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Ethnic affairs, public affairs management and services committee holds meeting (2/2021)

THE Ethnic Affairs, Public Affairs Management and Services Committee organized the coordination meeting (2/2021) yesterday afternoon in Nay Pyi Taw.

Member of the State Administration Council, Union Minister for Defence General Mya Tun Oo, in his capacity as Chairperson of the Committee addressed the coordination meeting, and members of the Committee Saw Daniel, Union Ministers U Ko Ko, Dr Thet Thet Khine, and U Saw Tun Aung Myint, Deputy Ministers Major-General Soe Tint Naing, U Ye Tint, U Zaw Win, U Myo Hlaing, U Min Htein and U Zaw Aye Maung, the Permanent Secretaries, Directors-General and officials attended the meeting.

At the meeting, Union Minister General Mya Tun Oo said the State Administration Council is setting nine objectives for the development of the country and among those goals, the Committee is directly related to the establishment of the Union based on genuine and disciplined multiparty de-



Member of the State Administration Council Union Minister for Defence General Mya Tun Oo chairs the second coordination meeting of the Ethnic Affairs, Public Affairs Management and Services Committee in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

mocracy and federalism with full justice and the preservation of national cultural characteristics and respect for all ethnic nationalities.

He added the ethnic nationalities living in the border areas must get their citizen-

ship cards in accordance with the law, and it is necessary to coordinate with relevant ministries for the development of the ethnic areas and access to basic jobs. He called on the participants to work together for the socio-economic develop-

ment of the ethnic nationalities. Deputy Minister for Ethnic Affairs, Secretary of the Committee U Zaw Aye Maung, presented the responsibilities of the committee: appointing local or international experts and the process of deciding on

the coordination of governance between the Self-Administered Division / Zones.

The committee members discussed the relevant sectors and the Union Minister coordinated the meeting accordingly.—MNA

Notification to Public

The Ministry of Health and Sports is working to prioritize the availability of quality and safe vaccines for COVID-19 prevention in the general public.

The COVID-19 vaccine by the international donations are documented by the Ministry of Health and Sports. In addition, if private pharmaceutical companies want to import, distribute and inject high-quality, safe COVID-19 vaccines that are being injected internationally or regionally in Asia, it can be applied to the Food and Drug Administration with the required documents.

Ministry of Health and Sports

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Announcement of Union Election Commission

(4 March 2021)

REGARDING the Multiparty General Election held on 8 November 2020, the Union Election Commission has inspected the withdrawal/receipt/use/remaining of ballot papers used for Pyithu Hluttaw Election of Kyauktada Township in Yangon Region, together with the respective township election sub-commission, head of

police, Immigration and Population and administrators according to the Hluttaw Election Law Section 53.

According to inspection on the ground, a total of 28 poll stations of Kyauktada Township in Yangon Region took out 26,304 ballot papers. It used 15,055 ballot receipts, and the remaining ballots were 11,039 instead

of 11,249.

The extra/shortage ballots were found at respective poll stations, and the missing ballots were 306, which is lesser than the actual numbers of remaining ballots and illegal extra-used ballots were 96. The findings are as follows:

On the ground inspections on ballot papers for Pyithu Hluttaw Election of Kyauktada Township

Sr	Subject	Withdrawal	Used	Exact Remaining	Remaining on the ground	Difference		Remark
						Missing	Extra- used	
1	Wards and Village-tracts	25,300	14,553	10,747	10,537	306	96	
2	Township advance ballots	533	502	31	31	-	-	
3	Township remaining ballots	471	-	471	471	-	-	
Total		26,304	15,055	11,249	11,039	306	96	

It is also found out that it failed to return the advance ballot receipts for respective wards in Kyauktada Township.

According to the respective Hluttaw Election Rules and Rule 66(h), "The poll heads must pack the under-mentioned and must print his seal on the packs. The poll heads must express the pack's content, names of ward or village-tracts and poll station number. He can

also allow the poll station representative for Hluttaw MPs or other election agents to print their seals and make a large bundle. -

1. Unused ballot papers, receipts and Form (16-1)
2. Voting lists of the polling station
3. Receipts for advance ballot papers
4. Invalid votes Form (17).

The Rules also instructed the poll head, deputy poll head, and members to carry out according to the stipulations mentioned above.

It was found that the number of ballots used was higher than the number of ballot papers issued in 8 polling stations. The use of extra ballots in these polling stations are as follows, and it is found that more ballots were printed.

List of extra-used ballot papers for poll station-wise of Wards in Kyauktada Township

Sr	Ward/Village Tract	Poll station	Issued	Used	Extra ballot papers
1	No (1) Ward	1	900	934	34
2	No (2) Ward	1	900	902	2
3	No (6) Ward	3	700	702	2
4	No (7) Ward	1	1,350	1,351	1
5	No (7) Ward	3	900	950	50
6	No (9) Ward	1	950	951	1
7	No (9) Ward	3	1,150	1,153	3
8	No (9) Ward	4	1,200	1,203	3
Total			8,050	8,146	96

The missing ballot papers at 10 ward poll stations are as follows:

List of missing ballot papers for poll station-wise of ward in Kyauktada Township

Sr	Ward/Village Tract	Poll station	Issued	Used	Missing ballot papers
1	No (1) Ward	2	500	473	27
2	No (1) Ward	3	800	796	4
3	No (2) Ward	3	900	899	1
4	No (3) Ward	1	850	849	1
5	No (3) Ward	3	1,150	1,000	150
6	No (5) Ward	1	800	799	1
7	No (6) Ward	4	800	799	1
8	No (7) Ward	2	1,300	1,250	50
9	No (8) Ward	1	1,200	1,153	47
10	No (8) Ward	3	1,000	976	24
Total			9,300	8,994	306

Union Election Commission

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.

Free healthcare services

Promotion of Myanmar martial arts for the health of people, raising fund for the public hospitals to provide free healthcare services for the civil service personnel at the initial stage.

(Excerpt from the speech to the coordination meeting of the State Administration Council made by the Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on 16 February 2021)

Alms offered to monks and nuns in Tatkon



THE Ministry of Religious Affairs donated the alms to the monks and nuns residing in the monasteries and nunneries in Tatkon Township in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning.

The donation ceremony was attended by Sayadaw Abhidhaza Maharatta Guru Bhaddanta Asinna, Principal Speaker of Mahasihanada Pariyatti School and Sayadaws, Union Minister for Religious Affairs U Ko Ko, the Permanent Secretary, Directors - General and officials.

The Ministry of Religious

Affairs donated a total of 214 rice bags for the 1,015 monks and 382 nuns residing in 16 monasteries and 7 nunneries in Pobbathiri Township and Pyinmana Township on 19 February. A total of 145 rice bags was presented to a total of 502 monks and 517 nuns residing in 9 monasteries and 4 nunneries in Lewe Township on 2 March 2021.

A total of 144 rice bags were donated to 709 monks and 169 nuns residing in 19 monasteries and 5 nunneries in Tatkon Township yesterday.—MNA

Union Minister U Ko Ko presents donations to Sayadaws in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

MoSWRR discusses cooperation with UN, INGOs

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement organized a coordination meeting over cooperation with UN and INGOs yesterday.

During the meeting, Union Minister Dr Thet Thet Khine discussed the importance of MoU and LoA with NGOs and INGOs, international technical assistance and best practice and financial assistance of international organizations.

Then, Deputy Minister U Aung Tun Khine presented plans for sustainable relation between UN and international

organizations and the Assistant Secretary briefed processes for MoU and LoA for technical assistance.

Then, the Director of Social Welfare and other officials of relevant departments presented about the organizations which completed MoU, LoA, LTA, Project Agreement and Workplan.

The Deputy Minister then instructed to inspect the beneficiaries through the work with NGOs and INGOs and to adopt monitoring and evaluation system. —MNA



MoSWRR minister and deputy minister are leading the discussion on cooperation with UN and INGOs yesterday.

Public information

YANGON Administration Council is working with relevant departments to help the businesses in the region. People are informed to contact the following phone numbers to get assistance for their small and medium-scaled businesses and investments which are facing some delays and working to do new businesses. **Phone numbers: 01 830 1975, 01830 2175**

YANGON Region Administration Council

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
State Administration Council
Order No 101/2021

6th Waning of Tabodwe 1382 ME
4 March 2021

Appointment and Duty Assignment of
Deputy Attorney-General

U San Lwin is appointed as the Deputy Attorney-General in accordance with 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 102/2021

6th Waning of Tabodwe 1382 ME
4 March 2021

Appointment and Duty Assignment of
States/Regions Attorney-Generals

The following persons are assigned by the State Administration Council to the duties of the States/Regions Attorney-Generals shown against each of their respective States/Regions in accordance with the Article 419 of the State Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| (1) Daw Nan Hla Hla Aye | Kachin State |
| (2) U Kyi Myine | Kayah State |
| (3) U Ye Lwin | Kayin State |
| (4) U Khwa Thio | Chin State |
| (5) Daw Hla Hla Aye | Sagaing Region |
| (6) U Ohn Than | Taninthayi Region |
| (7) U Khin Maung Tint | Bago Region |
| (8) Daw Khin Myat Thu | Magway Region |
| (9) U Myint Aung | Mandalay Region |
| (10) U Myint Aung | Mon State |
| (11) U Hla Thein | Rakhine State |
| (12) U Htay Aung | Yangon Region |
| (13) U Tin Oo | Shan State |
| (14) Daw Khin Khin Nwe | Ayeyawady Region |

By order

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

Five future programmes of State
Administration Council

1. The Union Election Commission will be reconstituted to carry out tasks that should be done, including inspection of voting lists in accordance with the law.
2. Effective measures will be taken for the prevention of current infectious COVID-19 with added momentum.
3. Efforts will be made to recover businesses that faced loss caused by COVID-19 in various ways as quickly as possible.
4. Emphasis will be placed on restoring eternal peace in the entire nation in line with agreements from the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) as much as possible.
5. When missions will be accomplished in accord with provisions of the state of emergency, a free and fair multiparty democracy election will be held in accordance with the Constitution (2008), and further tasks will be undertaken to hand over State duty to the winning party meeting the standards of democracy.

Bombers seen among the rioters in Sanchaung

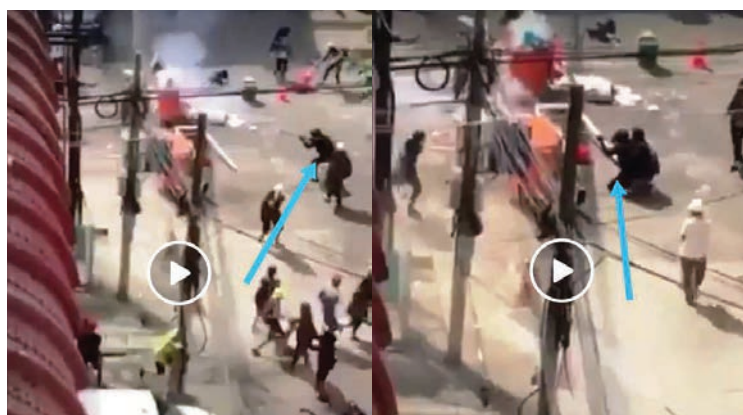
GROUPS of bombers are seen involving among the rioters, according to the statement of the Myanmar Police Force.

According to the statement, security forces had to disperse a group of violent protesters in the corner of Baho street and Phyapon street in Sanchaung Township around 10 am on 3 March.

The incident was monitored by CCTV cameras and found to be rioters armed with

two weapons believed to be smoke grenades. According to CCTV footage, the guns were of two different types and fired by a group of six people.

According to an analysis of the incident, the protesters were no longer in the normal stage of the protest but were armed with explosive devices and resorted to violence, and the injuries were attributed to security forces.—MNA



Rule of law bodies investigate cause of death of Ma Kyal Zin

THE Myanmar Police Force issued the statement that the security forces maintained the violent demonstrators in accordance with the law at the corner of 84th street and 30th street on 3 March in Chanayethazan Township, Mandalay Region.

It is found that various

opinions and allegations have been raised on the social media about the death of Ma Kyal Zin, 19, who was died during the incident. According to the injury in the photo, respective experts have analyzed that it was not an injury caused by a riot weapon and if it is the injury caused by the riot

weapon or live ammunition, it is not possible for the head of the deceased person to be in good condition.

It is reported that the respective rule of law bodies are investigating the cause of her death and more information will be announced in a timely manner.—MNA

People to be aware of dangers amid riots

ALTHOUGH announcements are being released regarding the destructive elements behind the protests, the youths accelerate their acts into violence by prioritizing their feelings.

According to CCTV footage spreading on the social network about protest occurred on the morning of 3

March in Sanchaung township of Yangon, 6 people among the protest crowd were found using smoke grenades and Myanmar Police Force also released a statement about it.

Moreover, the people should be cautious during this period as in death cases due to small firearms are not associated with the security

forces, and there might be some unscrupulous persons behind these cases, according to the findings of analysts.

The well-experienced political pundits also warn the people not to participate in riots and the youths should be wisely aware of dangers.—MNA

People to be cautious of destructive elements that incite unrest

THE anti-government allies put the youths frontline and provide the posters and signboards. The politicians conduct various incitements, according to the statement of the Myanmar Police Force.

According to that statement, the protest crowds across the nation blocked the public roads. They conducted arrests and torture of security forces, violence against monks, ATM robbery, destroy of state-owned buildings and vehicles yesterday. Therefore, the security forces dispersed the protest crowds with crowd-control weapons.

The security forces dispersed protest crowds in Pynmana of Nay Pyi Taw, Ahlone, Sanchaung and Kyauktada of Yangon Region, Pyawbwe and Myingyan of Mandalay Region, Shwebo of Sagaing Region, Patheingyi of Ayeyawady Region, Myeik and Dawei of Taninthayi Region, Myitkyina of Kachin State and Taunggyi of Shan State yesterday. It is also found that the youths accelerate their acts into riots due to the negative, destructive elements.

It is here warned the people to be more cautious to maintain the situation as most of the politicians are hiding in safe places forcing the youths to take to the streets and to confront the security forces. —MNA



Former peaceful protests were incited into riots by destructive elements. Most of the politicians are hiding in safe places forcing the youths to take to the streets and to confront the security forces.



Domestic gold prices fall by over K100,000 in half month

ACCORDING to the domestic gold market, the gold market prices in Myanmar dropped by over K100,000 in half a month.

Although pure gold reached the highest price of over K1,400,000 per tical on 17 February, the price dropped to K1,302,000 per tical after 15 days on 4 March.

Recent days saw the gold price unstable in the domestic market. That is the reason why the Yangon gold market halted on 5 February. But, the market reopened on 10 February.

Consequently, Yangon Region Gold Entrepreneurs Association called an emergency meeting on 4 February before the gold market started. Then, the association made four decisions. They are to use the cash down payment system and encourage people who are trading with fear and trading with restraint.

Similarly, the international gold price is also on the de-

cline. The gold price was only around US\$1,788 per ounce on 17 February but had dropped to \$1,713 on 4 March 2021, a decline of \$75 in 15 days.

In January 2021, the domestic gold fetched the highest price of K1,336,000 per tical on 6 January. It reached the lowest price of K1,316,000 per tical on 28 January. The lowest level of K1,340,000 came from 2 February, and the highest level of K1,410,000 (3 February), the gold traders said.

The local gold price reached the lowest K1,310,500 (2 September) and the highest level of K1,314,000 (1 September). In October, the rate ranged between K1,307,800 (30 October) and K1,316,500 (21 October). The rate fluctuated between the highest of K1,312,000 (16 November) and the lowest of K1,278,000 (28 November). In December, the pure yellow metal priced moved in the range of Ks



In January 2021, the domestic gold fetched the highest price of K1,336,000 per tical on 6 January. It reached the lowest price of K1,316,000 per tical on 28 January. **PHOTO: GNLM/FILE**

1,275,000 (1 December) and K1,333,000 (28 December).

With the global gold prices on the uptick, the domestic price hit fresh highs in 2019,

reaching K1,000,000 per tical between 17 January and 21 February, crossing K1,100,000 (22 June to 5 August), climbing to K1,200,000 (7 August-4 Sep-

tember), and then reaching a fresh peak of K1,300,000 on 5 September, according to the gold traders. — NN/GNLM

Community-based tourism site promoted in Mongnai Township



Lwelin monastery with ancient heritage is located in the village of Mongnai Township.

A WORK coordination meeting to create a community-based tourism village was inaugurated at Kanbawza Hall of Mongnai Township in southern Shan State.

U Soe Htut, the township administrator, remarked that Shan State has a vast land area among the states and regions,

home to 33 ethnic groups. Tourism resources are required to enhance the tourism industry and socio-economy of the Shan State's rural people. A village in the township will be selected and created as the community-based tourism site with the 2020-2021 financial year's allocated funds.

The officials concerned and

the attendees selected the Lwelin village of Kunna village-tract as the community-tourism village. Lwelin monastery with ancient heritage is located in the village. Officials further discussed plans to implement the tourism village in detail and inspected the potential sites. — IPRD/GNLM

Summer paddy cultivation succeeds in Twantay

THE summer paddy cultivation succeeded in Takahle village, Twantay township, Yangon region with about 82,032 acres put under cultivation of monsoon paddy. In comparison, 32,938 acres were put under cultivation of summer paddy in 2020.

The villages in Twantay township are growing summer paddy mainly after harvesting the monsoon paddy because of sufficient irrigated water availability. The villagers have also cultivated mixed crops such as chilli, eggplant, sweet potato, gourd, ridge gourd, maize and ASEAN Eugenia.

The farmers are growing the summer paddy which is better suited to the region. The paddy species are 90 days, Ah Nyar Thar and Shwebo Chome summer paddy species.

"I am a paddy farmer from Takahle village. I have 20 acres of paddy fields. I have grown Taung Pyan species of monsoon paddy with a yield of only 50 baskets. The cultivation of the monsoon paddy

cost around Ks 200,000 or Ks 300,000 per acre. During the rainy season, the paddy fields were destroyed by floods and golden snails. Thus, the paddy yield has dropped. So, the local farmers are mainly growing the summer paddy in their farmlands," said U Win Yee, a local farmer from Takahle village.

He also added that I had grown both summer and monsoon paddies in our 20 acres of farmland. But, I have cultivated only the highly demanding species suited to our regions. Most of the villagers are growing 90 days, Ah Nyar Thar and Shwebo Chome summer paddy species, producing about 90 or 100 baskets per acre. We also need to use fertilizer to make high volume. We are using four fertilizer bags per acre. It is the summer paddy. So, we are supplying the irrigation water to the farmlands from the creek every two days. The cultivation cost of summer paddy is over K300,000 per acre. —Myo Hlaing (Twantay)/GNLM

Export of cattle, animal products dives by \$35.84 mln this FY

MYANMAR'S export of animal products between 1 October and 19 February in the current financial year 2020-2021 touched a low of US\$15.857 million, a sharp drop of \$35.8 million compared with the corresponding period of the 2019-2020 FY since China suspended livestock trading.

In the previous FY, animal products export has registered at \$51.69 million. The private sector solely drives animal products export.

About 10,000 heads of cattle, owned by 150 companies, are now stranded in the Muse border as China stopped purchasing cattle. The labour wages and feedstuff cost burden them. It costs K400,000-600,000 to take care of 100 heads of cattle every day.

Some traders brought the cattle from Muse back to their home owing to the burden of high feedstuff cost and labour wages. Some intentionally stated that they would return to the originally-designated place but conduct illegal trade in border areas.

For legitimate trade, China permits live cattle import only after ensuring the cattle is free from 20 diseases, including Foot and Mouth Disease, along with vaccination certificates, health certificates, and farming registration certificates. Therefore, the officials concerned from the two countries are negotiating the matter.



Myanmar's live cattle export heavily relies on the China market due to a reasonable price, although Myanmar has other external markets such as Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. **PHOTO: GNLM/FILE**

Earlier, 1,500-2,000 heads of cattle were daily traded through the Muse border. Chinese New Year holidays, preventive measures for the COVID-19, and other reasons contribute to the cattle trade suspension.

Additionally, Myanmar's live cattle export heavily relies on the China market due to a reasonable price, although Myanmar has other external markets such as Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, and Bangladesh.

The Ministry of Commerce grants a permit to each com-

pany for 100 cattle export, and the permit is valid for three months. The companies can be taken legal actions if they do not sell the cattle during the three-month period.

Next, the officials from the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department (LBVD) under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation signed with China's counterparts regarding cattle surveillance and health projects for live cattle export on 18 January 2021, intending to enhance livestock trading and ensure

regular border trade through legitimate channel.

The LBVD has been implementing the establishment of a foot-and-mouth-disease free zone, control zone and vaccination areas since 14 July 2020 to export live cattle to China through the land border.

Live cattle export was allowed in late 2017 to eradicate illegal exports, creating more opportunities for breeders and promoting their interests.

The country exports cattle above five years old, including vaccination certificates, health

certificates, and farming registration certificates. According to the 2018 cattle census, there are 11.5 million heads of cattle in the country.

The authorities have issued cattle export licences to more than 300 companies in the Magway region. There are around 5,000 companies holding cattle export licences across the country.

Myanmar can yearly export around 500,000 heads of cattle beyond domestic consumption, the association stated. — GNLM

Myanmar rice exports to China strong as Yuan gains

With the Chinese Yuan appreciating, Myanmar's exports of rice and broken rice are so strong that the exporters are receiving handsome benefits, said U Min Thein, vice-chair of Muse Rice Wholesale Centre.

At present, the Chinese Yuan is gaining, and a Yuan is worth over K200. As a result of this, the exporters are financially doing well, he added.

"The stronger the Chinese Yuan, the better the exporters earn," he remarked.

There is good potential for rice and broken rice among the

goods exported to China. The rice prices stand at 129 Yuan per bag for broken rice, 133 Yuan for Ngasein rice variety, 135 Yuan for Thuka variety and 142 Yuan for Htonepu variety, Muse rice depot stated.

Last 26 February, China gave green lights to some Myanmar export companies to deliver the rice to China through the Muse land border.

He continued the authorized companies for rice export to China have increased this year as against last year.

Myanmar traders have

started shipping rice to China under new permits through the Muse border.

Nevertheless, the private banks' closure disrupted the transaction problem in the rice trade, he elaborated.

Myanmar shipped more than 720,000 tonnes of rice and broken rice to foreign countries between 1 October and 15 January of the current financial year, earning over US\$275 million, Myanmar Rice Federation stated.

The country sent over 308,000 tons to neighbouring

countries via border trade, and maritime trade saw over 418,000 tonnes.

Myanmar has exported rice to 31 foreign markets so far. China is the main buyer of Myanmar rice with over 340,000 tonnes, followed by the Philippines (36,000 tonnes) and Poland (14,000 tonnes). Meanwhile, Myanmar sent broken rice mostly to China (over 210,000 tonnes), followed by Belgium (46,000 tonnes) and Thailand (over 6,300 tonnes). Broken rice was placed in 16 foreign markets.

Myanmar set the rice export

target at only 2 million tonnes in the current FY as summer paddy growing acreage drops, said U Ye Min Aung, Chair of Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF).

Weather changes affected irrigation water resource availability in agriculture. Consequently, the export figures showed a drop of 300,000 tonnes of rice in exports this year.

Myanmar generated over \$800 million from rice exports in the previous FY2019-2020 ended 30 September, with an estimated volume of over 2.5 million tonnes. — NN/GNLM

Identify, eliminate bottlenecks for farmland disputes

Some 70 per cent of Myanmar's population resides in rural areas and depends on agriculture and livestock breeding.

To ensure sustainable livelihoods and the development of the country, our land resources need to be managed and utilized properly. Only systematic utilization and management of land resources can improve the socio-economic condition of the people.

Hence, land disputes issues should be settled as soon as possible. Only then will our rural communities who are solely relying on agriculture and livestock breeding for their livelihood can earn more extra income from their farming. Besides, the more land disputes we settle, the lesser criminal cases based on farmland.

Excess and unused lands returned as state-owned lands need to be used for the benefit of the people, and if unutilized, they need to be kept on record and maintained. Some farmland released by the ministerial departments have not been received by their former owners due to some delays or lack of clarity on who the former owners are. Now, the time comes to identify and eliminate the bottlenecks.

To put an end to illegal squatting, including settlement in forest reserves and construction of infrastructure on farmlands, those who are responsible for settling the land dispute issues need to cooperate with farmers and regional law enforcement officials.

The management of farmlands, as well as vacant, fallow and virgin lands, needs to be improved. Meanwhile, priority over land use and land rights should be given to the small farmers and landless farmers.

Section-35 of the Farmland Law prohibits squatting on farmland, and those who violate the law face imprisonment of six months to two years or a fine of K300,000 to K500,000.

Besides, farmland cannot be sold, pawned, or leased to foreigners without the permission of the State.

Generally, resolving complicated issues correctly demands time and space to a certain extent.

At the same time, we need to use compassion, fairness and avoid malpractice to ensure that those involved in the cases are satisfied with their resolution.



FAO's Investment Centre doubles down on efforts to create more robust and sustainable agri-food systems

What's the FAO Investment Centre?

Simply put, the FAO Investment Centre creates investment solutions in sustainable food and agriculture. The Centre offers a range of investment support services helping countries to create long-term investment policies and plans, to design and implement investment projects with financing partners and to generate knowledge and build capacities related to investment. A distinctive characteristic of the Centre is that it works almost exclusively through partnerships with financial institutions and member country governments.

Better investment in food and agriculture leads to more efficient and equitable agri-food systems as well as greater resilience in the face of climate change and other shocks such as COVID-19.

What's new is that FAO members have recently agreed to inject significantly more resources into the Centre - enabling it to expand, provide more in-depth investment support to countries and strengthen its collaboration with international and national financial institutions and other development partners.

As FAO Director-General QU Dongyu said: "together, we are transforming agriculture and agri-food systems through targeted investment, innovation, knowledge and strengthened capacities."

In 2020, working with partner international financial institutions and with our member country governments, we helped mobilize \$6.6 billion of public investment projects to create stronger and more sustainable agri-food systems. That's an increase of \$900 million (16%) compared to 2019 and an increase from 32 to 38

projects. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, last year we supported the design of \$2 billion new public investments that will provide people with access to healthy food and create jobs.

A good example is the Joint Programme to Respond to the Challenges of COVID-19, Conflict and Climate Change, benefitting six countries in the Sahel by investing in agricultural infrastructure, innovative technology as well as human and social capital in cross border areas facing security issues. Both FAO and World Food Programme (WFP) will be supporting the G5 Sahel Secretariat and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in project implementation. The cost of the project is \$180 million over six years of which 109 million financed by IFAD and \$71 million by the Green Climate Fund.

Also last year, we supported the implementation of projects worldwide in some 120 countries. This consists of providing critical technical support to governments during the projects' implementation period (typically around five years) to make sure that investments are on track to deliver the desired outcomes. The Centre's multi-disciplinary teams can address implementation issues related to all aspects of agriculture and rural development including infrastructure and irrigation, agriculture, livestock, fisheries, forestry, etc. The Centre also provides support to better soft investments in human and social capital and capacities, governance and institutions, farmer organizations and community development.

Countries have been looking to FAO for policy guidance on responding to COVID-19 and technical assistance to ongoing projects. In response, we

provided timely policy advice, undertook rapid impact assessments of COVID-19 on agri-food systems to inform countries' decisions and solutions to mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic on their food and agriculture sector.

With investment partners such as the World Bank - the Centre's oldest and largest partner - we developed response packages and reoriented ongoing projects to address the COVID-19 challenges.

With the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), we established a (\$3 million) technical response facility to help the agri-food sector to overcome COVID-19 challenges and to strengthen agri-food systems' longer-term resilience.

With the European Commission, we are undertaking rapid agri-food systems assessments in many countries - by end of 2021 we aim to reach 61 countries, among the most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition. The assessments are only the first step. The work will help to shape new policy recommendations in food and agriculture, and potential private and public investments in agri-food systems' transformations in those countries. We are also working with many partners, including European Development Finance Institutions, to help de-risk investments in the agri-food sector - a sector marked by uncertainty and volatility even at the best of times.

We are also integrating COVID-19 response activities into the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) projects in countries such as Bangladesh, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Haiti, Senegal and Yemen.

The Centre has also stepped up its actions to increase visibil-



At an FAO-supported animal feed processing plant in Afghanistan. PHOTO: FAO

ity and influence public debate on the need for investment in agri-food systems as the world works towards building back better.

We have a good track record of bringing stakeholders together from the public and private sectors, including farmers and their organizations, to discuss policy issues and resolve bottlenecks.

In parallel, the Centre has been key to the rolling out of the poverty-focused Hand-in-Hand Initiative in close to 40 countries.

Good investment design is fundamental, but you also need effective implementation to make a positive impact in people's lives. Our investment team plays a substantial role in supporting the successful roll-out of publicly funded investment projects - irrespective

of whether we were involved in their design or not. This can range from supporting the modernization of digital land registries in Europe and Central Asia, long-term support to pastoralists in the Sahel, water management in the Caribbean or rural entrepreneurs and trade in the Pacific. The Centre casts a wide footprint when it comes to delivering impact at country level.

We also forged new partnerships with financing institutions to expand our investment support, and new collaborations are being built with the European Investment Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and others.

Mindful that public money alone is not enough to end poverty, we are creating new and innovative partnerships to transform how development is

financed, especially through blended finance - the use of public or philanthropic money combined with private investment into businesses that generate social and environmental impacts alongside financial returns.

For example, we are working with the European Commission, through the AgrIntel initiative, providing advisory services to impact funds and blended finance operations investing in small and medium agribusinesses through equity and loans. Blended finance is certainly an area to watch.

Since we began, our team has supported the EU to review over 124 blended finance proposals worth EUR 609 million. Funding has already been cleared for 23 proposals worth EUR 96 million.

SOURCE: FAO

Covid cases rising again in Europe: WHO

The number of new coronavirus cases has risen in Europe after six weeks of decline, the World Health Organization said on Thursday.

"Last week, new cases of

COVID-19 in Europe rose nine per cent to just above one million. This brought a promising six-week decline in new cases to an end, with more than half of our region seeing increas-

ing numbers of new infections," WHO Europe's regional director Hans Kluge told a news conference.

"We are seeing a resurgence in central and Eastern Europe.

New cases are also on the rise in several western European countries where rates were already high," he said.

"We need to get back to the basics. We need to enlarge" the

vaccine portfolio, he said.

WHO's Europe region comprises 53 nations and vaccination drives have begun in 45.

According to an AFP tally based on official numbers, 2.6

per cent of the European Union's population have received two doses of Covid-19 vaccines and 5.4 per cent have got one dose.

SOURCE: AFP

Objectives of 76th Anniversary Armed Forces Day

FOR the Tatmadaw to join hands with the entire nation to safeguard democracy, which is the aspiration of all the nationalities of the country, from deviating from its path, in accord with the basic principles of the Constitution, while observing Our Three Main National Causes, which is the national policy;

To protect the people from all dangers including natural disasters at any time and in any situation and to provide all-round assistance for ensuring social security of the people;

To restore eternal peace based on NCA, without deviating from Our Three Main National Causes, as the cessation of armed conflicts is the principal requirement in realizing democracy;

To build a strong and compact Standard Army, which has the combat prowess and combat power; to effectively safeguard the State peace and stability and sovereignty.



Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7: 00 pm Tuesday 4 March 2021)

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL NOON OF THE 3 March 2021: Rain or thundershowers will be isolated in Taninthayi Region and Kachin State. Degree of certainty is (80%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Upper Sagaing Region and Shan, Chin, Rakhine, 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 State.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 5 March 2021: Generally fair weather.

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

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 5 March 2021: Generally fair weather.

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It's the time!

By Maung Theikdi

WHEN it comes to human beings, almost everyone (except those with weak power of past life) has their high brain for reasoning, speaking, consideration, problem-solving, and other emotional feelings. Moreover, all the people have one same thing that is none other than time. Although it is impossible to save time, it is so easy to spend the time. Time is as important as one's life, and if one dies, it can never be regained, and if we've lost the time, we can never get it back.

Spend the time beneficially

The young children, who have learned civics and primary literature since their childhood, spend their time correctly by studying various subjects at different universities to serve the country's future. When the universities are closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the youths should read suitable literary

cation ceremonies and prepare to enter their respective careers as the next chapter of life. The occupational field is as vast as the ocean, and we all have to study to be fitted with the skills we have learnt. Your life is worthy of being lived with dignity only if you have an income and a stable job. You can survive only with the job (income). That is the law of the world.

It is undeniable that most civil servants who chose their careers to serve the country with reasonable salary rates are patriotic and eager to perform their duties. But, there might be some exceptions, like some become civil servants just for salary and employment. All are the same to obey the civil services law no matter the reasons for being civil servants. But now, if we look at the survey of those urging the people by shouting slang "Don't go to the office" or join Civil Disobedience Movement

It is undeniable that most civil servants who chose their careers to serve the country with reasonable salary rates are patriotic and eager to perform their duties. But, there might be some exceptions, like some become civil servants just for salary and employment.

The government staff are educated persons to decide what is right and what is wrong or what is essential and so on.

materials and study languages and computer skills. If so, their time will be useful to build up themselves when schools remained closed.

The school days are the happiest time for the youths. Although some spent time without proper management, they have to face full of hardships before completing their education. It is just because of their actions. The people must experience suffering, such as positive or negative effects for what they have done.

Those who complete education can attend the convo-

(CDM) are unemployed or suspended from their work to the COVID-19 pandemic or dismissed for other reasons. And most of them are living on support from others.

It's time to return to their workplaces

Now, it is time for the civil servants to enter their respective departments' duties even though they joined CDM to a certain extent.

Regarding CDM, Chairman of the Security, Stability and Rule of Law Committee and the State Administration Council Senior-General Min

Aung Hlaing once said, "The government has patiently waited for their movements to a certain extent and action will be taken against those who break the rules under the law. The civil service personnel should have better belief and stances with full loyalty towards the country," during the 1/2021 meeting of the Security, Stability and Rule of Law Committee held on 26 February.

Therefore, the civil service personnel participating in CDM have a second chance to correct their mistakes and see the right things by getting out of the wrong side or ways. It is none other than "going to the office" starting "tomorrow". The government staff are educated persons to decide what is right and what is wrong or what is essential and so on. If you think of life's necessary things, they may be family, job, education, friend, social affairs, religious affairs, recreational issues, and health sector and might lose these things. Therefore, CDM participants should deeply consider these things in the long run.

I want to highlight some words of author Kyaw Win for the CDM participants to know the value of time.

It is, "If you want to know

the value of one year, just ask a student who failed an examination. If you want to know the value of one month, ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby. If you want to know the value of one week, ask the editor of the weekly journal. If you want to know the value of a day, ask a daily wage worker who has to make ends meet for his six children. If you want to know the value of one hour, ask the lovers waiting to meet each other. If you want to know the value of one minute, ask the person who just missed the train. If you want to know the value of one second, ask the person who just thinly

escaped death in a car accident. And if you want to know the value of one-hundredth of a second, ask the athlete who won a silver medal in the Olympics."

Therefore, it is true that the government staff participating in CDM will think that time is vital for every day. I want to say to the government personnel that it is time to return to their duties without resigning instead of worrying whether they should go to the office or be dismissed or leave. They also should consider whether they spend time usefully in a day.

Translated.

Therefore, the civil service personnel participating in CDM have a second chance to correct their mistakes and see the right things by getting out of the wrong side or ways.

Let's approach the problem with a fair balance on both sides

By Ko Tun Khin

HUMANS are a group of living things that live in groups. As the saying goes, "Humans are social animals." Humans are social beings. However, some animals also live in families such as eagles, tigers and lions, cats, monkeys, and pigeons, crows that live in groups. But why are people included in the species that live in groups?

Living in unity collectively

People have found that they are more successful when they work together to deal with some of the dangers of imbalance than when they face them alone. Grouping; People have come to live in harmony with the group because of the knowledge that collective strength gives them greater power.

Buddha said the deeds of those who are united are the reason for wealth. When there is unity, we can always succeed because we are strong. It is only human beings who can change and improve the world for success.

Suppose there is no unity within an organization or group, or nation. In that case, there is no power, and it leads to devastation. Divisions began to form when there are different goals, interests, objectives or directions.

Conflicts break out in the

group or the country when there are different wants and interests, from playing football to choosing the head of the village and electing the Member of Parliament.

Eventually, there will be hostilities. Fighting each other is not a common feature of civilized society. And it is not the right answer to a problem.

Many incidents have been lost in the history of Myanmar due to the disunity. You can know if you have a look at the forty-year Inwa-Hantharwady war, which began in the middle of the 14th century.

Myanmar in Upper Inwa and Mon in lower Hantharwady fought each other for fame and victory. The war began during the reigns of two prominent warlords, Rajadhirit and Minkhaung. It lasted for more than two-thirds of a century from mid-14th to 15th century, as the Mon and Myanmar kings who ascended the throne continued the war.

Misconceptions

When both sides were tired and faded the power, Hantharwady fell under the reign of Toungoo king Tapinn Shwe Htee. Innwa was invaded by the powerful Shan Saopha and finally fell Mohnyin Salon during the reign of king Narapati. This event showed the loss of being



When two groups compete, only the group which stands for the right and justice with unity and the stronger side (quality/quantity) won. These are the answers to wars.

disunity because of ego and misconceptions.

If we look at the reign of King Thibaw, who succeeded the Konbaung dynasty, Myanmar was enslaved because of the disagreement between Kinwon and Tinetar. In the British era, this was called the 40th Mon-Myanmar War to cause dissension among the people. In fact, the war lasted 37 or 38 years, but it was not always fighting.

It was easy for the British to rule Myanmar since they

caused dissension among the people. That is why we had to wait for many years to get Independence. As the royal family's relatives could not have agreement among them, it led to the country's ruin.

When two groups compete, only the group which stands for the right and justice with unity and the stronger side (quality/quantity) won. These are the answers to wars. In the history of Myanmar, there were victories, defeats, ups and downs, as well as advantages and disadvantages.

Whoever is not the same as another is an enemy

It is our people who are affected by two groups fighting in one country. As we all know now, a state of emergency has been declared in the country. Those who take advantage of disunity are inciting and creating unrest. And anyone who does not support them is considered as the enemy.

All those taking to the streets and the ones who are dispersing the crowds are all the ethnic nationalities born in the country where 135 ethnic groups live. Although the ideas, perceptions and conceptions, and beliefs are different, we are not enemies. The solution must be found through negotiation. Of course, those

who do not want the benefits of unity will be glad.

Common ground

The current situation came into being because of subjectivity, party attachment, ism and ego. They do want to win all. Therefore, it is necessary to approach the problem with a fair balance on both sides in order to continue the stable democracy journey.

The State Administration Council is committed to building a genuine and disciplined multiparty democratic union based on democracy and federalism through the full practice of justice; to adhere to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) for lasting peace in the country and to continue to adhere to the principles of an independent, proactive and neutral foreign policy and the peaceful coexistence among world's nations.

Thus, we must set aside our ego and arrogance and learn the lessons of history and strive to prevent the disintegration of our union and the country's sustainable development. For the people and the nation's benefits, let us unite not to become enslaved as the people's power is within the country.

Translated.

Suppose there is no unity within an organization or group, or nation. In that case, there is no power, and it leads to devastation. Divisions began to form when there are different goals, interests, objectives or directions.

Japan billionaire offers space seats

IT'S the sort of chance that comes along just once in a blue Moon: a Japanese billionaire is throwing open a private lunar expedition to eight people from around the world.

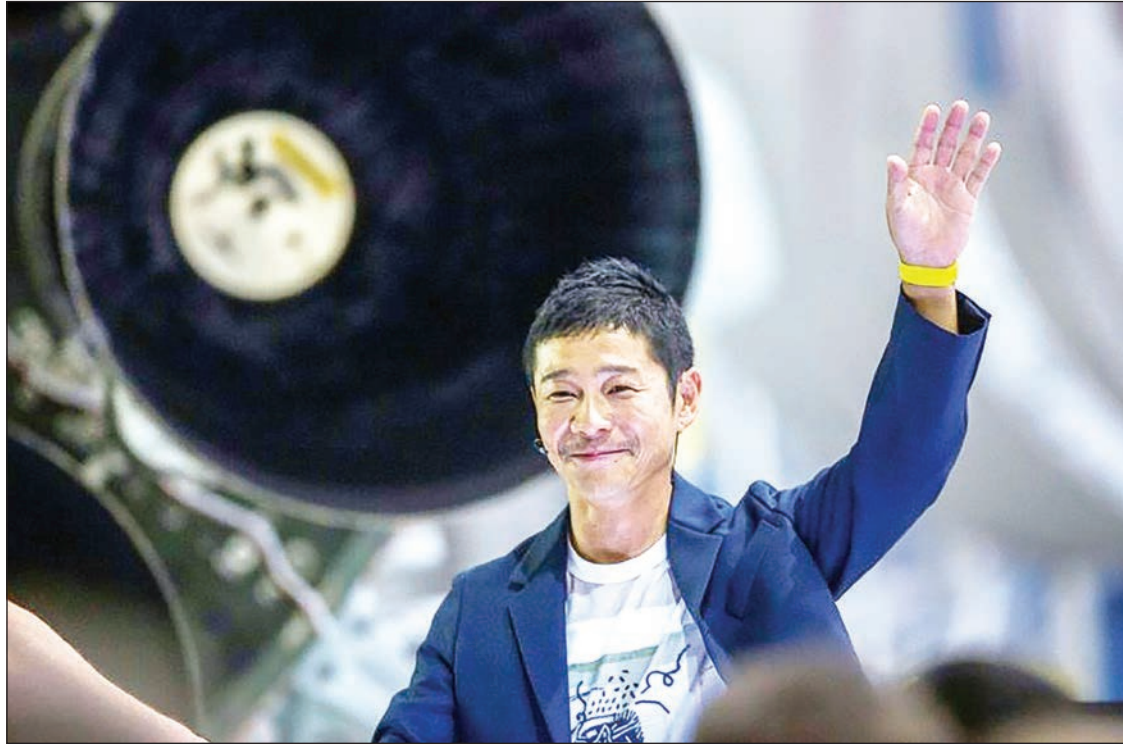
Yusaku Maezawa, an online fashion tycoon, was announced in 2018 as the first man to book a spot aboard the lunar spaceship being developed by SpaceX.

Maezawa, who paid an undisclosed sum for the trip expected to launch in 2023 at the earliest, originally said he planned to invite six to eight artists to join him on the voyage around the Moon.

But on Wednesday, in a video posted on his Twitter account, he revealed a broader application process.

"I'm inviting you to join me on this mission. Eight of you from all around the world," he said.

"I have bought all the seats, so it will be a private ride," he



Maezawa paid an undisclosed sum for the right to join the lunar mission, currently scheduled for sometime in 2023. PHOTO: AFP

added.

Maezawa, 45, said his initial plan of inviting artists had

"evolved" because he came to believe that "every single person who is doing something creative

could be called an artist."

The Japanese entrepreneur said applicants would need to ful-

fil just two criteria: being ready to "push the envelope" creatively, and being willing to help other crew members do the same.

In all, he said around 10 to 12 people will be on board the spaceship, which is expected to loop around the Moon before returning to Earth.

The application timeline for spots on the trip calls for would-be space travellers to pre-register by March 14, with initial screening carried out by March 21. No deadlines are given for the next stages -- an "assignment" and an online interview -- but final interviews and medical checkups are currently scheduled for late May 2021, according to Maezawa's website.

Musk 'highly confident'

Maezawa and his band of astronauts will become the first lunar voyagers since the last US Apollo mission in 1972 -- if SpaceX can pull the trip off. — AFP ■

How beers and Vikings gave Bluetooth technology its name



The Bluetooth logo is a superimposition of the runes for the letters "H" and "B", the initials for Viking-era king Harald "Bluetooth" Gormsson. PHOTO: AFP

ONE of the best-known modern technologies owes its name and logo to a Viking-era king with a bad tooth: a quarter century ago, two engineers hatched the idea for the moniker "Bluetooth" over beers.

At the end of the 1990s, Sven Mattisson, a Swedish engineer working at telecom group Ericsson, and Jim Kardach, an American employed by Intel, were among those developing the revolutionary technology.

In 1998, at the dawn of the "wireless" era, the two men were part of an international consortium that created a universal standard for the technology first developed by Ericsson in 1994.

But prior to that, they had struggled to pitch their wireless products.

Intel had its Biz-RF wireless programme, Ericsson had MC-Link, while Nokia had its Low Power RF. Kardach, Mat-

tisson and others presented their ideas at a seminar in Toronto in late 1997.

"Jim and I said that people did not appreciate what we presented," Mattisson, now 65 and winding down his career at Ericsson, recalled in a recent interview with AFP.

The engineer, who had travelled all the way to Canada from Sweden for the one-hour pitch, decided to hang out with Kardach for the evening before flying home. "We received a lukewarm reception of our confusing proposal, and it was at this time I realised we needed a codename for the project which everyone could use," Kardach explained in a long account on his webpage.

'Chauvinistic story'

To drown their sorrows, the two men headed for a local Toronto bar and ended up talking about history, one of Kardach's passions. —AFP ■

Microsoft sets stage for mixed-reality future

MICROSOFT on Tuesday set the stage for a future in which long-distance coworkers can collaborate as though in the same room, using augmented reality glasses and cloud computing power.

The US technology colossus launched Microsoft Mesh platform at its annual Ignite developers conference, which was a streamed event this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"One of the easiest ways to

think about it is Microsoft Mesh connects the physical and digital worlds, allowing us to transcend the traditional boundaries of space and time," co-creator Simon Skaria said in a video presentation.

Microsoft technical fellow Alex Kipman, whose team created HoloLens AR eyewear that has caught on with businesses, appeared as a hologram to unveil Mesh on a virtual stage. Mesh is powered by Azure cloud comput-

ing systems that combine data center processing power with artificial intelligence. HoloLens headgear with a US\$3,500 price tag is used to overlay digital imagery on real world settings, but the Mesh platform has the potential to be synced to virtual reality gear such as Facebook-owned Oculus as well as smartphones, according to Kipman.

Apple, Google, and Facebook are among the tech titans investing in mixed reality. —AFP ■

New Zealand eyes Australia-style media deals with tech firms

NEW Zealand called on Google and Facebook Wednesday to strike deals with Kiwi media similar to those reached in Australia, which require the tech giants to pay for using news.

Broadcast Minister Kris Faafoi said he was considering rules implementing the same type of arrangements for New Zealand's struggling media sector but hoped the deals could be reached through negotiation.

"Last week I met with both Google and Facebook," he told a parliamentary committee.

"I'm confident that commercial discussions taking place between traditional media and digital platforms will also begin here in New Zealand and I en-



New Zealand called on Google and Facebook Wednesday to strike deals with Kiwi media similar to those reached in Australia, which require the tech giants to pay for using news. PHOTO: AFP

courage that." Australia last week passed legislation requiring Big Tech to pay for news generated by local media companies, which have long complained that digital giants are sucking up their advertising revenue while also

using their content. Facebook and Google did succeed in having some provisions of the new law watered down, meaning the deals are more likely to arise from negotiations than being imposed by regulators. —AFP ■

OPEC, allies eye output decision at key meeting

THE OPEC group of oil producers and its allies meet Thursday with all eyes on whether powerhouses Russia and Saudi Arabia can agree on output levels following a rebound in demand and prices.

While the so-called OPEC+ group is often at loggerheads over how much oil to pump into the market, a sudden plunge in prices triggered by the coronavirus pandemic early last year led members to agree on a dramatic cut in output to underpin prices.

Now that vaccination campaigns are underway and demand from China, the world's largest oil importer, has bounced back to pre-pandemic levels, the group is expected to raise output.

But the success of the meeting on Thursday will hinge on whether heavyweights Russia and Saudi Arabia can agree on a way forward.

"There is within the alliance



On the sidelines of a technical meeting Tuesday, the head of OPEC, Mohammed Barkindo, pushed for middle ground when he said the cartel must emphasise "cautious optimism" given persistent risks from the pandemic. **PHOTO: AFP**

a major difference of opinion on the capacity of the oil market to absorb new volumes" of crude, said Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at SEB research group.

The world's second-largest

crude producer after the United States, Russia "leans for caution", Schieldrop explained, while number three, Saudi Arabia, "defends the increase in supply".

Russian Deputy Prime Min-

ister Alexander Novak said on state-run Russian media that "the situation is much better than a year ago and this fall", but he warned that "many uncertainties and risks remain".

—AFP ■

Europe's manufacturing offsets downturn in services



The most recent manufacturing PMI data were the latest illustration of Europe's two-speed economic recovery. **PHOTO: AFP**

WHILE services for the sixth consecutive month revolved in contractionary territory, as virus-related restrictions continued to affect many businesses, manufacturing portrayed greater resilience, expanding for an eighth successive month

and faster when compared to previous readings.

The most recent manufacturing PMI data were the latest illustration of Europe's two-speed economic recovery.

In February, Eurozone manufacturing PMI was revised

slightly higher to 57.9 – a three-year high, up from a preliminary estimate of 57.7 and significantly higher from January's 54.8 as operating conditions improved.

A reading above the 50 mark indicates an expansion compared to the previous month.

Output and new orders expanded by the most since last October's recent peak, aided by the stronger exports - the main driver of all new order gains. Additionally, employment increased for the first time in two years. Delays and difficulties in sourcing inputs, this resulting from an upturn in global demand and transportation hurdles, led to the second-greatest deterioration in lead times (the latency between the initiation and completion of a process) since data were first available. On the price front, input cost inflation reached a near-decade high, while output prices rose at the strongest rate since April 2018.

Confidence in Eurozone's future direction continued to strengthen, with optimism reaching its highest level since mid-2012. —AFP ■

Mine deal heralds end of bitter New Caledonia feud

NEW Caledonia's fiercely divided political parties on Thursday reached a deal on the sale of a key nickel mine which sparked a collapse of the French territory's government and threatened to cloud a third independence vote set for next year.

The massive Goro mine complex has been shut since December, when striking workers tried to storm the site to

prevent its sale by the Brazilian mining giant Vale and the French state.

Under the new deal hammered out by pro-independence groups, loyalist parties and indigenous Kanaks, the mine will be sold to a consortium that now includes employees as well as three regional provinces.

As a result, local investors

combined will keep a majority stake of 51 per cent, while the Switzerland-based commodities trader Trafigura, which originally planned to buy the site, will hold just 19 per cent. A pension fund will own the remainder.

"More than just a simple end to the crisis, this political accord creates a new mining model for southern Caledo-

nia," said Roch Wamytan, a Kanak leader who is president of the Congress in Noumea.

Wamytan and his allies in the pro-independence FLNKS alliance forced the collapse of the coalition government on February 2 to protest the sale as well as a budget plan for the cash-strapped island in the southern Pacific. —AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Stocks slide as inflation fears take hold

Stock markets retreated Thursday, with the heaviest losses in Asia, as rising inflation fears offset optimism about the re-opening of virus-hit economies, traders said.

The growing belief is that in the coming months, a spending splurge from pent-up consumers exiting lockdowns -- and a huge imminent US stimulus package -- will light a rocket under prices.

This in turn could force central banks to wind back ultra-easy monetary policies -- including record-low interest rates -- that have been a key driver of the surge in stocks markets.

All eyes will be on US Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell when he speaks later Thursday, for his latest take on a rise in US Treasury bond yields, a crucial guide of future rate expectations, to one-year highs in recent weeks. —AFP ■

Venezuela opposition accuses government of illegal gold sales

Venezuela's opposition on Wednesday accused the government of President Nicolas Maduro of illegally selling the country's international gold reserves to access liquidity and elude international sanctions.

Julio Borges, who represents opposition leader Juan Guaido, travelled to Washington to share the results of an investigation into the sale of 300 tonnes of gold since 2014 that allegedly involves Russia, Mali and the United Arab Emirates.

Borges said the UAE was the "nerve centre of this great theft of Venezuela's riches".

He added that Maduro had been able to access "a bit more than one billion euros" in 2020 through the sales.

"Huge amounts of cash have left UAE for Venezuela to be exchanged for Venezuelan gold," said Borges, who presented his findings to the US Treasury and Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. —AFP ■

Texas power grid operator fires CEO after storm chaos

TEXAS' power grid operator has fired its president and CEO following last month's winter storm that left millions without electricity, media reports said.

Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) has under come fire from customers and politicians over its apparent failure to prepare for the cold weather and the enormous bills some customers have faced due to a massive spike in energy prices.

President and CEO Bill Magness was fired late Wednesday after the ERCOT board held an emergency meeting and gave him 60 days' termination notice, CNN and other media reports said, citing an ERCOT state-



Millions of Texans were left without power in mid-February as Arctic conditions overwhelmed local utility companies ill-prepared for such weather. PHOTO: AFP

ment.

Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, who has called on

the leaders of ERCOT and the Public Utility Commission of Texas to resign, welcomed the

news.

"2 days ago, I called on ERCOT and PUC leaders to resign.

Good news -- now they are both gone," Patrick tweeted.

"Next — one of my top 31 priorities — reforming ERCOT and fixing what went wrong."

Several board members of ERCOT have already resigned after millions of Texans were left without power in mid-February as freezing conditions overwhelmed local utility companies ill-prepared for such weather.

PUC chairwoman DeAnn Walker resigned on Monday.

Texas governor Greg Abbott has ordered an investigation into the grid operator, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has also said it will probe the factors behind the power outages. —AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Airbus says won't lay off staff in Germany, France or UK

AIRBUS said Thursday that it would be able to avoid forced redundancies in Germany, France and Britain as the European aircraft maker reels from the fallout of Covid-19 on air travel.

The staff situation in Spain, another production site for the aircraft maker, is still uncertain because talks with unions had begun later than elsewhere, it said.

"At this moment, and thanks to the effectiveness of all social measures deployed so far, Airbus does not see the need to implement forced redundancies in France, Germany and the UK," it said, adding however that this depended on the "successful deployment of ongoing internal mobility measures."

At the end of June, the company had said it was planning to cut around 15,000 jobs worldwide, or 11 percent of its total workforce.

The company said the cuts were in response to the pandemic, which had triggered the "gravest crisis" the industry had ever seen.

It added at the time that government aid could help reduce the number of layoffs. —AFP ■

Takeaway app Deliveroo picks London for share listing

TAKEAWAY meals app Deliveroo on Thursday said it had chosen London for its stock market listing, a major boost for the capital's financial sector which has been roiled by Brexit.

Deliveroo, in line with other home-delivery companies, has seen demand soar in the past year owing to lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic.

No date has been set for the initial public offering (IPO), while the group could be valued at more than \$7.0 billion (5.8 billion euros).

British finance minister Rishi Sunak welcomed Thursday's announcement, which comes after London's financial sector, known as the City, recently lost its European share trading crown to Amsterdam following Britain's exit from the European Union.

"The UK is one of the best places in the world to start, grow and list a business -- and we're determined to build on this reputation now we've left the EU," Sunak said in comments included in the Deliveroo statement.

"Deliveroo has created thousands of jobs and is a true British tech success story," he added.

Sunak said the government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson was meanwhile "looking at reforms to encourage even more high growth, dynamic businesses to list in the UK". —AFP ■

Two-year suspended prison sentence along with €250,000 fine for Flavio Becca

SPORTS investor and construction developer Flavio Becca has been accused of money laundering and misuse of company funds.

2 years suspended prison sentence, as well as a fine of €250,000 and the confiscation of numerous watches. For watches that can not be seized, a fine of €20,000 will be imposed. That

was the judge's verdict in first instance on Thursday.

The trial involved over 800 luxury watches with a total value of about €18 million, which were secured during 13 searches in 2011. The bulk of it had been purchased through various companies. In doing so, they had nothing to do with the objective of the construction companies, but

were in part intended as investments, said Flavio Becca during the trial in late January.

The prosecution had asked for 3.5 years in prison, with possible suspension, a €250,000 fine and the confiscation of 324 luxury watches. Flavio Becca himself was not present in court. Becca and his Defense have 40 days to appeal. —AFP ■

Lufthansa posts record annual loss, sees long recovery



Europe's biggest airline said it expects to book an operating loss again. PHOTO: AFP

GERMAN flag carrier Lufthansa said Thursday it lost a record 6.7 billion euros in 2020, as the coronavirus pandemic wiped out demand for travel and left flights grounded.

Europe's biggest airline said it expects to book an operating loss again in 2021, though a smaller one than last year, as capacity will reach only 40-50 per cent of pre-pandemic levels for the full year.

Underlining the long road

to recovery, it added that capacity will climb to 90 per cent of 2019's level in "the middle of the decade".

After borders slammed shut as governments scrambled to halt contagion in the first wave of the Covid-19 crisis, the airline faced an uncertain future.

In June, it was offered a lifeline by the German government, which pumped in nine billion euros of liquidity for a 25 per cent stake.

"The past year was the most challenging in the history of our company - for our customers, our employees and our shareholders," said Lufthansa chief executive Carsten Spohr.

In the airline's home base, demand is sluggish with work from home orders curtailing business travel.

Across Europe, restrictions are also in place as governments continue to battle rising infection numbers. —AFP ■

Pope says he will visit Iraq as 'pilgrim of peace'

ON the eve of his historic trip to Iraq, Pope Francis paid tribute Thursday to those who have suffered from years of violence, saying he came as a "pilgrim of peace".

In a video message, the 84-year-old offered his hand to "brothers and sisters of other religions", but also highlighted the heavy toll paid by Iraq's Christian communities, saying there had been "too many martyrs". "I long to meet you, to see your faces, to visit your land, ancient and extraordinary cradle of civilisation," the pope said.

"I come as a pilgrim, a penitent pilgrim to implore forgiveness and reconciliation from the Lord after years of war and



The pope's trip to Iraq is his first foreign jaunt since the pandemic swept Europe last year. PHOTO: AFP

terrorism."

"I come as a pilgrim of peace in search of fraternity, animated by the desire to pray

together and to walk together, also with the brothers and sisters of other religions," he added. The pope, making his first

foreign trip since the coronavirus pandemic swept Europe a year ago, will arrive in Iraq on Friday before embarking on

a packed schedule of events through to Sunday.

From central Baghdad to the Shiite shrine city of Najaf, welcome banners featuring his image and Arabic title "Baba al-Vatican" already dot the streets.

From Ur, the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham in the southern desert, to ravaged Christian towns in the north, roads are being paved and churches rehabilitated.

Among the most extraordinary moments of the trip will be his one-on-one meeting with Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the highly reclusive cleric, who is a top religious authority for many of the world's Shiite Muslims. —AFP ■

Greece assesses damage from 6.3 magnitude quake

ENGINEERS in central Greece on Thursday were assessing the damage from a strong 6.3 magnitude quake that injured at least 11 people, damaged hundreds of buildings and spread panic.

The recovery work began as scores of people from the villages of Damasi and Mesochori, some 240 kilometres (149 miles) north of Athens, spent the night away from their homes after Wednesday's quake, many

sleeping in their cars.

Civil protection officials said tents had been set up at Damasi's outdoor stadium for temporary accommodation, in addition to five hotels in the nearby town of Trikala and the main city of Larissa. Repeated aftershocks have struck the area, including a strong 5.2 magnitude tremor on Wednesday evening. Crews inspected schools, hospitals and other vital public buildings in the area, in addition to homes,

state news agency ANA said, adding that schools were closed on Thursday.

State TV ERT said more than 300 homes had suffered various degrees of damage. Locals said stone buildings over 60 years old had been the hardest hit.

The earthquake also appears to have affected the water supply around the Larissa area, with many households reporting cloudy water. —AFP ■

Dutch court drops farm kidnap charges against cult father



Gerrit Jan van D was arrested in October 2019 for allegedly keeping his children in a room on his farm for around 10 years. PHOTO: ANP

A Dutch court on Thursday dropped the case against a father who isolated his children in a remote farmhouse for a decade, saying that he was mentally unfit for trial. The 68-year old, identified only as Gerrit Jan van D., was arrested in October 2019 for allegedly keeping his

children in a room on his farm in the northeastern village of Ruinerwold.

But tests had found that a stroke in 2016 had left the former cult member partially paralysed, unable to speak and cognitively impaired, prosecutors said last month, urging judges

to drop the charges.

"The court is of the opinion that the defendant has such physical and cognitive limitations that he is unable to follow the criminal proceedings or to sufficiently understand the possible consequences of this process," the Assen District Court said. "All things considered...the public prosecutor's case should be declared inadmissible."

Five of the children were discovered on the remote farm after a sixth walked into a local bar in a confused state and raised the alarm.

The father faced kidnaping charges as well as claims of sexually abusing two of his three older children, who were not kept on the farm. But the judges said he was unable to discuss the case with his lawyers and put together a defence strategy. —AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

French court acquits ex-PM Balladur in corruption trial

A French court on Thursday acquitted former prime minister Edouard Balladur on corruption charges after he was accused of using kickbacks from an arms deal but handed a suspended jail term to his former defence minister.

The verdict by the Law Court of the Republic (CJR), which sits to try serving and former ministers for alleged violations committed in office, came just days after ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy was convicted for corruption. Balladur, 91, had been accused of funnelling illicit commissions from arms deals to his unsuccessful presidential campaign in 1995.

His former defence minister Francois Leotard, 78, was however convicted of complicity in the misuse of assets and handed a suspended two-year prison term and a fine of 100,000 euros (\$120,000).

Neither was present in court for the verdict.

Balladur and Leotard, both right-wingers, were charged in 2017 with "complicity in the misuse of corporate assets" over the sale of submarines to Pakistan and frigates to Saudi Arabia between 1993 and 1995.

The verdicts came hot on the heels of a corruption conviction for former president Sarkozy on Monday which stunned France and has led to a debate about the extent of political corruption. —AFP ■

Australia minister 'sorry' for calling alleged rape victim a 'lying cow'

AUSTRALIA'S scandal-hit government on Thursday apologised for calling an alleged rape victim a "lying cow," sparking fresh claims of a "toxic" culture in the country's corridors of power.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Defence Minister Linda Reynolds "deeply regretted" the slur against her former staffer Brittany Higgins, who last month came forward with claims of serious sexual assault.

"I spoke to Minister Reynolds this morning about this matter," Morrison said. "She knows those comments to have been inappropriate and wrong... they were made in her private office in a stressful week." —AFP ■

ONE Fists of Fury II: Amir to fight against Kang tonight

AMIR Aliakbari of Iran will take on Kang Ji Wong of South Korea in the main card or Heavyweight bout of the ONE Championship special event named "Fists of Fury II" at Singapore Indoor Stadium tonight.

The ONE event will feature bouts of world-class fighters, and fights will start at 8:30 pm of Singapore standard time, according to the statement with the ONE Championship.

There will be a total of six men's fights, including the main fight.

In the co-main bout or another Heavyweight fight, Alex-



PHOTO: ONE CHAMPIONSHIP

andre Mechado of Brazil will fight against Anatoly Malykhin of Russia.

In the Featherweight bout,

Ryogo Takahashi of Japan will fight with Tang Kai of China.

In the other Featherweight bout, Yoshiaki Nakahara of Japan

will face Ruslan Emilbek Uulu of Kyrgyzstan.

In the Flyweight fight, Roshan Mainam of India will take on

Aziz Calim of Indonesia.

In the last fight or Bantamweight bout, Mark Fairtex Abelardo of New Zealand will fight with Emilio Urrutia of the United States.

The ONE Championship Fights will be broadcast live free on ONE Super Application and ONE

Championship YouTube Channel, according to the statement with the ONE Championship.

The first two fights will also be streamed live on ONE Championship Facebook page, ONE Championship stated.—GNLM

Man. United to join Liverpool in not releasing internationals



Manchester United Manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. PHOTO: AFP

LONDON — Manchester United Manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said it "doesn't make sense" for his players to travel for international duty later this month if they have to quarantine on their return and miss games as a result.

Arrivals in Britain from "Red List" countries are subject to 10 days' hotel confinement.

South American countries and Portugal are among the nations on that list meaning United stars Bruno Fernandes of Portugal and Uruguayan striker Edinson Cavani could be missing for World Cup qualifiers. Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said his club will

also withdraw players if they are forced to quarantine, casting the participation of Brazilian trio Alisson Becker, Roberto Firmino and Fabinho and Portugal forward Diogo Jota into doubt.

In normal circumstances, clubs must release players for international duty on specific dates. However, FIFA has given clubs dispensation to prevent players who may be affected by the regulations from joining up with their countries for the matches. "It doesn't make sense to travel, when we are paying them, if they come back and are away for 10 days" said Solskjaer. "That's a chat we'll have with the players."—AFP ■

Overseas fans likely to be barred from Tokyo Games: local media

TOKYO — Overseas spectators are likely to be shut out from the Tokyo Olympics, Japanese media reported Thursday, after organizers said that public safety would be the "top priority" at the coronavirus-delayed Games.

The Japanese government, Tokyo metropolitan government and Tokyo 2020 organizing committee are leaning towards holding the massive event in front of a domestic audience only, the Yomiuri Shimbun and other outlets said. Officials fear that

an influx of visitors from abroad will endanger the Japanese public. "As the spread of coronavirus continues in every country, they have decided that allowing visitors from overseas on a large scale will only make people anxious," the Yomiuri report said.

The three parties met with International Olympic and Paralympic Committee heads on Wednesday and agreed to take a decision on spectators by the end of the month, ideally before the nationwide torch relay begins on March 25. —AFP ■



Officials fear that an influx of overseas visitors for the Games will endanger the Japanese public. PHOTO: AFP

FC Barcelona loses EU bid to overturn state aid claim

BARCELONA — Barcelona football club on Thursday lost a bid before the EU's top court to overturn a claim it received unfair state aid through tax breaks.

The EU's Court of Justice dismissed an appeal lodged by FC

Barcelona over a February 2019 ruling that found its status as a non-profit organisation gave it an unfair lower tax rate than that applied to most other Spanish clubs. Under a Spanish law dating back three decades, only Barcelona,

Pamplona, Athletic Bilbao and Real Madrid were granted the non-profit status, and all other professional clubs had to register as limited sports companies subject to higher taxes.

Hit by a European Commis-

sion claim that it was, in effect, receiving state aid, FC Barcelona argued that there was no legal proof of an economic advantage.

But the EU court sided with the commission in finding that the conditions met the state aid

definition under European law. It ruled that the EU's lower court had erred in its handling of the matter, and stated that "the aid scheme at issue was... liable to favour clubs operating as non-profit entities". —AFP ■