an independent and national broadcast media in March 1945.

names of Rangoon Radio in May 1945, the Burma Broadcasting Services—BBS on 15 February 1946, Myanmar Broadcasting Service on 28

cessive eras and the crucial role of media as the fourth pillar for the country.

After the speech, the Senior General presented cash

November 1958, colour television broadcasting system on 3 June 1980 and Myanmar Radio and Television on 22 November 1997.

He also congratulated for broadcasting an FM Channel in the English language under the name of Myanmar Radio to mark 75th anniversary of MRTV and gave advice on quality programmes.

The Senior General also said his appreciations on the programmes of MRTV in suc-

cessive eras and the crucial role of media as the fourth pillar for the country.

awards to the MRTV staff members and foodstuffs produced by the Tatmadaw factories.

The Senior General and party also looked around the souvenir shops and traditional food items of national races.

The second session of the event was held with the launching of the Myanmar Radio (English programme) and the MRTV English programme.

Union Minister U Chit Naing made a speech at the ceremony, and Deputy Ministers U Ye Tint and Brig-Gen Zaw Min Tun launched the channel.

The Union Minister, the Deputy Ministers and the departmental heads presented awards to the outstanding staff members of departments.

The ceremony was concluded with the performance of staff members with a song to honour the MRTV.

The MRTV is also broadcasting 11 channels of national races (NRC), Hluttaw channel, farmers channel, MRTV sports channel. —MNA/GNLM

■

We have adopted new plans for the vaccination programme to cover all the people

WE have adopted new plans for the vaccination programme to cover all the people. In doing so, the import of new and effective vaccine approved by the FDA will be permitted first. The private sector will be allowed to import these vaccines — implications of Sputnik V vaccine from Russia, SARS-COVI from China and COVAXIN from India. These brands of vaccine are being used in other countries.

(Excerpt from the speech to the Situation Report on the Country made by the Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on 12 February 2021)

Education, Health and Human Resources Development Committee holds coordination meeting

THE Education, Health and Human Resources Development Committee, led by Vice-Chairman of the State Administration Council and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Vice-Senior General Soe Win, held a coordination meeting yesterday.

The meeting was attended by Admiral Tin Aung San, Daw Aye Nu Sein, U Mounng Har, Union Minister for Health and Sports Dr Thet Khaing Win, Chairman of Union Civil Service Organization U Than Swe, deputy ministers, permanent secretaries and officials.

In his keynote speech, the Vice-Senior General talked about the five committees of the Council, including his committee and implementation of policies and plans in collective efforts.

Union Minister Dr Thet Khaing Win, the joint secretary of committee, explained foreign scholarship programmes, participation in local and international meetings, sending migrant workers and foreign currency budgets for the international events.—MNA

Vice-Chairman of the State Administration Council Vice-Senior General Soe Win chairs the coordination meeting on education, health and human resources development on 15 February 2021. **PHOTO: MNA**



MoI minister opens Recreation Centre for MRTV Staff

AN OPENING ceremony of Recreation Centre for the staff to mark the 75th Anniversary of the Myanma Radio and Television was held at its headquarters in Nay Pyi Taw Tatkon yesterday.

At the ceremony, Union Minister U Chit Naing, deputy ministers U Ye Tint and Brig-Gen Zaw Min Tun cut the ceremonial ribbon to open the Recreation Centre.

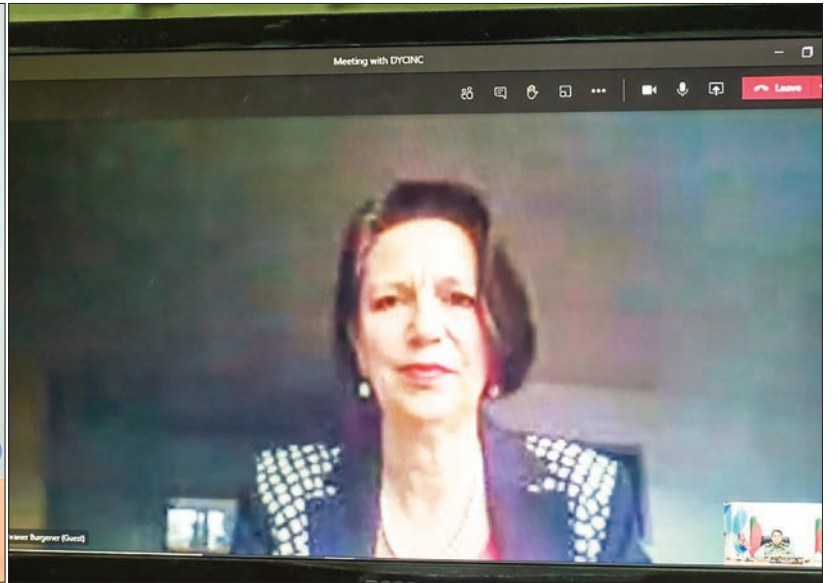
The Union Minister and deputy ministers looked around the Recreation Centre, and Director-General of MRTV U Ye Naing explained the Indoor Game hall, Mind Game hall, Songster room, Fitness Room and Lobby room.—MNA

Union Minister U Chit Naing, Deputy Ministers U Ye Tint and Brig-Gen Zaw Min Tun cut the ribbon to open the Recreation Centre for MRTV personnel on 15 February 2021. **PHOTO: MNA**

Vice-Senior General meets UN SG Special Envoy for Myanmar via video conferencing

VICE-CHAIRMAN of the State Administration Council and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Vice-Senior General Soe Win held a video conference with the UN SG Special Envoy for Myanmar, Ms Christine Schraner Burgener yesterday.

At the meeting, they discussed developments in the works of State Administration Council after the first meeting between them on 5 February, security measures for people, information about internal situations to the world, COVID-19 vaccination programme and works for recovery of the national economy.—MNA



Vice-Chairman of the State Administration Council Vice-Senior General Soe Win holds the online talks with UN SG Special Envoy Ms Christine Schraner Burgener on 15 February 2021. PHOTO: MNA

MoALI minister discusses future plans with departmental officials



Union Minister U Tin Htut Oo meets the MoALI senior departmental officials on 15 February 2021. PHOTO: MNA

UNION MINISTER for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation U Tin Htut Oo held a meeting with the senior officials of departments under his ministry on the future plans yesterday.

At the meeting, the Union Minister discussed effective collaboration among the respective departments, systematic management on human resources based on their capacities, transparency on promotion, free of anti-corruption and adherence to the rules, finance and projects and participation of experts in the respective sectors.

He also talked on the recovery plan for livestock and agricultural sector impacted by COVID-19 pandemic, research on the production of fruits and vegetables with high demand in the market, findings alternative methods to overcome challenges and obstacles, the use of ICT in agricultural, livestock, rural development and cooperative sectors

The Union Minister instructed systematic expenditure of funds in the projects, systematic land leasing for these sectors, ensuring implementation of works mentioned in rental agreements and the future plans for delayed projects.—MNA

State Administration Council's Announcement

Some unscrupulous persons are putting various forms of pressures and posing threats to civil service personnel in performing their duties at present. The civil service personnel who have encountered such pressures and threats shall contact the following phone numbers. Strong legal actions will also be taken against those who make such pressures and threats.

Contact phone numbers	-067 412 168	-067 412 246	-067 412 388	-067 412 598	-067 412 539
	-067 412 222	-067 412 387	-067 412 444	-067 412 066	-067 412 540

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

Myanmar Gems Enterprise, No.2 Mining Enterprise discuss coordination plans

THE Myanmar Gems Enterprise and the No. 2 Mining Enterprise held a coordination meeting in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Union Minister for Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation U Khin Maung Yi chaired the meeting where Managing Director U Min Thu from the MGE explained the objectives, background history and works of the enterprise, followed by the reports of Permanent Secretary U Min Min Oo and the legal advisor of the ministry.

The Union Minister made instructions on the implementation of works, and conducting the Initial Environmental Examination, the Environmental Management Plan and the Environmental Impact Assessment.

Managing Director U Aye Zaw from No. 2 Mining Enterprise reported the works of his enterprise, production capacity for the minerals and the revenue from this sector.—MNA



Union Minister U Khin Maung Yi chairs the coordination meeting of the Myanmar Gems Enterprise and No 2 Mining Enterprise on 15 February 2021. PHOTO: MNA

Trade Policy Review Body hold virtual meeting on preparing for second review report to WTO

THE virtual meeting of Trade Policy Review Body kicked off on 15 February online to prepare for the second review report, with the assistance of GIZ and ARISE Plus project.

Permanent Secretary U Min Min from the Ministry of Commerce led the meeting participated by the directors-general of Trade Department, representatives of TPR Technical Team and experts from the relevant subjects.

The meeting discussed progress in implementing provisions, rules and pledges made in the trade agreements to inform other member countries about foreign trade poli-



The virtual meeting of the Trade Policy Review Body is in progress on 15 February 2021. PHOTO: MNA

cies and practices.

Although Myanmar be-

came a member of World Trade Organization in 1995, the coun-

try could only review the first trade policies and practices in

2014. Based on the findings and recommendations from this review, more steps were taken with the technical assistance of WTO to ensure better policies on the trades.

The report by the WTO Secretariat included trade policies of Myanmar and implementations of these policies, while the report of Myanmar government under the WTO-TPR mechanism will also explain trade policy reforms and implementations of WTO agreements from 2014 to 2021.

After submitting the report to the WTO, it will issue the final report.—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 2nd 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

Ministry of Health and Sports

Global strong demand sparks agricultural exports as of 22 January

THE agricultural exports have touched a high of US\$1.6 billion as of 22 January 2021 in the current financial year since 1 October 2020 on the back of strong global demand for agricultural products amid the coronavirus impacts.

The figures reflect a significant rise of \$514.587 million this FY. The ago exports soared from \$1.13 billion in the corresponding period of the 2019-2020 FY, according to the trade figures released by the Ministry of Commerce.

Myanmar's agricultural exports rose regardless of the

coronavirus's impact on foreign demand for other export groups.

In the exports sector, the agriculture industry performed the best, accounting for over 22 per cent of overall exports. The agricultural industry's chief export items are rice and broken rice, pulses and beans, and maize. Fruits and vegetables, sesame, dried tea leaves, sugar, and other agro products are also shipped to other countries.

Myanmar agro products are primarily exported to China, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, In-

dia, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. Sometimes, the export market remains uncertain due to unsteady global demand.

The country requires specific export plans for each agro product, as they are currently exported to external markets based upon supply and demand. Contract farming systems, the involvement of regional and state agriculture departments, exporters, traders, and some grower groups, are required to meet production targets, said an official from the Agriculture Department.

The Commerce Ministry is

working to help farmers deal with challenges such as high input costs, procurement of pedigree seeds, high cultivation costs, and unpredictable weather conditions.

Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank (MADB) under the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry last year notified the farmers of agricultural loans for the current financial year.

In a bid to mitigate the impacts stricken by the COVID-19, the bank also provided an additional loan of K50,000 per acre under the COVID-19 Special Re-

lief Loan Scheme between June and September 2020. Moreover, it cut the loan interest rate from eight to five per cent during the COVID-19 crisis.

The MADB yearly grants agricultural loans to the small-scale farmers. The paddy farmers can take out loans of K150,000 per acre, while the growers of other crops including sugarcane, can get K100,000 per acre. They have to put the original Farmland Permit Form (7) up for collateral to secure the loan under the personal guarantee system. — KH/GNLM

Farmers to grow more tapioca for prospective foreign income

MYANMAR, located among the large buyer countries of tapioca, should widely cultivate tapioca to raise foreign income for the country.

About 100 countries grow tapioca at present, commonly found in Africa, Asia and America. China and India account for 90 per cent of global demand for tapioca starch.

Additionally, Asia constitutes 30 per cent of tapioca production. Thailand is the primary producer among them, covering 48 of 76 provinces. It is exported to Japan, China (Taiwan), Indonesia, Central America and South America.

The tapioca fetched 13.5 baht per kilo on 2 February, and 13.6 baht on 9 February, Thai Tapioca Starch Association official website stated.

Moreover, the export price (FOB Bangkok) of tap-

ioca starch stood at US\$475 per metric ton on 2 February. It rose to \$480 per tonne on 9 February.

Consequently, Myanmar has market potential for tapioca starch as well as dried tapioca. Tapioca must process within 24 hours of extraction from the cassava plant to produce high-quality starch. Tapioca powder can be stored at room temperature for two years.

Myanmar's agriculture department issued Agro Digit News stated that Myanmar has the favourable land resource to grow tapioca. It should be cultivated in the least developed regions to create job opportunities for local residents.

Tapioca can be used in food products, medicines, feedstuff and biofuel. It can receive foreign income from exports. The exports of tapioca starch



Myanmar's agriculture department issued Agro Digit News stated that Myanmar has the favourable land resource to grow tapioca. PHOTO: MNA

do not need an export licence. It can be shipped to the coun-

tries that grant Customs duty exemption only with the export

declaration (Form D to Thailand). — NN/GNLM

COVID-19 Call Centre opens daily

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

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

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Strategic plan based on research a must for agricultural sector recovery

As our country is seeing the beginning of the end of COVID-19 pandemic thanks to the vaccination programme, we need to prepare for putting the agricultural sector, on which our economy is relying, on the road to recovery.

To gain quick wins in the agricultural sector, the development of research on agriculture is an urgent need.

The research must focus on major crops consumed by the people and marketable crops now and in future. Meanwhile, a strategic plan which can directly benefit the rural people, including farmers, must be implemented systematically.

To make these projects a success, we must take a balanced approach between budgets and prospects for agricultural market and productivity. Reviewing about over the works and reforms are also required to achieve quick wins.

The strategic plan to develop agriculture in post-COVID-19 period must also be both safe and nutritional.

To gain quick wins in the agricultural sector, the development of research on agriculture is an urgent need.

When it comes to the innovation system, the development of information and communication technology among farmers is the sine qua non.

Why? With the development of mobile phone density reaching over 100 per cent and smartphone user density over 80 per cent in our country, our country is considered to have the highest mobile phone density in the ASEAN region, as per international research reports.

Hence, we must take this advantage best to overcome challenges in the agricultural sector in the post-COVID-19 period.

Our country is mainly an agricultural nation, with over 60 varieties of crops grown in the country according to season throughout the year. About seventy per cent of Myanmar's population live in rural areas, and their main business is agriculture.

No sector has escaped from the impact of COVID-19. Its impact on agriculture is complex and varied across diverse segments that form the agricultural value chain. Even among the different segments, its impact varies widely among different regions and among producers and agricultural wage labourers.

The agricultural sector contributes 22.5 per cent to the nation's GDP. The agricultural sector developed at a rate of 2.1 per cent in 2018-2019 financial year, and the agricultural ministry is working to increase the development rate to 2.5 per cent in 2019-2020 financial year.

We are confident that we can overcome the post-COVID-19 challenge through the united efforts of regional governments, private sectors, experts and farmers associations.

Rich countries snap up 70% of global vaccines, challenging vaccine equity: report

Some high-income countries have snapped up about 70 per cent of coronavirus vaccines that would be available in 2021, which, together with other issues such as production capacity, would largely threaten equal and timely global vaccine provisions, said a recent report on The Lancet.

The report, published online on Friday, said that governments in high-income countries, representing 16 per cent of the global population, have struck pre-orders covering at least 4.2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines, which is at least 70 per cent of doses available in 2021 from five candidates.

While COVAX attempts to ensure that no country should vaccinate more than 20 per cent of its population until all countries have vaccinated 20 per cent of their populations, in accordance with principles of global equality, many high-income countries have bypassed COVAX and instead sought to gain priority access to abundant quantities of COVID-19 vaccines that are enough to vaccinate their populations several times over.

According to vaccine contracts tracked by Duke University, as of February 8, the EU has ordered enough doses to vaccinate its people more than two times, and Canada has about five times more than it needs if each person needs two doses. The US has snapped up 2.6 billion doses, nearly a quarter of the world's

supply so far - to cover 396 per cent of its population.

Tao Lina, a Shanghai based vaccine expert, previously told the Global Times that it is natural that rich countries bypass COVAX and purchase vaccines in advance directly with the manufacturers.

"But it is not necessary to strike up vaccines. It will take a country weeks even months to administrate millions of doses. If rich countries are willing to share extra doses that they would not use in one month with developing countries, the situation will be much better for the latter," Tao suggested.

However, a problem is that COVAX is supported by international organizations like the WHO, but these international organizations lack executive power over any country, so it is hard to make rich countries follow COVAX's guidelines, Tao said.

For COVAX to succeed, The Lancet report said it needs substantial funding to purchase vaccines. As of February 2021, governments and other partners have committed around \$4 billion in funding for COVAX, but Gavi and WHO estimate that a further \$6.8 billion will be needed for COVAX to procure and deliver at least 2 billion doses by the end of 2021.

Zhuang Shilihe, a Guangzhou-based vaccine expert, told the Global Times that vaccine distribution is more down to countries' ability to procure

them. Vaccines naturally go to rich countries that could afford the bill as poor countries strive for vaccines through COVAX.

COVAX is an ideal scheme that will balance worldwide vaccine distribution, but, multiple factors such as poor countries' lack of funding to purchase vaccines means the scheme cannot function in a timely manner, Zhuang said.

The fundamental question is the shortage of vaccine supply, the expert said, adding that imbalanced vaccine distribution may not be addressed in 2021.

A successful solution to the production bottleneck would probably require widespread technology transfer to enable the expansion of manufacturing capacity, according to the Friday Lancet report.

Currently, few countries have the domestic capacity to rapidly produce COVID-19 vaccines on their own and instead will need companies to actively share knowledge, technology, and data with domestic manufacturers, the report noted.

Some leading vaccine developers have reached such collaboration with manufacturers in mid- and low-income countries.

Chinese producer Sinovac previously told the Global Times that it now exports semi-finished vaccines to countries capable of filling and packaging doses. It not only eases the pressure on Chinese production facilities, but also saves international trans-

port costs and greatly improves the affordability of vaccines.

Zhang warned that the worst result of the situation is that some countries may conduct mandatory approval to make up vaccine demand like generic drugs in India. "This could happen if some countries have difficulty obtaining vaccines."

Chinese experts said that China is open to share and transfer technology, but a problem is that maybe not all countries are capable of establishing a production line.

The Global Times learned from Chinese vaccine producers that the production line of inactivated vaccines contains two



Some high-income countries have snapped up about 70 per cent of coronavirus vaccines that would be available in 2021, which, together with other issues such as production capacity, would largely threaten equal and timely global vaccine provisions, said a recent report on The Lancet. PHOTO: VCG

parts: a virus cultivation workshop and a solid preparation workshop.

Throughout the procedure, there are hundreds of items that should be tested to ensure safety and efficacy of the vaccine.

Every step of vaccine production has to be conducted in workshops that have obtained Good Manufacturing Practice certificates. Countries without such workshops would not be able to ensure the quality of vaccines they produce, Feng Duoqia, president of the China Vaccine Industry Association, told the Global Times previously.

The high cost of building coronavirus vaccine production

lines would also prevent some countries from producing vaccines on their own, but rather preferring to wait for COVAX allocation or purchase jabs from other countries, experts said.

Transferring technology to manufacture vaccines could be a solution to balance worldwide vaccine distribution, and it may be better to transfer technology to countries with capability to launch large-scale production to make up for vaccine shortages, a Beijing-based immunologist who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Sunday.

SOURCE: Global Times/Xinhua

Europe's virus death toll passes 800,000: AFP tally

MORE than 800,000 people have died from the coronavirus across Europe since the pandemic began in December 2019, according to an AFP tally Sunday based on official sources.

As of Saturday, 1630 GMT, there were 800,361 deaths recorded in the 52 countries and territories that make up the continent -- including Russia and Turkey -- for 35,395,270 declared cases.

That puts the continent's death toll ahead of Latin America and the Caribbean, which has 635,834 dead for 20,021,361 cases; of the United States and Canada's 502,064 deaths for 28,312,719 cases; and Asia's 247,730 deaths for 15,641,940 cases.

Europe as a whole recorded an average 4,478

deaths a day from the virus last week, 14 per cent lower than the previous week.

But since November 11, the region has recorded at least 4,000 deaths a day on average -- peaking at a record 5,700 daily deaths at the end of January.

For a month though, the figures for infections have been falling in Europe.

But if the curve of average daily deaths has dropped, the tendency remains constant over the long term -- for since the beginning of November, 100,000 deaths have been recorded about every 20 days.

Thus Europe passed 500,000 deaths on December 17; 600,000 on January 7; and 700,000 on January 25.

SOURCE: AFP



In this file photo taken on 27 June 2020 a scientist works at the Neurobiology laboratory of the Cayetano Heredia University in Lima. PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar Gazette

Appointment of Permanent Secretary

The State Administration Council has appointed U Aung Myint Oo, Director-General of the Road Department of the Ministry of Construction, concurrently as Permanent Secretary of the same ministry.

Myanmar Gazette

Heads of Service Organizations confirmed

The following persons are confirmed as Heads of Service Organizations shown against each of their names after the one-year probational period.

Name	Appointment
1. U Tun Zaw	Director-General Central Statistical Organization Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry
2. Dr Thi Thi Myint	Director-General Legal Advice Department Union Attorney-General Office
3. U Kyaw Win Han	Rector Central Institute of Civil Service (Lower Myanmar) Union Civil Service Board



Myanmar Daily Weather Report (Issued at 7:00 pm Monday 15 February 2021)

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL MORNING OF THE 16 February 2021: Light rain or thundershowers are likely to be isolated in Kachin State. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Upper Sagaing, Yangon, Ayeyawady, Taninthayi regions and Shan, Kayin, Mon states and generally fair in the remaining regions and states.

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

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of isolated light rain or thundershowers in Upper Sagaing, Taninthayi regions and Kachin, Shan, Kayah, Kayin, Mon states.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 16 February 2021: Fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 16 February 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 16 February 2021: Fair weather.

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NATO will not leave Afghanistan before 'time is right'



Journalists' appear on a screen during a press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of a Nato defence minister council at the Alliance headquarters in Brussels, on 15 February, 2021. NATO defence minister will gather on a videoconference on February 17 and February 18 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

BRUSSELS — NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said Monday the alliance will not withdraw its troops from Afghanistan “before the time is right”, ahead of a discussion

by defence ministers on the deployment.

The ministers of the 30 NATO member states will on Wednesday and Thursday hold their highest-level talks since

US President Joe Biden took office vowing to work closer with allies after four years of tensions under Donald Trump.

Top of the agenda for the virtual conference will be the

fate of the alliance’s 9,600-strong support mission in Afghanistan after Trump struck a deal with the Taliban to withdraw troops.

The deployment’s future hinges on whether Biden agrees to stick to a May deadline to pull out foreign forces or risks a bloody backlash from the Islamist insurgents by staying put.

“While no ally wants to stay in Afghanistan longer than necessary, we will not leave before the time is right,” Stoltenberg told a media conference.

“Ministers will continue to assess the situation on the ground and monitor developments very closely.”

Biden’s administration says it is reviewing the deal, and the Pentagon has accused the Taliban of not fulfilling promises that include reducing attacks and cutting ties to insurgent groups like Al-Qaeda.

Defence ministers are not expected to make a concrete announcement on the deploy-

ment’s future at their meeting.

NATO allies want the US to consult more closely with them after feeling sidelined when Trump cut US troop numbers to 2,5000 in January, their lowest figure since the start of the war in 2001.

Taliban violence has surged in recent months amid stuttering peace talks with the Kabul government. The group has warned NATO ministers not to seek a “continuation of occupation and war”.

“The Taliban must reduce violence, negotiate in good faith and live up to their commitment to stop cooperating with national terrorist groups,” Stoltenberg said.

“Our common goal is clear. Afghanistan should never again serve as a haven for terrorists to attack our homelands.”

A study mandated by the US Congress has called for a delay in the pullout, warning it would effectively hand the Taliban a victory. —AFP ■

Israeli strikes on Syria kill 9 militia fighters: monitor

BEIRUT — Israeli missile strikes against several targets near Syria’s capital Damascus killed at least nine pro-regime militia fighters early Monday, a Britain-based war monitor said.

“Nine Iran-backed militia fighters were killed” in Israeli strikes targeting arms depots, including missile stores, around Damascus, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The Observatory said all the fighters killed were non-Arab “pro-government” forces but it said it could not determine if they were Afghan, Pakistani or Iranian.

“Syrian air defences intercepted a sizable number of the missiles but many hit their targets and caused material damage,” added the monitor, which relies on a network of sources inside Syria for its reports.

The attack began shortly after midnight and lasted for nearly half an hour, it said.

Syrian state media also reported the strikes but said that air defences had intercepted “most” of the missiles.

Contacted by AFP, an Israeli army spokeswoman said “we cannot comment on these reports”.

Since the outbreak of Syria’s civil war in 2011, Israel has routinely carried out raids in the country, mostly targeting Iranian forces and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters as well as government troops.

Iran and Hezbollah have backed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime in the near-decade-long war.

Israel rarely confirms strikes in Syria, but the Jewish state’s army said it hit about 50 targets in the war-torn country in 2020, without providing details. It has consistently vowed to prevent its arch-enemy Iran from gaining a foothold in Syria.

On Sunday, the Israeli army started a four-day drill along its northern border with Lebanon, a country with which it is still technically at war.

The “surprise exercise” was “designed to improve Air Force readiness for combat” in the border region, the army said in a statement.

During the exercise, which will end on Wednesday, Israeli “aircrafts, jets and helicopter traffic will be felt across the country, and a number of explosions may be heard in northern Israel”, it added. —AFP ■

Vaccine shortage forces Rio to suspend Covid jabs



Employees using personal protective equipment (PPE) work during the production of vaccines against Covid-19 at the Osvaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ), in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on 12 February, 2021. In this phase of the production, the first doses of the vaccine are being bottled and sent to the quality control department before being released for vaccination. **PHOTO: AFP**

RIO DE JANEIRO — Rio de Janeiro will suspend its Covid-19 vaccination campaign until next week because the Brazilian city has run out of doses, Mayor Eduardo Paes said Monday.

“I have been informed that the new doses did not arrive. We will have to interrupt our campaign tomorrow (Tuesday),” Paes wrote on Twitter.

He said the campaign

would resume next week with a new delivery of Chinese-developed vaccine CoronaVac.

One month into hard-hit Brazil’s immunization drive, several critical areas have run into vaccine shortages, fueling frustration with President Jair Bolsonaro’s government.

Rio, Brazil’s second-biggest city, had warned last week it only had enough vaccine to last until Saturday.

The iconic beach city of 6.7

million people has canceled its famed carnival celebrations, originally scheduled for this week, in a bid to contain infections.

The city has recorded nearly 18,000 deaths from Covid-19, making it among the hardest hit in Brazil.

Nearly 240,000 people have died of Covid-19 in Brazil, the second-highest death toll worldwide, after the United States. —AFP

Coronavirus: Latest global developments

Paris—These are the latest developments in the coronavirus crisis:

UK quarantine hotels

The UK government introduces mandatory hotel quarantine rules for arrivals from dozens of countries deemed “high risk” for coronavirus variants.

The new policy requires all UK citizens and permanent residents entering England from 33 countries on a wider travel ban list to self-isolate at their own expense in approved hotels for 10 days and take several tests.

Auckland snap lockdown

New Zealand’s biggest city begins a snap three-day lockdown, forcing two million people to stay at home, as authorities scramble to contain the nation’s first outbreak of the highly contagious UK variant.

Vietnam troubling cluster

Two million people have been ordered to stay at home for 15 days starting Tuesday, state media reports, as the nation struggles to extinguish a troubling new outbreak in Hai Duong province.

Germany-France border checks?

Chancellor Angela Merkel’s

spokesman Steffen Seibert says Germany will not rule out expanding new travel controls to its French border amid a surge in virus mutations in the Moselle region, after Paris urges against border closures.

Peru vaccine scandal

Peru’s foreign minister resigns amid a growing scandal over politicians receiving vaccinations well before the general public — the second top official to step down after the health minister did so last week.

Zimbabwe gets jabs

Zimbabwe receives its first batch of Sinopharm vaccines

from China as the country, already struggling with a deepening economic crisis and scant health resources, gears up to begin administering jabs.

2.4 million deaths

The virus has caused at least 2,400,543 deaths since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP on Monday.

The United States is the worst-affected country with 485,337 deaths followed by Brazil with 239,245, Mexico with 174,207, India with 155,732 and Britain with 117,166. — AFP

Iraq detects new UK-based strain, reimposes partial lockdown

Baghdad — Iraq will re-impose partial lockdown measures until early March after detecting a new strain of the coronavirus, including among children, its health minister announced on Monday.

“Unfortunately, government labs showed genetic mutations in the Covid-19 strain, detecting the new fast-spreading strain in Iraq,” Hassan al-Tamimi told reporters.

He referred to the strain as the one “which spread in the UK,” and said it had been detected in some Iraqi children, but did not give a total number of people who had been diagnosed with the new variant.

It emerged in southern England in December and is thought to be more contagious than earlier forms.

Iraq has been among the countries hardest-hit by coronavirus in the Middle East, with more than 640,000 reported cases and over 13,000 deaths.

After peaking in September at around 5,000 new cases per day, Iraq saw a remarkable drop with around 800 new cases a day in December but the numbers have been on the rise since then. On Monday, Iraq announced more than 2,700 cases confirmed cases, a record since the start of the year.

The daily deaths have remained relatively low, with only six confirmed deaths on Monday — compared to a peak in September of around 70 deaths per day. The rise in cases prompted authorities to re-impose a series of measures to tackle the virus until March 8.

Masks will be obligatory in public places, with a fine of 25,000 Iraqi dinar (\$17) for any violators.

From Thursday an overnight curfew will be in place from 8:00 pm until 5:00 am while Iraqis will be subjected to full lockdowns on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

The measures will still be in place during Pope Francis’ historic visit from March 5-8, which will include trips to Baghdad, the city of Mosul in the north and a meeting with the country’s top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani.

Iraqi officials told AFP on Monday they were still proceeding with the visit as planned. —AFP

DR Congo starts Ebola vaccination after new outbreak



(From L) World Health Organization (WHO) Health Emergencies Programme head Michael Ryan, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, a WHO staff member and WHO Chair of Emergency Committee on Ebola Robert Steffen attend a combined news conference following a two-day international conference on COVID-19 coronavirus vaccine research and a meeting to decide whether Ebola in DR Congo still constitutes health emergency of international concern on January 12, 2020 in Geneva. The UN health agency on February 12 said it was “way too early” to say whether COVID-19 might have peaked or when it might end. It also said that it was extending for another three months its global emergency designation for the Ebola outbreak in DR Congo. **PHOTO: AFP**

BUTEMBO, (DR CONGO) — Health workers in eastern DR Congo have begun an Ebola vaccination drive after four cases, two of them fatal, surfaced just three months after the country’s last outbreak of the disease, the UN said.

“The authorities today... launched an anti-Ebola vaccination campaign in Butembo just a week after the virus re-

emerged,” the World Health Organization (WHO) said in a tweet.

“Workers at Matanda hospital, where the first positive case of Ebola was treated, were the first to be vaccinated,” it said.

The health ministry announced on February 7 that four women in Biene, in the troubled region of North Kivu,

had fallen ill with the notorious haemorrhagic fever. Two have since died.

The WHO’s office in the Democratic Republic of Congo said four people in Biene had been vaccinated and 334 other contacts would also receive the jab.

On November 18, DR Congo declared that the country’s 11th documented epidemic of

Ebola was over.

The outbreak, in the north-western province of Equateur, claimed 55 lives.

On Sunday, the West African state of Guinea said it had confirmed seven cases of Ebola — the first resurgence of the disease in the region since a 2013-2016 epidemic that killed more than 11,300 people. — AFP

Himalaya flood disaster hits Delhi water supply

NEW DELHI -- Fallout from a devastating flash flood in a remote north Indian valley hit the capital New Delhi more than 500 kilometres downstream on Monday, when water supplies were cut to tens of thousands of residents.

Authorities blamed the high quantities of mud and debris from the February 7 deluge, which left more than 50 dead and 150 missing, for the shortages.

The Rishiganga valley in Uttarakhand state is 530 kilometres (330 miles) upstream to the northeast of Delhi but its water is a key supplier for the capital.

Authorities would not say how long taps would be shut down. The flood swept through the valley devastating a power complex and destroying roads and bridges.

Rescuers are just starting to pull out bodies from a tunnel engulfed by mud and debris where more than 30 workers were believed to be trapped.

The flood is believed to have been triggered by a chunk of gla-



Border Roads Organisation (BRO) workers rebuild the destroyed Raini bridge in Chamoli district on 13 February, 2021 after Raini bridge was washed away by a flash flood thought to have been caused when a glacier burst on 7 February. **PHOTO: AFP**

acier sliding down a mountainside or a glacial lake breaching its banks.

Water from the valley flows into the Ganges and from there to Delhi.

Raghav Chadha, vice-chairperson of Delhi's water board, urged residents to use water "judiciously" as two of the city's main water treatment plants were unable to operate at full capacity due to the dirty raw water.

He said teams were "deployed round the clock" cleaning filters and "flushing high ammonia raw water".

Delhi, which has a population of over 20 million, faces water shortages every summer.

Sixty percent of the water supplied in Delhi comes from the Yamuna river and about 34 per cent from the Ganges. Both have faced severe pollution problems in recent years.—AFP

Red Sea coral reefs 'under threat' from Israel-UAE oil deal

EILAT, (Israel) -- Israeli environmentalists are warning that a UAE-Israeli oil pipeline deal threatens unique Red Sea coral reefs and could lead to "the next ecological disaster".

The agreement to bring Emirati crude oil by tanker to a pipeline in the Red Sea port of Eilat was signed after Israel normalised ties with the Gulf Arab nation late last year and should come into force within months.

With experts warning of possible leaks and spills at the ageing Eilat port, and the Israeli environmental protection ministry demanding "urgent" talks on the deal, activists mobilised last week.

They held a protest in a parking lot overlooking Eilat's oil jetty against what they see as a disaster waiting to happen, chanting that profits will be made "at the expense of corals".

"The coral reefs are 200 metres (yards) from where the oil will be unloaded," said Shmulik Taggar, an Eilat resident and

founding member of the Society for Conservation of the Red Sea Environment.

"They say the tankers are modern and there won't be any problem," he said, warning however that "there's no way there won't be a malfunction".

He predicted that with the projected arrival of two to three tankers a week, traffic will be "back-to-back".

This, he said, would also impact the aesthetic of a city promoting ecological tourism.

"You can't sell green tourism when you have oil tankers by the dock," he said.

Unique reefs

The Jewish state and the UAE established ties last year as part of the US-brokered "Abraham Accords".

One of the deals that followed was a Memorandum of Understanding between Israel's state-owned Europe-Asia Pipeline Company (EAPC) and a new entity called MED-RED Land Bridge Ltd -- a joint venture

between Abu Dhabi's National Holding company and several Israeli firms.

In October, EAPC announced a "binding MoU" with MED-RED to bring crude from UAE to Eilat and then transport it by pipeline to Israel's Mediterranean city of Ashkelon for onward export to Europe.

Taggar argued that deals benefitting the fossil fuel industry at the expense of the environment are "not in the spirit of our times".

"It might have been appropriate in the 1960s and 1970s, before we were a developed state," he said. Activists argue the deal evaded tough regulatory scrutiny because of EAPC's status as a state-owned firm working in the sensitive energy sector.

While coral populations around the world are under threat from bleaching caused by climate change, the reefs in Eilat have remained stable due to their unique heat resistance.—AFP

Jaguar car brand to go fully electric from 2025

LONDON -- Jaguar, the Indian-owned luxury car brand, will produce only electric vehicles from 2025 and restructure its UK non-manufacturing operations, the company announced Monday.

"By the middle of the decade, Jaguar will have undergone a renaissance to emerge as a pure electric luxury brand," said a statement from Jaguar Land Rover, which intends to become a net zero carbon company by 2039.

JLR said it "will substantially reduce and rationalise its non-manufacturing infrastructure in the UK". It did not say whether this meant job cuts were on the horizon.

JLR will meanwhile invest £2.5 billion (\$3.5 billion, 2.9 billion euros) annually under its 'Reimagine' plan, which sees the first all-electric Land Rover model in 2024.

"At the heart of its Reimagine plan will be the electrification of both Land Rover and Jaguar brands on separate architectures with two

clear, unique personalities," the statement said.

Jaguar Land Rover's said it aims to achieve net zero carbon emissions across its supply chain, products and operations by 2039.

"As part of this ambition, the company is also preparing for the expected adoption of clean fuel-cell power in line with a maturing of the hydrogen economy.

"Development is already underway with prototypes arriving on UK roads within the next 12 months as part of the long-term investment programme," the statement added.

JLR is owned by Tata Motors, itself part of Indian conglomerate Tata Group.

Jaguar Land Rover will ensure "closer collaboration and knowledge-sharing with Tata Group companies to enhance sustainability and reduce emissions as well as sharing best practice in next-generation technology, data and software development leadership", it added.—AFP

Yokohama Rubber to boost mold output in Thailand

BANGKOK -- Major Japanese tire maker Yokohama Rubber Co. will expand its tire mold production capacity in Thailand as part of efforts to ensure stable supply in Southeast Asia.

Yokohama Rubber said in a press release Friday that the company's mold production subsidiary, Yokohama Mold Co., has started construction of new manufacturing facilities at its Thai unit in January, with completion set for late this year. Neither the scale of expansion nor investment has been disclosed.

The Thai unit, Yokohama Mold (Thailand) Co., was founded in 2018 in Rayong Province. It supplies tire

mold for use in passenger car and light truck tires to Yokohama Rubber plants in Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, India and other countries.

The capacity expansion in Thailand is one of the projects selected by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) for financial support in its program aimed at strengthening overseas supply chains.

The Yokohama Rubber group hopes to add the Thai facility to the lineup of its major supply bases in Asia, including ones in Japan and China, while promoting cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations region. — Kyodo News ■

Nikkei ends above 30,000 mark for 1st time in over 30 years

TOKYO -- Upbeat corporate earnings, hopes for a U.S. recovery and robust growth data for Japan's pandemic-hit economy injected fresh vigor into the Tokyo stock market Monday, pushing the Nikkei index to close above the 30,000 mark for the first time in more than 30 years.

The 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average ended up 564.08 points, or 1.91 per cent, from Friday at 30,084.15, its highest close since Aug. 2, 1990, when the Japanese economy was experiencing an asset bubble.

The broader Topix index of all First Section issues on the Tokyo Stock Exchange finished 20.06 points, or 1.04 per cent, higher at 1,953.94.

Shares gained ground throughout the day following the release of Japanese gross domestic product data showing a better-than-expected recovery from the coronavirus pandemic-induced slump in the October-December period.

GDP in the last quarter of 2020 grew a real 3.0 per cent, or



A financial data screen in Osaka shows the Nikkei Stock Average closing above the 30,000 mark for the first time in over 30 years on 15 February 2021. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

an annualized 12.7 per cent, from the previous quarter; led by a leap in exports and robust private consumption. Capital spending also rose.

“Strong exports were foreseen from recent earnings reports, but the expansion in private consumption was bigger-than-expected, showing that

businesses outside the dining out sector were solid,” said Koichi Fujishiro, a senior economist at the Dai-ichi Life Research Institute.

Private consumption accounts for more than half of Japan's GDP. The Nikkei has nearly doubled since the pandemic pushed the benchmark index down to as low as 16,552.83 last

March, a recovery analysts have attributed to massive monetary easing by central banks and hefty fiscal spending by governments around the world.

Kazuo Kamitani, a strategist in the Investment Content Department of Nomura Securities Co., said the impeachment acquittal of former U.S. President Donald Trump on Saturday also supported the market as hopes grew for a sooner-than-expected rollout of stimulus measures.

But with the earnings reporting season nearing an end, the Nikkei's advance may slow, Kamitani said. The index is expected to move within a range of 1,000 points around the 30,000 threshold for about a month amid caution about chasing the upside, he said.

The market showed little reaction to a major earthquake that rocked the northeastern region of Japan on Saturday, causing more than 150 injuries, brokers said.

The U.S. dollar rose to the lower 105 yen range as the yen was sold on advances in U.S. long-

term interest rates late last week to their highest level since last March.

On the First Section, advancing issues outnumbered decliners 1,339 to 773, while 81 ended unchanged. Gainers were led by mining, precision instrument, and oil and coal product issues.

Olympus jumped 252.00 yen, or 12.2 per cent, to 2,314.00 yen after the major Japanese optical equipment maker upgraded its earnings forecast for fiscal 2020 on a recovery in endoscope sales.

Asahi Group Holdings climbed 156 yen, or 3.5 per cent, to 4,584 yen, after the beverage maker forecast on Friday a better-than-expected net group profit for 2021.

Renesas Electronics rose 8 yen, or 0.6 per cent, to 1,290 yen a day after the semiconductor maker said its factories in eastern Japan had experienced limited impact from the quake.

Trading volume on the main section fell to 1,275.91 million shares from Friday's 1,343.98 million shares. — Kyodo News ■

Thailand economy shrinks most since 1997 on tourism collapse



A woman withdraws money from an ATM on Khao San Road, a once popular tourist strip in Bangkok on 15 February, 2021, as Thailand records its worst economic performance in more than two decades. PHOTO: AFP

BANGKOK -- Thailand's pandemic-shattered economy suffered its worst full-year performance in more than two decades, data showed Monday, with officials citing the toll of both a gutted tourism industry and ongoing political upheaval.

Last year's 6.1 per cent contraction was the worst since a 7.6 per cent decline during the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and officials said they expect the economy to expand at a much slower pace than initially predicted in 2021.

The downgrade -- to 2.5-3.5 per cent growth from an previous estimate of 3.5-4.5 per cent -- came despite a slight improvement in the final three months of the year. “It has rebounded from

the previous quarter due to the government's stimulus package that boosted spending,” Danucha Pichayanan, the secretary general of the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC), said at a news conference. Although the kingdom was largely spared the worst of the virus, pandemic-spurred partial lockdowns have hit the economy hard. Thailand has registered more than 24,500 coronavirus cases, with a jump of about 20,000 infections since late last year, after a second wave that stemmed from the country's largest seafood market.

Some 40 million tourists had been expected to arrive in 2020, but as international travel

ground to a trickle, their absence hammered the country's services sector, bruising entertainment, retail, hotels and restaurants.

The kingdom's freefalling economy has been a factor in the youth-led protest movement that is calling for premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha's resignation, constitutional reform and changes to the once-untouchable monarchy.

Asked about the political climate, Danucha implied it was delivering a further blow.

“The Thai economy relies on investment and exports. The political situation will affect investors' confidence,” he said.

The country's economy was struggling even before the pandemic, which laid bare the deep inequality between the haves and have-nots of Thai society.

In response to the pandemic slump, the government implemented a record, 1.9 trillion baht (\$59.7 billion) stimulus package, cash handouts and tax incentives.

Further economic improvements will depend on managing the pandemic and boosting visitors, Danucha said. “The outbreak and vaccine rollout, together with tourism recovery, are the main economic factors this year.”

—AFP ■

China overtakes US as EU's biggest trading partner

BRUSSELS -- China last year overtook the United States as the EU's biggest trading partner, the EU statistics agency Eurostat said on Monday.

Britain meanwhile, which is no longer part of the European Union, was the third-largest trading partner for the bloc, behind China and the United States, the agency said.

The supremacy of China came after it suffered from the coronavirus pandemic during the first quarter but recovered vigorously with consumption even exceeding its level of a year ago at the end of 2020.

This helped drive sales of European products, particularly in the automobile and luxury goods sectors, while China's exports to Europe benefited from strong demand for medical equipment and electronics.

The dethroning of the US comes as the EU and China are seeking to ratify a long-negotiated investment deal that would give European companies better access to the Chinese market.

Eurostat said the trade

volume with China reached 586 billion euros (\$711 billion) in 2020, compared to 555 billion euros (\$673 billion) for the US.

The agency said EU exports rose by 2.2 per cent to 202.5 billion euros while at the same time, imports from the People's Republic of China increased by 5.6 per cent to 383.5 billion euros.

EU exports to the United States fell by 13.2 per cent in the same period and imports by 8.2 per cent.

In addition to the Covid-19 crisis, transatlantic trade has been impaired by a series of tit-for-tat feuds that have resulted with tariffs being on steel and products such as French champagne or Harley-Davidson motorcycles.

Eurostat said trade with the UK plummeted in 2020, the year Britain officially left the bloc, though it was in a transition period to blunt the effects of Brexit until December 31.

EU exports to the UK fell by 13.2 per cent, while imports from across the channel dropped by 13.9 per cent, Eurostat said. —AFP ■

UK's PM cautious on lockdown easing as new hotel regime starts

LONDON — Britain intends to seek a “cautious but irreversible” ending of strict coronavirus restrictions, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Monday as his government introduced hotel quarantine stays for arrivals from “high risk” nations.

Britain, with more than 117,000 deaths from Covid-19, is one of the worst-hit countries in the world by the pandemic. Johnson has come under criticism for acting too quickly to relax measures and too slowly to re-impose them in recent months.

But lockdown-sceptical MPs are pressing for an accelerated exit after Britain over the weekend surpassed its target to vaccinate 15 million of the most vulnerable people with a first vaccine jab.

Speaking at a health clinic in southeast London, Johnson said the government needed to be “very prudent” as it reviewed a third stay-at-home order in England that has shut down schools, non-essential businesses and hospitality ven-

ues since early January.

“What we wanted to see is progress that is cautious but irreversible, and I think that’s what the public and people up and down the country will want to see,” Johnson said.

The government is due to set out a roadmap to relax the measures in England on February 22, and has indicated schools could reopen on March 8.

However, Health Secretary Matt Hancock said there is “some way to go” before lockdown can be eased, stressing the government was awaiting key data on how successfully the vaccines reduce transmission.

But over the weekend, more than 60 MPs from the ruling Conservatives signed a letter calling for Johnson to commit to a firm timetable ending with the lifting of all legal controls by the end of April.

Once enough people are inoculated, “it’s time for us to take a bold stride into life and start to recover our society and our hu-



Healthcare professionals work at a Covid-19 vaccination centre set up at Chester Racecourse, in Chester, northwest England, on 15 February 2021. PHOTO: AFP

manity”, lawmaker Steve Baker told Talkradio on Monday.

Red list

While eyeing a possible route out of lockdown, the government is also tightening the borders to guard against emerging variants of the coronavirus that could undermine the vaccination programme.

The new quarantine policy requires all UK citizens and permanent residents entering England from 33 “red list” countries to self-isolate at their own expense in approved hotels for 10 days and take several Covid-19 tests.

Other visitors from the countries, including all South

American nations, South Africa and Portugal, are currently barred from visiting the UK.

Arrivals found to have given false information about being in one of the countries 10 days before travel could receive up to 10 years in prison – which has drawn criticism for being excessive.— AFP

Catalan separatists boost majority in Spain regional election

BARCELONA — Catalan separatist parties boosted their parliamentary majority in a regional election Sunday that was overshadowed by the pandemic and marked by low turnout, more than three years after a failed bid to break away from Spain.

With Spain still grappling with a third wave of coronavirus infections, the vote in the wealthy northeastern region was held under tight restrictions to reduce the risk of contagion.

With 99 per cent of the votes counted, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez’s Socialists won the most votes but the three separatist parties together were set to get 74 seats in the 135-seat assembly.

That is up from 70 seats won in the last election in December 2017, just months after Catalonia’s failed secession bid which led to the jailing of several separatist leaders.

To reduce the risk of virus transmission in the region, poll-

ing stations were set up in spacious venues like food markets, the area around FC Barcelona’s football stadium and the bullring in Tarragona.

Voters had to wear face masks, use disinfectant gel provided at polling stations and stand apart while lining up in rainy weather to cast their ballots.

During the last hour of voting, which was reserved for people infected with Covid-19, polling station workers wore gloves, facial screens and white protective gowns.

The Socialists had 33 seats, up from 17 in the last vote when they finished fourth.

Sanchez had hoped the election – Catalonia’s fifth in a decade – would end separatist rule in the region which accounts for a fifth of Spain’s economy.

He fielded his health minister Salvador Illa as his candidate in the hope that his high profile in the fight against the pandemic

would help win votes.

While separatist parties have been deeply divided over strategy since the failed secession bid, they were not punished by voters and for the first time won over 50 per cent of the vote, against 47.5 per cent four years ago.

The more moderate ERC got 33 seats, the hardline JxC got 32 and the radical CUP nine seats. **‘Amnesia’ jibe**

The result leaves the ERC’s main candidate, 38-year-old jurist Pere Aragonés, best placed to become Catalonia’s next leader.

“We have stopped an operation by the (Spanish) state to expel separatists from institutions,” he said after the results were announced.

Illa had argued it was “time to turn the page” after over a decade of Catalan nationalist governments focusing on separatism but Aragonés dismissed his approach during the campaign as “amnesia”.—AFP

Erdogan accuses US of backing ‘terrorists’ in Iraq

ANKARA — President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday accused the United States of siding with “terrorists” after blaming outlawed Kurdish militants of executing 13 Turks in northern Iraq.

Erdogan’s comments came a day after Ankara said Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) rebels had killed 13 captives – most of them Turkish soldiers and police officers – they had allegedly abducted in southeast Turkey and kept in an Iraqi cave.

The PKK has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 that is believed to have left tens of thousands dead.

The United States and Turkey’s other Western allies recognise the PKK as a terror group. But Washington has supported another Kurdish militia in Syria that Turkey sees as an offshoot of the PKK.

Turkey this month launched a military operation against rear PKK bases in

northern Iraq that Erdogan said on Monday was designed in part to free the 13 hostages.

“The statement made by the United States is a farce,” Erdogan said in his first public comments on the incident.

“You said you did not support terrorists, when in fact you are on their side and behind them,” Erdogan said in televised remarks.

The US State Department on Sunday it “deplores the death of Turkish citizens” but was waiting for further confirmation that Ankara’s account of the 13 men’s death was true.

The PKK said the 13 died when Turkish forces bombed the cave where the men were being kept.

“If reports of the death of Turkish civilians at the hands of the PKK, a designated terrorist organization, are confirmed, we condemn this action in the strongest possible terms,” the State Department said in a statement.—AFP

Japan to survey side effects of 3 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine



An experts' meeting is held at the health ministry in Tokyo on 15 February 2021. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

TOKYO — Japan will survey the potential side effects caused by various coronavirus vaccines after a total of 3 million doses are administered to the general public, the health ministry said Monday.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare will invite participants to respond to its survey after inoculation for people aged 65 and older starts on April 1. It plans to track common side ef-

fects such as fever and fatigue among three different vaccines, including one by Pfizer Inc. that was formally approved Sunday.

Around 10,000 to 20,000 health care workers are set to begin receiving their first dose of the Pfizer vaccine on Feb. 17. The government will collect and periodically release details about all side effects experienced, regardless of whether the vaccine is the cause.

It will also provide information on the safety of the vaccines garnered from the survey after inoculations begin for the general public. The survey is expected to cover around 500,000 people per single dose of each version of the vaccine. A total of 3 million doses will be necessary if the government includes doses by pharmaceuticals AstraZeneca Plc and Moderna Inc., alongside Pfizer.—Kyodo News

Stay-at-home orders in Vietnam Covid-19 hotspot

HANOI—Two million people in Vietnam will be put under a raft of restrictions starting Tuesday, after their northern province became the epicentre of a growing Covid-19 outbreak.

Residents of Hai Duong province have been ordered to stay at home for 15 days, state media reported, as a nation widely praised for its handling of the pandemic struggles to extinguish a troubling new outbreak.

Since late January, Vietnam has recorded 637 locally transmitted coronavirus cases, including 461 in Hai Duong province alone.

“People (in Hai Duong) are asked to stay at home and only go out when necessary, such as to buy food or medicine, or to work at factories or production establishments that are not being asked to close,” said the official mouthpiece of Vietnam’s health ministry, Suc Khoe Doi Song.

Gatherings of more than two people will be banned, while schools, bars, restaurants and



Women wearing protective face masks to prevent the spread of Covid-19 walk along a street in Hanoi on 29 January 2021. PHOTO: AFP

karaoke parlours that were shut early ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday will remain closed.

When they must go outside their homes, residents are instructed to stay two metres from others.

Traffic through the province of two million will also be limited, state media reported, with only vehicles travelling on essential business allowed to enter.

In addition to the social distancing directive, Hai Duong au-

thorities have asked that people quarantining at three centres in the province be relocated after infections recently began spreading at those sites, according to the government.

Vietnam’s latest coronavirus outbreak -- which began in the north and has since spread to central and southern areas -- has been linked to new, more contagious variants of the deadly virus, including the UK and South Africa strains.—AFP

Indonesian landslide kills nine with 10 missing

JAKARTA — At least nine people have died and 10 are missing after a landslide caused by torrential rains swept away several homes in Indonesia, officials said Monday, with hundreds forced to flee their flooded homes.

Twenty-one people were initially reported missing after the disaster struck Sunday evening in a rural part of East Java.

Indonesia’s Search and Rescue Agency said it had found nine bodies, but was still searching for 10 others.

The other two people had been rescued.

“We cannot bring heavy equipment to the site of the landslides currently. However, we are currently trying to

make our way,” the East Java Search and Rescue Agency told AFP in a written statement.

The landslide also seriously damaged eight houses, said the agency.

Pasuruan, a town in the province, was also flooded after a river overflowed due to the heavy rains, forcing more than 350 people to flee their homes, the agency added.

Fatal landslides and flash floods are common across the Indonesian archipelago, where seasonal downpours are frequent and relentless.

In January at least 21 people died and more than 60,000 fled the area after a series of major floods hit South Kalimantan. — AFP

Iran renews pledge against nukes after controversy

TEHRAN — Iran reiterated Monday that its opposition to nuclear weapons was official policy as laid down by its supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in the wake of controversial remarks by a minister.

“Iran’s position remains unchanged. Iran’s nuclear activities have always been peaceful and will remain peaceful,” foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told a news conference.

“The supreme leader’s fatwa banning weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons is still valid,” he added, referring to Khamenei’s religious edict.

The renewed pledge came a week after Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi said it would not be Tehran’s fault if the country was ever “pushed” towards developing a nuclear bomb.

“Our nuclear industry is a peaceful industry. The supreme leader explicitly stated (that) in his fatwa,” Alavi said in a state television interview broadcast on February 8.

“But if a cat is caught in a corner, it may behave differently... If they are pushing Iran in that direction, then it is not Iran’s fault, but those who pushed it.”

He stressed that “under normal circumstances, Iran has no such intention or plan”.

Iranian intelligence min-

isters can only be appointed or dismissed with the approval of the supreme leader.

Iran had claimed the existence of the fatwa for years before making the text public for the first time in 2010, at a time of crisis over Iran’s nuclear programme.

Tehran was at the time accused by the international community, especially the West and Israel, of seeking to secretly acquire the atomic bomb.

The fatwa declares the use of the atomic bomb and other weapons of mass destruction to be “haram”, or forbidden by Islam, and it is regularly cited by Iranian authorities as a guarantee of Tehran’s good intentions.

But the US State Department described Alavi’s remarks as “very concerning” and said Iran was obliged under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to never “acquire nuclear weapons”.

This comes as a 2015 landmark deal between Iran and world powers limiting Tehran’s nuclear programme in exchange for international sanctions relief is hanging by a thread.

Former US president Donald Trump withdrew from the accord in 2018 and reimposed sanctions on Tehran, with Iran a year later gradually suspending its compliance with most key nuclear commitments in response.—AFP

Nadal closes on Slams record, Barty raises home hopes at Australian Open

MELBOURNE—Rafael Nadal outclassed Fabio Fognini to close in on the all-time Grand Slam titles record on Monday as Ashleigh Barty ramped up hopes of becoming the Australian Open's first home winner in 43 years.

Nadal said his lower-back stiffness was continuing to improve after his 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 against the flamboyant Italian, which set up a quarter-final against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Fognini had registered a five-set win over Nadal at the 2015 US Open, but the Spaniard cantered to victory after recovering from 2-4 down in the second set.

Nadal is now into his 43rd Grand Slam quarter-final, staying on course for a title match

with eight-time winner Novak Djokovic who battled through an abdominal injury to reach the last eight on Sunday.

"I'm happy to be in the quarter-finals today -- that means a lot to me, it's positive stuff," said Nadal, who is level with Roger Federer on 20 Grand Slam men's singles titles. Next up for Nadal is world number six Tsitsipas, who went through on a walkover after Italy's Matteo Berrettini pulled out with an abdominal strain.

The Melbourne tournament remained fan-free for a third day on Monday during a five-day lockdown in Victoria state to curb a coronavirus outbreak.

As the action continued in front of empty stands, top-ranked



Spain's Rafael Nadal (L) shakes hands with Italy's Fabio Fognini after their men's singles match on day eight of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on 15 February 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

Barty beat big-hitting American Shelby Rogers in impressive fashion to reach the last eight.

Barty won 6-3, 6-4 to go into

the quarter-finals without dropping a set as she bids to become the first Australian champion since Chris O'Neil in 1978.

"I love playing at home and sharing this with my friends and family," said Barty, who hit 21 winners. —AFP ■

Olympic venues reported safe after northeastern Japan earthquake

TOKYO—Three Tokyo Olympic venues north and east of the capital were reported undamaged Sunday following a magnitude-7.3 earthquake that struck northeastern Japan the night before, the Olympic organizing committee said.

Fukushima Prefecture and neighbouring Miyagi Prefecture, both hard hit by the massive earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, will host Olympic events to promote regional reconstruction.

Azuma Stadium, in the city of Fukushima, will host baseball and softball games, while Miyagi Stadium, northeast of Sendai, will host Olympic soccer. Another soccer venue, Ibaraki Prefecture's Kashima Stadium, was also declared undamaged as were all of their respective temporary facilities.

The organizing committee said thorough surveys of the sites would be undertaken as early as Monday and it would continue to cooperate with local

governments as preparations continue for the Olympics, opening on July 23.

The starting point of the Olympic torch relay, Fukushima's J-Village national soccer training center, also appeared undamaged by the quake.

The torch relay is to commence on March 25 and the committee said it would check on the status of the relay route "as preparations go forward in cooperation with local executive committees." —Kyodo News ■



Photo taken 20 January 2020, shows an aerial view of Azuma Stadium in Fukushima, which will host baseball and softball during the Tokyo Olympics. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

Messi 'happy' leading Barca revival but PSG a reminder of what could await



Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (C) challenges Alaves' French defender Florian Lejeune (R) and Alaves' Spanish goalkeeper Fernando Pacheco during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and Deportivo Alaves at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on 13 February 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

MADRID—Lionel Messi put his arm around Ilaix Moriba, the 18-year-old born in the same year Messi made his Barcelona debut and who was now being given his own chance to play for the club's first team.

Ilaix had just set up the opening goal against Alaves on Saturday when he was congratulated by his 33-year-old captain, whose task it is on Tuesday to lead this youthful Barca to an unfancied victory against Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League last 16. From nurturing the next generation of Barcelona talents to confronting one of

Europe's richest, most ambitious clubs, the fork in the road for Messi's future is becoming clear.

PSG may not be Messi's preferred choice this summer, especially if Manchester City decide the Argentinian is the final piece of the jigsaw for a team already ahead of the rest in the Premier League.

But the two clubs remain his most realistic destinations, both united in representing almost everything that staying put at Barcelona would not. Clubs ready, in theory, to win the biggest trophies immediately and able to spend whatever it takes to do it. —AFP ■