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Announcement of Union Election Commission

12 March 2021

1. Regarding the Multiparty General Election held on 8 November 2020, the Union Election Commission has inspected the voter lists and the casting of votes of Pyigyidagun Township in Mandalay Region.
2. According to the inspection findings, the previous election commission released 204,403 eligible voters in Pyigyidagun Township of Mandalay Region. The list of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population in November 2020 showed 165,417 eligible voters who had turned 18. The voter lists mentioned that there were 16,945 citizens, associate citizens, nationalized citizens, and non-identity voters, 2,248 persons repeated on the voter lists more than three times and 24,056 persons repeated on the voter lists two times.

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Myanmar delegates delivered statements at the respective discussions on Myanmar during the 46th Session of the Human Rights Council

DURING the ongoing 46th session of the Human Rights Council at the United Nations Office in Geneva, Interactive Dialogue on the Special Rapporteur's report on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar and General Debate on the Secretary-General's Oral Update on the Involvement of the United Nations in Myanmar were held on 11 and 12 March 2021 respectively. Permanent Secretary U Chan Aye and Deputy Director-General U Kyaw Thu Nyein from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs participated in the discussions through pre-recorded videos. Officials concerned from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to Geneva also attended the said meeting virtually.

At the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned that Myanmar has consistently opposed country-specific mandates which run contrary to the principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity and non-politicization in addressing human rights issues of the concerned country. However, he



The 46th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in progress while Myanmar delegates delivered Statements on 11 and 12 March 2021. **PHOTO: MNA**

mentioned that the successive Governments have cooperated with the country-specific Special Rapporteurs and also accepted almost of all of their proposed country visits. Furthermore, he highlighted that despite fullest cooperation extended by Myanmar, the Special Rapporteur Ms Yanghee Lee failed to comply with the code of conduct and thus, the previous Government

decided not to cooperate with her.

The Permanent Secretary also explained the assumption of the State responsibility by the Tatmadaw on 1 February 2021 in accordance with the State Constitution (2008), the policies of the State Administration Council and five future programmes to be implemented during the period of State of Emergency. He further

stressed the State Administration Council's commitment to consolidate the genuine, disciplined multiparty democratic system that suits the prevailing situation of the country as aspired to by the people of Myanmar. Additionally, he reaffirmed that Myanmar will constructively cooperate and engage with the relevant UN mechanisms in line with the existing laws, its nation-

al priorities and needs. He underscored that understanding and constructive engagement from the international community will highly be appreciated and supportive to the Myanmar's effort to develop democratic transition process in an orderly manner.

During the General Debate on the Secretary-General's Oral Update on the Involvement of the United Nations in Myanmar, the Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asserted that cooperation with the United Nations is the cornerstone of Myanmar's foreign policy and thus will continue to extend cooperation with the relevant United Nations agencies including Resident Coordinator and the United Nations Country Team. He underlined the main role of United Nations Country Team as it has to take actions for effective integration and to assist the development of the host country in accordance with the objectives and priorities of the host country at its request. He underscored Myanmar's belief on building and strengthening of mutual trust between host country and the United Nations agencies through coordination and cooperation manners. —MNA

Announcement of Union Election Commission

12 March 2021

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3. Findings in inspection were as follows:

Findings on scrutinized voting list of Pyigyidagun Township

Sr	Township and numbers of polling stations	Township sub-commission	List from Immigration department	Those involved in voting list without citizenship scrutiny cards	Those involved in voter list more than three times holding one CSC	Those involved in voter list more than two times holding one CSC
1	71 polling stations in Pyigyidagun Township of Mandalay Region	204,403	165,417	16,945	2,248	24,056

4. The Union Election Commission has inspected the withdrawal/receipt/use/remaining of ballot papers used for Pyithu Hluttaw Election of Pyigyidagun Township in Mandalay Region, together with the respective township election sub-commission, head of police force, Immigration and Population and administrator according to the Hluttaw Election Law Section 53.

5. According to inspection on the ground, a total of 71 poll stations in Pyigyidagun Township in Mandalay Region took out 204,305 ballot papers. It used 130,798 ballot receipts. The remaining ballots were 64,991 instead of the exact remaining 73,507.

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

Sr	Subject	Withdrawal	Used	Exact Remaining	Remaining on the ground	Difference	
						Missing	Extra
1	Ward/Village-tract ballot	203,350	130,193	73,157	64,641	9,242	726
2	Township advance ballot	605	605	-	-	-	-
3	Township remaining ballot	350	-	350	350	-	-
Total		204,305	130,798	73,507	64,991	9,242	726

6. The missing ballots than the exact remaining ballots are 9,242 at 13 ward polling stations and it also found other polling stations at 4 wards used more 726 ballots than the issued numbers. The findings were as follows:

Sr	Ward	Issued	Findings			Difference	
			Used	Remaining	Total	Missing	Extra
1	Kha Khway Ward	6,400	5,912	-	5,912	488	-
2	Ga Nge Ward	6,850	6,405	-	6,405	445	-
3	Nga ward	3,750	3,350	-	3,350	400	-
4	Sa Lone Ward	18,900	18,645	-	18,645	255	-
5	Sa Lane Ward	21,450	20,000	-	20,000	1,450	-
6	Za Kwal Ward	9,900	9,861	-	9,861	39	-
7	Za Myin Zwal Ward	12,150	11,926	-	11,926	224	-
8	Nya Ward	9,550	8,650	-	8,650	900	-
9	Ta Talin Jate Ward	19,750	18,406	-	18,406	1,344	-
10	Chan Mya Thayar Ward	6,100	5,400	-	5,400	700	-
11	Ngwe Taw Kyi Gone Ward	18,700	16,310	-	16,310	2,390	-
12	Tagun Tine Ward	15,100	14,700	-	14,700	400	-
13	Htane Gone Ward	5,750	5,543	-	5,543	207	-
14	Ka Gyi Ward	4,250	4,252	-	4,252	-	2
15	Ga Gyi Ward	9,550	9,788	-	9,788	-	238
16	Taung Myint Ward	4,150	4,196	-	4,196	-	46
17	Thin Pan Gone Ward	28,050	28,490	-	28,490	-	440
Total		200,350	191,834	-	191,834	9,242	726

Union Election Commission

Returnees from Malaysia, India receive medical treatments in Yangon

MYANMAR returnees from Malaysia and India are now receiving medical treatments at relevant quarantine centres in Yangon, according to the Tatmadaw officials.

A total of 1,086 returnees from Malaysia are now staying at a quarantine centre in Hline Township, Yangon and another 70 returnees from Adman Island, India are staying at a quarantine centre in South Okkalapa Township, Yangon respectively.

Physicians and medical teams are now taking care of the returnees' health and officials will bring the returnees back home after their quarantine period. —MNA

Returnees are seen receiving treatments at COVID quarantine centre in Yangon. PHOTO: MNA



Such acts intend to harm the morality of people, so legal actions are necessary

ACTION is being taken against the civil servants participating in the CDM. Some have taken their salaries without going to work, citing various reasons. Respective ministries will take action after systematic inspections. There are illegal contents and photos depicting those wearing indecent clothes contrary to Myanmar culture circulating, especially on social media. Such acts intend to harm the morality of people, so legal actions are necessary.

(Excerpt from the speech to the 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 2 March 2021)

Union Minister U Aung Naing Oo highlights the role of Investment Facilitation

U Aung Naing Oo, Union Minister for Investment and Foreign Economic Relations met with officials from One-Stop Service (OSS) established under the Myanmar Investment Law in the afternoon of 12 March at the Yangon Region Branch Office of the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA).

Firstly, Union Minister for Investment and Foreign Economic Relations, U Aung Naing Oo delivered an opening speech. In his speech, Union Minister highlighted that in order to make it easier for doing business; the procedures of relevant ministries are being streamlined and simplified.



Union Minister U Aung Naing Oo holds talks with One-Stop Service officials on 12 March 2021. PHOTO: MNA

He said that promoting online services will continue while reducing barriers for investment.

He also urged the officials to give better services to continue aftercare service activities,

strengthening transparency, focusing investment promotion based on investment facilitation,

and enhancing the role of One Stop Service (OSS).

After that, the director for the Yangon Region Office of the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, U Myo Khaing Oo made a presentation on the activities of the office followed by the discussion of the officials from One Stop Service (OSS). Then, the Union Minister briefed on the presentations of the officials.

After that, the Union Minister inspected the operational status of One Stop Service (OSS). The meeting was attended by the Deputy Directors-General, Directors of the DICA and the departmental officials from the One Stop Service (OSS). —MNA

Announcement of COVID Vaccination Fund Management Sub-Committee

FROM 5-3-2021 to 11-3-2021, local/foreign donors contributed 92.201 million Kyats to the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund Myanmar currency account OA 013733 opened at the Myanma Economic Bank (Nay Pyi Taw). The status of the fund account as of 11-3-2021 is as follows:

COVID-19 Vaccination Fund OA-013733 List

	Kyat
Account opening balance on 5-3-2021	30,118,824,115.39
Received amount of money from (5-3-2021 to 11-3-2021)	92,201,000.00
Closed balance on 11-3-2021	30,211,025,115.39

COVID-19 Vaccination Fund EDC 600012 List

	USD
Account opening balance on 5-3-2021	178,140,149.53
Received amount of money from (5-3-2021 to 11-3-2021)	—
Closed balance on 11-3-2021	178,140,149.53

Police fire to disperse crowds in Mingaladon

WHEN the officials went to Mingaladon Township of Yangon Region to arrest a suspect yesterday morning, the big crowd attempted to attack and so the security forces fired into crowds.

The suspect was in Mya Thida Ward of Pynmabin Village Tract of Mingaladon Township and the security forces went there to arrest the suspect after the tip-off. Meanwhile, about 150 people holding knives and

sticks blocked the way with iron bars and attacked the security forces with stones and catapults.

When the security forces removed the blocked materials, the people holding knives and sticks attempted to attack them again.

So, the security forces fired into the crowds and Zaw Min Tun, aged 42, who lives in that ward, died after being shot in abdomen. —MNA

Myanmar delegation attends 15th AMRI, its related meetings

A Myanmar delegation led by Union Minister for Information U Chitt Naing attended the 15th ASEAN Ministers' Responsible for Information and its related Meetings (15th AMRI) hosted by Thailand via video conferencing system yesterday.

The virtual conference was also participated by ministers responsible for information from ASEAN countries, high ranking officials and officials of the Secretariat of ASEAN.

The theme of the 15th AMRI, 18th High-Ranking Officials responsible for information from ASEAN countries, and related meetings is "ASEAN: A Digital Community with Accessibility for All".

At the meeting, ministers responsible for information from ASEAN countries exchanged views on the information sector based on the theme.

The 15th AMRI endorsed the Framework for Developing Digital Readiness among ASEAN Citizens, the Framework for Promoting Accessibility for All in ASEAN Digital Broadcasting, and the Joint Media Statement for the 15th AMRI and Related Meetings.

The AMRI meeting is held every two years since 1989, and Myanmar hosted the 12th AMRI in Nay Pyi Taw in 2014 and 13th SOMRI in Ngwe-saung, Ayeyawady Region.

The meetings are aimed



Mol Union Minister-led delegation joins the 15th AMRI and its related meetings via video conferencing yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

at strengthening mutual understanding and trust.

The AMRI meetings focus

on projects related to the information sector in ASEAN countries, review current projects,

plan future tasks, review the high-ranking officials' reports by the ASEAN ministers responsible for information and giving suggestions and approvals by the ministers.

Senior Officials' Meeting-SOMRI and SOMRI+3 meeting are held for two days and ASEAN Minister Responsible for Information-AMRI and AMRI+3 are held for one day after the senior officials' meeting.

Because of the COVID-19 outbreak, the 15th AMRI became the first-ever virtual conference of AMRI.

The 16th AMRI will be hosted by Viet Nam in 2023.—MNA

MoALI discusses river water pumping projects to enhance productivity

THE Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation held a coordination meeting over river water pumping to enhance the productivity per acre of a farmer yesterday.

During the meeting, Union Minister U Tin Htut Oo discussed the possible ways on ensuring water access for the agriculture sector due to climate changes, the development of river water pumping projects and solar water pumping system in proper areas.

The meeting also discussed the use of modern agricultural-related technology in river water pumping areas, effective use of water, technical supports, the formation of WUG (Water Users Group)



Union Minister seen at the meeting to discuss river water pumping projects to enhance productivity on 12 March 2021. **PHOTO: MNA**

and WUA (Water Users Association) and public awareness programmes.

Then, the Union Minister highlighted the transitioning into the industrialized agricul-

ture and manufacturing sector via better access to water which is vital for crop produc-

tion rate, and effective ways for river water pumping, use of dam water, underground water and water storage not only for agriculture sector but also for drinking water of cattle.

He also stressed the need to apply the systemic crop patterns to achieve market crops that conform to the weather in river water pumping areas while the country is making efforts in the agriculture and breeding sector with modern techniques to develop the farming sector.

He then added complete transitioning into industrialized agriculture, cooperation work with WUGs and WUAs, effective use of water, substitution of drought-tolerant crops and value added crops.—MNA

COVID-19 immunization conducted to monks, nuns and civil service personnel

TATMADAW has been working together with civilian doctors who did not participate in the CDM campaign to conduct COVID-19 immunization and they vaccinated COVID-19 vaccines to people over the age of 65 including monks, nuns and civil service personnel across the country yesterday.

The vaccination was conducted in Lashio, Laukkai, Kunlong, Kutkai, Namhsan, Mongyai, Mantung, Namhkam, Hsipaw, Nawngkhio, Kyaukme, Hopan, Mongmit and Mabein, Taunggyi, Hopong, Yaksawk, Pindaya, Kalaw, Pinlaung, Kengtung, Mongkai, Kunhing, Karli, Mongshu, Langkho, Maukmai and Namsang, Kengtawng, Tachilek,

Mongphyat, Mongyawng, Monghkat, Monghsat, Mongton, Mongyan, Mongpyin, Metmung townships in Shan State; Patheingyi Township in Ayeyawady Region; Sagaing and Shwebo townships in Sagaing Region; Chanmyaythazi township in Mandalay Region; Toungoo, Okpo, Letpadan, Minhla, Monyo, Gyobingauk, Zigon, Nattalin, Thayawady and Padaung townships in Bago Region.

Chairmen of the respective region administration councils and officials from the respective regional commands encouraged and donated offertories to the monks.—MNA



Tatmadaw and civilian doctors are vaccinating an over 65-year-old woman.

Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Nine Objectives

1. Political affairs

- (a) Building of a Union based on democracy and federalism in practising genuine disciplined multiparty democracy in a full fairness manner
- (B) Emphasizing of restoration of eternal peace for the entire nation in line with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA)
- (c) Continuous practising of the “principle” of peaceful co-existence among countries by holding up the independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy

2. Economic affairs

- (a) Further development of production based on agriculture and livestock breeding through modern techniques and all-round development of other

sectors of the economy as well

- (b) Stability of market economy and inviting international investments to develop the economy of entire ethnic people
- (c) Encouragement of local businesses to create employment opportunities to be able to produce many products of the State

3. Social affairs

- (a) For ensuring of dynamism of Union spirit which is genuine patriotic spirit
- (b) Following customs and traditions of all ethnic nationalities and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national characters
- (c) Enhancement of health, fitness and education standards of the entire nation

MoNREC Union Minister inspects gardens in Nay Pyi Taw

UNION MINISTER for Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation U Khin Maung Yi inspected Shwe Kya Pyo garden and gardens within the compound of the office of the Director-General for Forestry's Department yesterday morning in Zeyathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw Council Territory.

During the inspection tour to Shwe Kya Pyo garden, the Director-General and officials of the Department of Forestry explained the plan to distribute the 2 feet high and above large seedlings planted in big bags in the garden this rainy season and the plantation of seedlings to be strong enough to be planted in the next year rainy season.



Union Minister U Khin Maung Yi and party make an inspection tour around gardens in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

A total of 91 species of tree including 2 feet high and above of shade trees, windbreaker flowering and fruit trees and

6,900 trees have been planted in Shwe Kya Pyo garden and it was explained that 50,000 seedlings of 23 species of tree

are being planted in 2021.

Officials in charge of the garden at the Director-General's Office explained that a

total of 11,000 trees of 34 new seedlings which are 2 feet high and above have been planted to distribute this rainy season and a total of 150,000 trees of 47 seedlings have been planted in 2021 to distribute in the coming rainy seasons.

The Union Minister instructed to plant only seedlings with a height of 2 feet and above that are suitable for the area in 2021 (rainy season) according to the Environmental Greening Action Plan; to maintain seedlings planted this year to a height of 2 feet and above and to distribute and plant the fast-growing trees among the current cultivated species when they become 2 feet high in June and July.—MNA

MoC discusses implementation of 10,000-unit public housing project

THE Ministry of Construction held the coordination meeting of the Steering Committee for the “10,000-unit Public Housing Project” to provide employment opportunities and livelihoods to low-income people through the construction sector under the COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan yesterday morning in Nay Pyi Taw in accordance with the COVID-19 prevention guidelines.

The 10,000-unit Public Housing Project was first proposed by the Ministry of Construction in July 2020 and it was approved to implement in August 2020. The project is currently being implemented in Yangon, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw with the first capital investment by private business associations and the government is planning to implement it with a system of repayment from an annual fund.

The State Administration Council has reformed the Com-

mittee on 25 February and approved the project implementation to be completed in a short period of time with the quality standards by funding and coordinating the business requirements.

The meeting aimed to explain the status of the project to the new committee members and discuss the implementation for 4,992 rooms which were left to complete as Phase (2) with responsible persons from the private business association. Phase (1) of the project is the construction of 5,008 rooms.

Union Minister for Construction U Shwe Lay said additional funding for the project is planned for the 2021-2022 fiscal year and it is necessary for Nay Pyi Taw Council, the Yangon Region Administration Council and the Mandalay Region Administration Council to provide funding requirements



Union Minister U Shwe Lay chairs the MoC coordination meeting on public housing project yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

for infrastructure (water/electricity/roads) and support the business needs.

He called for an open discussion on project needs, aiming to create jobs and cash flow through the construction sector, which is the original goal of the project.

Officials from the private business associations discussed

the implementation of construction projects, business and financial matters respectively. Deputy Minister for Planning, Finance and Industry suggested systematic adherence to public financial management regulations (2017) in carrying out project activities.

The project to build 10,000 units for public rental housing project has been implemented in

Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Mandalay and there will be a total of 704 units and 44 buildings Dekkhinathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw; 6,288 units and 393 buildings in Dagon Myothit (South and 3008 units and 188 buildings in Patheingyi Township in Mandalay Region. The first phase of 5008 units is expected to be completed by September 2021. —MNA

One-month performance of the State Administration Council



Chairman of the State Administration Council Senior General Min Aung Hlaing presides over the Council meeting.

THE rhythmic sound of Myanmar's traditional drums playing the Shwe Oh Si song spreads in the air when the three vessels gradually arrive at the jetty. The people on the deck of the ships are filled with excitement for arriving at their motherland. Those on the jetty including drum players are also ready to welcome the returnees and military officials with Aung Thabyay (Eugenia).

It was just a wonderful scene of the return of more than 1,000 Myanmar citizens from Malaysia by Tatmadaw naval vessels -- Mottama, Thanlwin and Sin Phyu Shin on 27 February noon.

State administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing once said the Myanmar nationals stranded abroad should return to the country during the COVID-19 pandemic and arrangements will be also made to repatriate those stranded in foreign countries. Therefore, such repatriation was carried out under the instructions of the SAC Chairman is a sign of success. The military vessels brought back a total of 1,086 Myanmar nationals from Malaysia to Myanmar. The naval officials also provided security, accommodations and healthcare services for the returnees on the way home and so such doings are the hopes for the other Myanmar people living in foreign countries.

Now, the State Administration Council reaches its first month. The council successfully repatriated the Myanmar nationals stranded in foreign countries despite the various difficulties and made efforts to meet the needs in political, social and eco-

nomical requirements and to ease the difficulties of people during this one month. Here is the one-month performance of the State Administration Council:-

Acting President U Myint Swe released an order dated 1 February. It stated,

1. On 8 November 2020, the general election of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar was held under the authority of the Union Election Commission (hereinafter referred to as 'UEC'). The 'UEC' had not only failed to properly perform its duties but also neglected to ensure a free, fair and transparent election as there were enormous discrepancies of electoral votes.
2. The sovereignty of the power of a nation MUST be derived from the citizens, but the fail-

ure of the free and fair electoral process due to terrible voting errors can contradict the national sovereignty of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the power of the people.

3. Refusal to address the concerns raised by several political parties, ethnic groups, and the Tatmadaw, and subsequently calling for Pyi Thu Hluttaw (Lower House) and Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House), as well as Pyidaungsu Hluttaw as scheduled, are violations of Article 417 of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. According to Article 417 of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, "the wrongful forcible means" of taking power

shall cause the loss of the sovereignty of Myanmar and the unity of the ethnic nationalities in Myanmar. Many people, who were dissatisfied with the performances of the 'UEC', organized protests against the performance of the 'UEC'.

4. As the government and 'UEC' both failed to address those problems, it is the Tatmadaw's undeniable duty to exercise Article 417 of the 'Supreme Law of the Myanmar' -- the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to declare 'State of Emergency' under the Constitution of the Republic of the Union.
5. In order to address the concerned voting lists, the government of Myanmar had to

exercise Article 418 (a) of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, which mandates the transferring of 'Legislative, Executive and Judicial Powers' to the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services.

6. In conjunction with Article 417 of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, this emergency declaration shall remain enforced in the entire nation for one year effective from today 1 February 2021.

The Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services released Notification No (1/2021) on the same day. The five points of that statement are the Road Map of the State Administration Council. The statement includes:

1. The Union Election Commis-



Returnees from Malaysia onboard Naval Vessel.

sion failed to address a large difference over the voting list used in the multiparty general election held on 8 November 2020. Although the request was made to call for the special session of the Second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, it again failed to do so. The President also refused the submission two times to hold the National Defence and Security Council meeting.

2. The Union Election Commission will be re-constituted to continuously take appropriate measures, including checking the voting lists in accord with the law.
3. Prevention of the current outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic will be effectively carried out with added momentum.
4. Efforts will be made to recover the businesses hit by the COVID-19 pandemic as quickly as possible.
5. Emphasis will be placed as much as possible on restoring eternal peace all over the country in accord with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).
6. When these tasks have been completed in accord with the provisions of the State of Emergency, a free and fair multiparty general election will be held, and then, the assigned duty of the State will be handed over to the winning party meeting norms and standards of democracy.

The Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services also said that the Tatmadaw will carry out all duties of the State handed over by the Acting President on 1 February by abiding by provisions of the Constitution (2008). In discharging the State responsibilities, the Tatmadaw will follow the provisions of the Constitution (2008) and existing laws that are not beyond the Constitution.

On 2 February, the State Administration Council including military personnel and civilians who want to serve for the interest of the country and people was organized. Then, the Union Ministers, Deputy Ministers and other well-experienced persons were selected and assigned duty in governance and management sectors of the government. The Council also organized region/state, district and township administration councils including for self-administered division or zones and appointed departmental heads.

Moreover, the Peace Talks Committee of the Tatmadaw was also formed with seven

members to enhance effective measures for a ceasefire and eternal peace.

The State Administration Council laid down nine objectives for the country and ethnic nationals. It includes three objects each for political, economic and social affairs.

1. Political affairs

(A) Building of a Union based on democracy and federalism in practising genuine disciplined multiparty democracy in a full fairness manner;

(B) Emphasizing of restoration of eternal peace for the entire nation in line with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA);

(C) Continuous practising of the 'principle' of peaceful co-existence among countries by holding up the independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy.

2. Economic affairs

(A) Further development of products based on agriculture and livestock breeding through modern techniques and all-round development of other sectors of the economy as well;

(B) Stability of market economy and inviting international investments to develop the economy of entire ethnic people;

(C) Encouragement of local businesses to create employment opportunities to be able to produce many products of the State.

3. Social affairs

(A) For ensuring of dynamism of Union spirit which is the genuine patriotic spirit;

(B) Following customs and traditions of all ethnic nationalities and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and



Returnees from Malaysia onboard Naval Vessel "Mottama".

national characters;

(C) Enhancement of health, fitness and education standards of the entire nation.

Performance in political objectives

The State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing made a speech to the public regarding the State on 8 February.

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

Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure was imposed in regions and states including Nay Pyi Taw Council Area on 8 February to ensure the stability of the State, the rule of law and peace for people.

Moreover, the State Ad-

ministration Council Chairman sent a message to mark Union Day fell on 12 February saying to work with the ethnic nationals in unity for the protection of non-disintegration of the Union including efforts to ease the socio-economic status of ethnic nationals during the COVID-19 pandemic and quick socio-economic recovery plans in the post-COVID-19 pandemic.

On 12 February, State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing made a speech to the public. In his speech, he stressed the measures for the government servants to be able to serve their duties peacefully.

On Union Day, the State Administration Council released a total of 23,314 prisoners including 55 foreign prisoners as the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is establishing a new democratic State with peace, development and disciplines, to turn the prisoners into certain decent citizens, to please the public and to create the humanitarian and compassionate grounds.



Health workers are administering the Covishield vaccine to the over 65-year-old woman in Yangon Region on 6 February 2021. PHOTO: MIN THIT (MNA)

Foreign relations

Vice-Chairman of the State Administration Council, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Soe Win explained the current situation in Myanmar, further plans and foreign policies to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Myanmar, as well as Union Minister for Foreign Affairs U Wunna Maung Lwin and Union Minister for International Cooperation U Ko Ko Hlaing, clarified those to Ambassadors from foreign embassies, diplomats and heads of UN agencies based in Myanmar through video conferencing on 5 February.

On 18 February, the Vice-Chairman of the State Administration Council also discussed with the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Armed Forces of Brunei Darussalam the training-related cooperation between two armies in the post-COVID-19 period.

On 12 February, at a special meeting of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, Myanmar's Permanent Representative U Myint Thu clarified the current situation in Myanmar. At the meeting, Myanmar did not agree with the draft resolution on the current situation in Myanmar presented by Britain and the European Union.

At the first meeting of the Foreign Policy Committee held on 18 February, Chairman of the State Administration Council Senior General Min Aung Hlaing discussed foreign policies, conditions for building good relations with neighbouring countries, plans for Myanmar citizens abroad, ways to boost international relations and cooperation, and international economic cooperation.

TO BE CONTINUED

Irrigation with climate-smart technologies key to cop with climate change

With acute climate change year after year, our agriculture sector is falling victim to climate change.

Steadily rising temperatures, prolonged droughts and erratic rainfall are threatening crop yields and livelihoods. Environmental experts have warned that the trend is likely to worsen as climate change proceeds.

The situation has alerted us including authorities concerned, farmers and investors to seek "climate-smart" technologies, irrigation with the solar-powered river-water pumping system to ensure

that the climate-change induced severe weather events do not impact the agriculture sector.

Besides, the situation has rung alarm bells and brought into focus the need to fundamentally rethink our current agricultural pattern, water usage, and food systems.

Agronomists say that irrigation boosts yields to between twice and four times the levels of rain-fed agriculture. Our country owns a plenty of water resources, rivers and lakes. But the water is not always available in right place or at the right time.

Hence, we must encourage investment in irrigation systems "climate-smart technologies" as it could be an important part of the solution not only to a shortfall in productivity in the sector but also for drinking water shortage of cattle of the livestock breeding sector.

Meanwhile, we need to promote crop diversification, commercial horticulture and

reducing post-harvest losses to help smallholder farmers who are facing a climate crisis.

We must encourage more efficient use of irrigation water with the use of drip-watering systems and solar-powered water pumps for farmers. Only then, can our farmers reduce their centuries-old dependence on rain.

Due to the impact of climate change, farmers have recorded lower output from rain-fed paddy fields. Hence, farmers have now pinned their hopes on summer crops, especially summer paddy, grown using irrigation water.

Farmers are confident that cultivation using irrigation water, which is considered a nutrient for paddy plants, will ensure a high yield.

Facing a climate crisis, authorities, environmental groups and industry need to work together to improve our country's irrigation system with "climate-smart" technologies.



UN health agency backs AstraZeneca COVID vaccine amid blood clot concerns

The UN World Health Organization (WHO) said on Friday that it was aware of blood clot concerns linked to "a specific batch" of AstraZeneca/Oxford COVID-19 vaccine, but maintained that to date, no-one has died from any coronavirus vaccine.

The development comes after several European countries suspended the rollout of the jab as a precaution.

"As of 9 March, there have been over 268 million doses of vaccine delivered since the start of the pandemic, and based on data reported - that's data reported to WHO by national governments - no causes of death have been found or been caused by COVID-19 vaccines to date", said spokesperson Dr Margaret Harris.

Speaking via videoconference in Geneva, Dr Harris noted that the WHO's independent expert global advisory board, SAGE, was currently assessing reports on the AstraZeneca vaccine and that those findings would be made public as soon as they were available.

Causal link not shown

Blood clotting episodes are common in people "so it's not clear if this was something that was going to happen", or whether the vaccine was responsible, the WHO spokesperson explained.

"A causal relationship...has not been shown", she said, while also underscoring that the European Union medical agencies' risk assessment committee, Pharmacovigilance, had also decided that the vaccine's benefits "continue to outweigh the risks". "The panel had taken the position that the jab should continue to be administered, while an investigation of cases of these thrombo-embolic events is ongoing", Dr Harris continued.

Countries that have reportedly paused their inoculation campaigns include Austria,

Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Iceland and Thailand. Hundreds of vaccine candidates

According to the WHO COVID-19 vaccine tracker, there are 81 vaccines in clinical development and more than 180 in the pre-clinical development phase.

To date, WHO has approved two vaccines for emergency use against COVID-19: the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine - approved on 31 December 2020 - and two versions of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine, on 15 February 2021.

The Chinese Sinovac jab is currently in the last stage of clinical evaluation and may be approved for use by the end of the month, Dr Harris said

"Certainly, we are looking at the Chinese vaccine and there is the Johnson & Johnson vaccine



Cambodia takes delivery of 324,000 doses of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine through the COVAX Facility. PHOTO: UNICEF/ANTOINE RAAB

to consider, and we are looking at a number of others," she added.

Latest figures

As of Friday 12 March, there have been 118,058,503 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including

2,621,046 deaths, reported to the UN health agency.

The highest number of cases of confirmed infection continues to be in the Americas, with 52,386,995, followed by

Europe (40,438,291), South-East Asia (13,819,871), Eastern Mediterranean (6,793,641), Africa (2,924,244) and Western Pacific (1,694,716).

Source: UN News

COVID disrupts contraception services, leads to 1.4 million unintended pregnancies, says UNFPA

One year since COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic, the UN's reproductive health agency said on Thursday that an estimated 12 million women have experienced disruptions to their family planning services.



Some 12 million women globally are estimated to have experienced disruptions in family planning services due to the COVID-19 pandemic. PHOTO: UNFPA/OLLIVIER GIRARD

According to new estimates from the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and Avenir Health, this has led to around 1.4 million unintended pregnancies.

These latest figures come as many countries, particularly

high-income nations, show early signs of steeply declining birth rates.

Together, the findings demonstrate how the pandemic has severely impacted women's control over their own reproductive health, and undermined family

planning.

Contraceptives out of stock

Analyzing contraceptive service disruptions last year in 115 lower and middle income countries, data from UNFPA, Google Mobility and other surveys, found that access to fam-

ily planning was hit by travel restrictions, interrupted supply chains and overwhelmed health facilities, among other factors.

"The results, for many women, have been life-changing", according to the UN sexual and reproductive health agency.

UNFPA profiled a 32-year-old Nepalese woman who married at 17, became a mother of four by age 24, and became pregnant after the nearby health centre ran out of contraceptives. Her fifth baby was born on 25 February.

Unintended pregnancies put a great strain on families that are already struggling under pandemic-related financial burdens, the UN agency explained. And its consequences are not simply economic, they are also linked to increased maternal morbidity, mortality and unsafe abortions.

UNFPA's projections showed that family planning

services were largely disrupted in April and May of last year for an average of 3.6 months. Earlier estimates, produced in April 2020, illustrated that serious family planning disruptions lasting six months could affect 47 million women in low and middle income countries, and result in seven million unintended pregnancies.

Acting swiftly

Fortunately, quick action has helped many health systems to maintain or restore essential health services, including contraceptives, said UNFPA.

The agency pointed out that even amid rising costs and supply chain constraints, it was able to procure and deliver contraceptives and other reproductive health supplies, as well as personal protective equipment for health workers.

Creative efforts, such as using a ride-hailing app to de-

liver contraceptives, SMS outreach and targeting family planning counselling to quarantine centres, also helped maintain or restore services.

UNFPA said that many women continue to face serious obstacles to receiving family planning and other life-saving reproductive health services.

A growing price

Although the total costs of the pandemic are not yet known, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 2.5 million people around the world have died from COVID-19.

When the full toll is calculated, UNFPA upheld that it will have to include the "extraordinary consequences" borne by women and girls, including those whose futures were rewritten, bodies injured or lives lost due to disruptions in access to contraception and health care.

Source: UN News

Appointment of Permanent Secretary

THE State Administration Council has appointed Dr Soe Win, Director-General of the Union Minister's Office of the Ministry of Education, as Permanent Secretary of the same ministry.

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 Friday 12 March 2021)

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL AFTERNOON OF THE 13 March 2021: Rain or thundershowers are likely to be scattered in Taninthayi Region and isolated in Kachin, Kayin, Mon States. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Upper Sagaing, Bago Regions and Shan, Chin, Rakhine, Kayah 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 rain or thundershowers in Upper Sagaing, Taninthayi Regions and Kachin State.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 13 March 2021: Generally fair weather

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 13 March 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 13 March 2021: Generally fair weather.

WEATHER OUTLOOK FOR WEEKEND: Weather will be generally fair in Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay and Yangon Regions.

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Gayal breeders dwindle in Chin State

THE number of gayal breeders has dropped significantly in Chin State, according to the gayal breeders in Tiddim Township.

The gayal from Chin hill ranges which can also be called the symbol of Chin State is highly valuable and used in social events and celebrations.

It belongs to the same species (Gavarus) of bisons and bantengs. They are not like cows but with hanging necks and hairs that have grown long enough to reach their ankles. Most of them are found grey black and white gayals are also found in bright colours.

“In Chin hills, the number of gayal breeders has declined year by year. So, we need some support such as necessary aid for the gayal breeders. The gayals graze and the pastures of the gayals are deteriorating from year to year. There is also



Most of the regions in Chin state are breeding gayals on a manageable scale. Then, they are selling a three-year-old gayal for K 300,000 and a six-year-old gayal for K 700,000 in the open season.

another reason for the declining number of breeders: some are changing their family businesses while some are moving out to other regions,” said U Chan Pi, a gayal breeder from Nae Arr

Lwe village in Tiddim township.

“Most of the regions in Chin state are breeding gayals on a manageable scale. Then, they are selling a three-year-old gayal for K 300,000 and a six-year-

old gayal for K 700,000 in the open season. With the declining number of gayal breeders, there could be only ten thousands of gayals in the Chin mountain ranges. Therefore, the relevant

authorities should provide the capital, protection against extinction and medical assistance for the breeders to increase the number of gayals,” said a gayal breeder from Chin State. “Live gayals are bought from Shan state. They are demanded also from Mizoram State, India. People from Kale, Monywa and Mandalay are also purchasing fresh and dried gayal meat. The gayal meat is used as the main dish in wedding, funerals and religious festivals in China mountain ranges,” said a local resident from Tiddim.

Although the wealth in Chin State is measured by the number of gayals, owning houses and land ownership earlier; now, they only focus on possession of gold and silver. This is another reason why the number of gayal breeders is decreasing.—Zohayzar

Pheegyan banana nursery plants sell well in Pwintbyu



Most of the banana plantations are found not only in Tamanyin village but also in the villages near Mone creek.

THE local growers are happy with earning income from growing Pheegyan banana in Pwintbyu Township, Magway Region. They are also having extra income from selling pheegyan banana nursery plants, according to the pheegyan growers from Tamanyin village in Pwintbyu Township.

People from Pwintbyu Township in the Magway region are growing pheegyan banana on a manageable scale in their village and the cultivation

is successful. The pheegyan market in Pwintbyu township this year has also performed significantly better than the last year.

“The pheegyans are grown eight cubits apart in the row and four banana trees per hole are grown. People are growing around 6,000 or 7,000 trees depending upon their land acres. Pheegyan banana is more popular in the market than any other fruits. As people prefer to eat pheegyan banana, the farmers

are earning more income. So, the number of pheegyan growers has increased this year. Additionally, they are selling the nursery banana plants for K300 per tree,” said a pheegyan grower in Tamanyin village. Most of the banana plantations are found not only in Tamanyin village but also in the villages near Mone creek. They are also growing pheegyan banana, Rakhine banana, Shwe Ni banana and Theemhwe banana. —Ye Win Naing (IPRD)/GNLM

Domestic gold market silent these days

THE domestic gold trading has calmed down these days, said U Myo Myint, chairperson of Yangon Region Gold Entrepreneurs Association (YRGEA).

He also explained that the gold trading market is cool because it is difficult to withdraw money because of the closure of the banks, to transfer the money from one place to another and also to go from one place to another because of the barricades laid on the roads. There is also no trading for lack of safety of the gold shops.

Consequently, the daily business of 50 visses (a viss equals 1.6kg) of gold was earlier sold in the market. Now, about five visses are being daily traded.

Besides the transport problems, the raw materials have become scarce because of fewer supplies from gold mining and the old gold scraps are refined into pure gold bars, according to YRGEA.

At present, the pure gold fetches about K1,337,000 per tical on 12 March in the domestic market while the global gold price hit US\$1718 per ounce, according to the local gold market data.

In January 2021, the do-

mestic gold fetched the highest price of K1,336,000 per tical on 6 January and reached the lowest price of K1,316,000 per tical on 28 January. In February, it reached the lowest level of K 1,340,000 (2 February) and the highest level of K 1,410,000 (3 February), the gold traders said.

The local gold price reached the lowest level of K 1,310,500 (2 September) and the highest level of K 1,314,000 (1 September). In October, the rate ranged between K 1,307,800 (30 October) and K 1,316,500 (21 October). The rate fluctuated between the highest of K 1,312,000 (16 November) and the lowest of K 1,278,000 (28 November). In December, the pure yellow metal priced moved in the range of Ks 1,275,000 (1 December) and K 1,333,000 (28 December).

With the global gold prices on the uptick, the domestic price hit fresh highs in 2019, reaching K 1,000,000 per tical between 17 January and 21 February, crossing K 1,100,000 (22 June to 5 August), climbing to K 1,200,000 (7 August-4 September), and then reaching a fresh peak of K 1,300,000 on 5 September, according to the gold traders. — NN/GNLM

Union Minister Dr Nyunt Pe inspects schools to be reopened in Nay Pyi Taw

UNION MINISTER for Education, Dr Nyunt Pe, Deputy Minister Dr Zaw Myint and U Zaw Win, Deputy Director-General for the Department of Basic Education, Education Officer for Nay Pyi Taw Council Territory visited No (18) Basis Education High School, No (9) Basic Education Post-Primary School (Yedi village) and No (19) Basic Education High School and inspected the preparations for reopening basic education schools in Dekkhinathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw.

During the inspection tour, the Union Minister said to the relevant education officers and teachers to prepare for the reopening of schools in accordance with the COVID-19 preventive rules and regulations, to provide a school library for the



MoE minister, deputy ministers and party make an inspection tour around the school yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

students, to assign teachers and provide relevant books at library for the development of school library. He added class-

rooms, laboratory equipment required for the school as well as staff housing for teachers and toilets will be provided ef-

fectively and promptly in accordance with the procedures.

The Union Minister continued teachers must abide by

the staff rules and regulations in order to implement a quality education system and refresher courses will be held in order to improve the teaching quality of teachers on 17 March in the respective townships, adding that arrangements are being made for qualified teachers to study BED degree courses at nearby education degree colleges such as Toungoo Education Degree College and Meiktila Education Degree College.

He also urged to work together to complete the teaching and management arrangements for the opening of basic education schools within the stipulated time.

Afterwards, the Union Minister inspected the preparation of schools and coordinated as necessary. —MNA

Severe action to be taken against those who untruly describe death of U Zaw Myat Lin from 'Suu' vocational institute in Shwepyitha Township

THE information has been released that the combined security force on patrol for taking security measures inspected 'Suu' Vocational Institute at No 512 on Hninzi Street in Ward 12 of Shwepyitha Township, Yangon Region, at about 12:40 am on 8 March. Meanwhile, in-charge of the course U Zaw Myat Lin jumped down from the house into backward and fell on the about two inches high steel pipe of the fence. In the incident, he died of injury at the belly.

Some persons posted fake news as propaganda for the structure of the dead body of U Zaw Myat Lin on the social network pages, mentioning

that security troops poured the boiled water or chemical liquid on the face and into the mouth of the dead and tortured him. Such acts aimed to cause misunderstanding to the people over the security forces with discrediting and tarnishing image.

Security forces sent the remains of U Zaw Myat Lin to Defence Services General Hospital in Mingaladon Township at about 3.30 am on 9 March to perform an X-ray examination and autopsy. The root cause of death and autopsy examination were clarified in detail to Daw Phyu Phyu Win, wife of the dead. At about 8 am on 11

March, the dead body was handed over without any damage to the wife of the dead Daw Phyu Phyu Win in accord with the procedures. Severe action will be taken against those who describe fake news on the dead body of U Zaw Myat Lin on the social network pages so as to misunderstand the people over the security forces on the duty of ensuring community peace and tranquillity, commit incitement and instigation to cause unrests and riots, communicate with the media which do not wish to ensure peace and stability and send misinformation to local and foreign organizations.—MNA

Violent rioters include in protests

GROUPS of violent people have been involved in the protests to confront the security forces, according to the statement of the Myanmar Police Force.

According to the report, there are several types of protests: the group who want to make their appearance more visible to the public by wearing a strange way of dressing; another group involved in protest just to include on social media. In addition to them, the riots included a group of people who hold handmade shields, weapons, smoke-covered masks and fire extinguishers, and another group who create roadblocks and hold slingshots, knives, and other handmade weapons and guns to confront the security forces.

It is announced that those violent people have been injured and died in confronting the security forces in various ways while they warned to disperse the crowd.

On 12 March, a total of 75 rioters (65 males and 10 females) were detained dur-

ing the riot in Pyimana township in Nay Pyi Taw; North Okkalapa, Mingala Taungnyunt, Insein, Kyimyindine, South Okkalapa, Mingaladon, Hlegu, Hmawbi, Thanlyin and Twantay townships in Yangon Region; Chanmyathazi, Amarapura, Mogok and Natogyi townships in Mandalay Region; Magway Township in Magway Region; Bago Township in Bago Region; Hinthada Township in Ayeyawady Region; Dawei and Kyunsu townships in Taninthayi Region; Mogaung Township in Kachin State; Loikaw Township in Kayah State; Mawlamyine Township in Mon State, Hsipaw, Kutkai, Pehon townships in Shan State.

Protesters are doing daily activities under the instruction of the NLD party by inciting on social media, assigning different slogans, instigating various revolutionary themes and setting time and date for the rallies. At present, there is no movement as expected, it is found that people are using social media to spread more rumours and misinformation through it. —MNA

Medical training course (1/2021) for UWSA members held

THE military medical team of Shan State provided medical training courses to UWSA (United Wa State Army) members and their family members and the medical training graduation ceremony (1/2021) was held at Wang Hong Hospital in Wang Hong village of Monghsat Township in Shan State (East) yesterday morning. The ceremony was attended by Golden Triangle Command, officials of Monghsat township and UWSA, trainees and

their family members.

An official of Monghsat first made his remark and a member of UWSA and trainee expressed words of thanks. Then, the officials gave prizes and certificates to the trainees.

A total of 58 trainees— UWSA members and their families joined this medical training (1/2021) on 18 January and other medical courses will be also launched. —MNA

IOC to buy vaccines from China for Tokyo, Beijing Olympic competitors

COMPETITORS at this year's Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics and the 2022 Beijing Winter Games will be offered coronavirus vaccines purchased from China, Olympic chief Thomas Bach announced Thursday in a significant move for the holding of the Covid-delayed Tokyo Games.

The Chinese Olympic Committee have made "an offer to make additional vaccine doses available to participants for Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022", Bach said.

"The IOC will pay for these additional doses of vaccines for the Olympic and Paralympic teams," he added.

"The IOC will also pay for two doses more that can be made available to people in that country," Bach said, describing it as a "demonstration of solidarity"



Competitors at this year's Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 Beijing Winter Games will be offered coronavirus vaccines bought from China, Olympic chief Thomas Bach announced Thursday in a significant move for the holding of the Covid-delayed Tokyo Games. **PHOTO: AFP**

in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Tokyo Games were originally scheduled for the summer of 2020, but were pushed back by one year as the coronavirus

pandemic raged across the globe. Bach has said there is "no reason to doubt" that the Games would open on July 23, but the promise of vaccination could help to allay competitors' fears.—AFP ■

WHO's pandemic response: from criticism to Nobel?

IN the year since the World Health Organization first described the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic, it has faced towering criticism, but has also been showered with praise.

Here is an overview of the main criticisms and plaudits the United Nations health agency has faced since the COVID-19 outbreak first surfaced in China in December 2019.

Acted too slowly

From the very start, the

WHO faced criticism that it was mishandling the crisis. Some accused it of taking too long to recognize that the virus was easily transmitting between humans.

But most of the criticism has focused on its initial reluctance to declare a global health emergency, and in particular to utter the word "pandemic". The WHO learned on December 31, 2019 of a mysterious pneumonia outbreak in Wuhan and has repeatedly insisted it immediately jumped

into action. But it was not until January 30, 2020 that WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared the situation a Public Health Emergency of International Concern - the highest level of alarm under international health rules. Top WHO experts had gathered a week earlier, but initially failed to agree on whether the PHEIC label was warranted at a time when, outside China, there were fewer than 100 COVID-19 cases and no deaths.

And while the PHEIC technically is the highest level of alarm, many countries did not spring into action until Tedros finally used the word "pandemic" on March 11. The word, which does not feature in the official international health alert system, appears to have more aptly conveyed the urgency of the situation, sending large swathes of the planet into lockdown.

Kowtowing to China

From the start, the UN health agency met criticism for its over-the-top praise of Beijing's early response to the crisis.—AFP ■



Medical workers collect throat swabs from residents in nucleic acid testing units and a movable cabin at a sampling site of Beijing Anzhen Hospital, Beijing, capital of China, June 24, 2020. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

COVID-19 pandemic crippling nature conservation efforts

THE COVID-19 pandemic has not only had devastating effects on humans, it has also heavily impacted efforts to safeguard natural ecosystems and habitats around the globe, conservationists warned Thursday.

The pandemic and its economic fall-out have put rangers out of work, forced cuts to anti-poaching patrols, and sparked a range of environmental roll-backs, the International Union for Conservation of Nature said.

A special edition of the IUCN's PARKS journal, containing a collection of new research papers on the pandemic's various impacts on nature conservation, indicated the crisis was being felt in protected areas worldwide.

"While the global health crisis remains priority, this new research reveals just how severe a toll the COVID-19 pandemic has taken on conservation efforts

and on communities dedicated to protecting nature," IUCN director-general Dr Bruno Oberle said in the statement.

Surveys done of protected areas across 90 countries showed that in general the impacts had been most severe in Africa, as well as in Latin America and Asia.

More than half of Africa's protected areas reported they had been forced to halt or reduce field patrols and anti-poaching operations.

'Massive' job losses

The closing of sites to tourism have dealt a particularly harsh blow.

"There has been a massive impact on wildlife tourism, so there has been a massive loss of jobs, loss of income," PARKS journal co-editor Adrian Philips, of IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas, told AFP.—AFP ■



The COVID-19 pandemic has not only had devastating effects on humans, it has also heavily impacted efforts to safeguard natural ecosystems and habitats around the globe. **PHOTO: AFP**

France lifts pandemic travel ban for Japan, 6 other nations

The French government said Thursday it will remove Japan and six other countries from a travel ban imposed on non-European Union nations since late January to prevent the spread of variants of the novel coronavirus.

While the travel ban targeting non-essential trips will be dropped as of Friday for the seven countries, travellers between France and these countries will still be required to

present documents proving they tested negative for the coronavirus 72 hours prior to departure, the French Foreign Ministry said.

The six other countries include Australia, Britain and South Korea. The ministry noted the variant of the coronavirus that was detected in Britain has been rampant in France, while also taking into account the situations in the seven countries. — Kyodo News ■

Australia's former finance minister named OECD chief

AUSTRALIA'S former finance minister Mathias Cormann was elected on Friday as the new head of the OECD, sources close to the group that advises advanced economies told AFP.

The 51-year-old politician was chosen "by a slim majority" during a meeting of ambassadors of the 37-nation Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development based in Paris.

A powerbroker in the ruling centre-right Liberal party and Australia's longest-serving finance

minister, Cormann quit parliament late last year to seek the top job.

But his candidacy was dogged by complaints from environmental groups that his record on climate change did not qualify him for the OECD job.

He emerged as a surprise frontrunner, and beat out fellow top contender, Sweden's Cecilia Malmstrom, a former EU trade commissioner.

He will succeed Mexico's Angel Gurría, who ends his third-five year term in May. —AFP ■

Most Asia markets track Wall Street record as Biden signs stimulus

ASIAN markets mostly rose on Friday following more records in New York and Wall Street after Joe Biden finally signed his enormous stimulus into law, while fears over inflation and a possible interest rate hike subsided for now.

Less than two months after taking office, the new president on Thursday put his name to the \$1.9 trillion rescue plan that paves the way for a spending splurge that is widely seen as ramping up domestic and global growth.

The package – which includes up to \$1,400 (€1,175) in cash handouts, extended unemployment benefits and various other aid programmes – comes

as the government pushes ahead with a vaccine drive that will allow lockdowns to be eased and life to return to a semblance of normality.

Biden, in a speech on Thursday to mark 12 months since the pandemic hit the country, said he hoped Americans would be able to celebrate Independence Day on July 4 with friends and family.

While it has long been expected, the final passage of the bill provided a big lift to equity markets, which have been rattled in recent weeks by concerns that the forecast world economic recovery will fire inflation and force central banks to lift interest rates sooner than expected. —AFP ■

UK economy sinks on virus curbs, as Brexit slams trade



Britain has experienced a rocky start to life outside the EU, with some UK exporters complaining of huge hurdles to previously seamless continental trade. PHOTO: AFP

BRITAIN'S economy hit reverse in January on renewed coronavirus curbs while the nation's post-Brexit EU goods exports suffered a record collapse, official data showed on Friday.

Gross domestic product shrank 2.9 per cent after 1.2 per cent

growth in December, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement, with heavy falls in services, production and manufacturing on COVID-19 restrictions. "The economy took a notable hit in January with retail, restaurants, schools and hairdressers all affected

by the latest lockdown," said ONS statistician Jonathan Athow. "Manufacturing also saw its first decline since April, with car manufacturing falling significantly," he said, adding that the health sector was boosted by COVID testing and vaccines.

'Inevitable' Brexit trade slump

The export of goods to the EU tanked by 41 per cent to £5.6 billion (€6.5bn) in January from December, in the first month since Britain's final Brexit divorce. The value of EU goods imported into Britain also sank, by a record 29 per cent or £6.6 billion. However, the British government described the performance as "inevitable" due to various factors, adding that freight levels have since returned to normal. "A unique combination of factors, including stockpiling last year, COVID lockdowns across Europe, and businesses adjusting to our new trading relationship, made it inevitable that exports to the EU would be lower this January than last," said a government spokesperson. —AFP ■

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V GSS YANGON VOY. NO. (1135S/N)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V GSS YANGON VOY. NO. (1135S/N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **13-3-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **HPT** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

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Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V ISEACO FORTUNE VOY. NO. (038W)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **13-3-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **MIP/MITT** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA LINES

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V KUO LUNG VOY. NO. (112N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V KUO LUNG VOY. NO. (112N/S)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **13-3-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **TMIT/MIP** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S CONTINENTAL SHIPPING LINE

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V ISEACO WISDOM VOY. NO. (1134S/N)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V ISEACO WISDOM VOY. NO. (1134S/N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **13-3-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **HPT** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA LINES

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V SINAR BINTAN VOY. NO. (706N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V SINAR BINTAN VOY. NO. (706N/S)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **13-3-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **MITT/MIP** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S SAMUDERA SHIPPING LINE

Russia backs plans for Afghanistan interim rule with Taliban

RUSSIA said Friday it backed the Taliban's integration into a future interim government in Afghanistan, as global powers ramped up efforts to secure a peace deal and end decades of war.

The foreign ministry's comments come as a May deadline looms for the United States to end its two-decade military involvement in the ravaged country. Washington has encouraged the Afghan leadership to work towards establishing an "inclusive" government and proposed talks with the Taliban to secure a peace accord.

"The formation of an interim



Afghan security forces escort suspected Taliban fighters. PHOTO: AFP

inclusive administration would be a logical solution to the problem of integrating the Taliban

into the peaceful political life of Afghanistan," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria

Zakharova told reporters ahead of talks next week in Moscow.

But she added that the decision should be made "by the Afghans themselves and should be resolved during negotiations on national reconciliation".

US President Joe Biden is wrapping up a review on whether to stick to an agreement with the Taliban negotiated by his predecessor Donald Trump who wanted to pull out the final US troops from Afghanistan by May.

The so-called Doha Accord signed in the Qatari capital last year underscored Trump's desire to end long-running US military involvement. —AFP ■

Nigeria gunmen raid college, dozens feared abducted

NIGERIAN gunmen raided a college in a northwestern state and at least 30 students are feared kidnapped, a senior government official said Friday, in the latest abduction targeting a school.

The suspected kidnap gang stormed the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation in Mando, Kaduna state, around 9:30pm (2030 GMT) on Thursday, shooting indiscriminately and taking students hostage.

The college was said to have some 300 male and female students -- mostly aged 17 and older -- at the time of the attack. Kaduna state com-

missioner for internal security Samuel Aruwan said 30 of the students were missing while the army was able to rescue 180 people after a fierce battle with the gunmen.

"The troops successfully rescued 180 citizens; 42 female students, eight staff and 130 male students," Aruwan said in a statement.

"However, about 30 students, a mix of males and females, are yet to be accounted for." The commissioner said some of the rescued students were injured during the operation and had been hospitalized in a military facility.



Security forces have been unable to prevent a string of kidnap attacks on Nigerian schools. PHOTO: AFP

Heavily-armed gangs in northwest and central Nigeria have stepped up attacks

in recent years, kidnapping for ransom, raping and pillaging.—AFP ■

Pirates kidnap 15 sailors in Gulf of Guinea off Benin



Pirates have kidnapped 15 crew members from a chemical tanker in the Gulf of Guinea after boarding the vessel off the coast of Benin, the ship's Dutch owners said on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

PIRATES have kidnapped 15 crew members from a chemical tanker in the Gulf of Guinea after boarding the vessel off the coast of Benin, the ship's Dutch

owners said on Friday.

The incident happened on Thursday afternoon around 210 nautical miles (389 kilometres) south of Cotonou when pirates

attacked the chemical tanker Davide B, the De Poli tanker company said.

"Fifteen crew members have been taken... while six other seafarers of the vessel are safe and unhurt," said the company, based in Barendrecht, just south of the Dutch port city of Rotterdam.

The six crew members "remain on board of the ship, which is currently attended by security personnel," De Poli Shipping-management said.

The Maltese-registered Davide B was sailing from Riga to Lagos in Nigeria when the attack happened.

"The company's management is now greatly concerned about the well-being of the missing crew," said company spokesman Cor Radings.

"Our main priority now is to establish contact with the missing crew in order to secure their earliest and safe release," he told AFP.

He could not give details about the missing crew members, but they are believed to be Russian, Ukrainian and from the Philippines.

Kidnap attacks on ships for ransom have become common in the Gulf of Guinea which runs from Senegal to Angola, taking in the southwest coast of Nigeria.

The perpetrators are usually Nigerian pirates.

The Gulf of Guinea accounted for more 95 percent of all maritime kidnappings last year -- 130 out of 135 cases, according to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), which monitors security at sea.—AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Australian minister settles after slurring alleged rape victim

AUSTRALIA'S defence minister settled a defamation case Friday with a former staffer who was allegedly raped in her parliamentary office, after calling the woman a "lying cow".

Brittany Higgins, 26, who last month came forward with allegations she was raped by a colleague in the minister's office, issued a statement noting minister Linda Reynolds had apologised and settled the case.

"I am pleased that the Minister has now withdrawn her comments and I accept her apology to me," Higgins said.

"This has been an immensely challenging period for me and I wish to reiterate the only reason I have chosen to come forward is to help others."

Higgins launched the defamation case after Reynolds' comments to staff leaked to the press. —AFP ■

South Africa's Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini dies aged 72

GOODWILL Zwelithini, the controversial but revered king of the Zulus, South Africa's largest ethnic group, died Friday aged 72 after weeks in hospital for a diabetes-related illness, the royal palace announced.

The king wielded great influence among millions of Zulus through his largely ceremonial and spiritual role despite having no official power in modern South Africa. During a half-century-long reign, he revived festivals celebrating virgin women, was blamed for fuelling deadly xenophobic violence, slammed gays as "rotten" and enjoyed a lavish and hedonistic lifestyle in a country where millions live in poverty. It is with the utmost grief that I inform the nation of the passing of (the).... King of the Zulu nation," the palace said a statement signed by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, a powerful veteran politician who is also a Zulu prince.—AFP ■

Facebook halts project for undersea data cable to Hong Kong

FACEBOOK has decided to halt its efforts to build a trans-Pacific undersea cable that would have connected California and Hong Kong, due to tensions between the United States and China.

"Due to ongoing concerns from the US government about direct communication links between the United States and Hong Kong, we have decided to withdraw our FCC application," a Facebook spokesperson told AFP on Wednesday, referring to the Federal Communications

Commission.

"We look forward to working with all the parties to re-configure the system to meet the concerns of the US government," the spokesperson added.

The social networking giant and several telecom companies filed their first construction permit in 2018, to connect two sites in California to Hong Kong and Taiwan. The project was supposed to facilitate communications through fiber optics capable of carrying large volumes of data with very low waiting times. —AFP ■



The cable, named the Pacific Light Cable Network, was originally intended to link the United States, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Philippines. PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Australian government offers half-price flights to local tourists

Almost one million Australians will be able to enjoy half-price flights to domestic holiday destinations, under a government plan announced Thursday to boost tourism as Covid border closures keep international travellers out.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the government would spend Aus\$1.2 billion (US\$929,000 million) to subsidise 800,000 flights to areas outside major cities that were "heavily dependent on international tourists". —AFP ■

Japan auto industry body welcomes Apple's possible entry: Toyota

JAPAN Automobile Manufacturers Association Chairman Akio Toyoda said Thursday the Japanese auto industry will welcome Apple Inc., provided the U.S. tech giant is fully responsible for its services, including the maintenance and scrapping of its vehicles.

"If a tech firm joins our industry, it means the auto sector remains a potential market. (A newcomer) will bring new options for customers," Toyoda, who is also president of Toyota Motor Corp., said in an online press conference.

Toyoda made his first remarks on Apple's potential moves after Reuters reported in December that the U.S tech giant aims to begin production of its own electric vehicles as early as 2024. Apple has reportedly asked some automakers to mass produce EVs it will design.

But he added that the lifespan of a car is 30 or 40 years, and a new entrant must be "determined" to be fully responsible for their cars until they are scrapped. Asked about the auto industry's recent shift to electrification, Toyoda urged the Japanese government to boost electricity generated by renewable energies to reduce carbon emissions. — Kyodo News ■

Georgia emerges as unlikely hotspot for digital nomads



Georgia's Black Sea port city of Batumi is also a draw for digital nomads. PHOTO: AFP

AMERICAN travel addict Candy Treft radiates enthusiasm while she extols the virtues of her new home country Georgia as one of the world's best locations for digital nomads.

The 51-year-old medical professional arrived in Georgia in 2019 and is now running a co-working and co-living space for foreign remote workers flocking to the tiny former Soviet republic nestled between the Caucasus Mountains and

the Black Sea.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, a growing number of people who could work fully remotely were striking out and adopting a digital nomad lifestyle -- answering emails from the beach or a picturesque town square.

Bali has long been a favourite of digital nomads, and for European destinations Lisbon and the Estonian capital Tallinn have been popular.

Besides distinctive cui-

sine, rich culture and nature, Georgia "ticks off all of a digital nomad's boxes", Treft told AFP in her three-storey house in Tbilisi's old town, where she provides lodging and workspaces to nomadic professionals.

"The cost of living is more than affordable here, Internet access is very good, and safety -- safety in Georgia is better than one can experience in most other places in the world." —AFP ■

China's Baidu plans \$3.6 billion Hong Kong



Baidu became China's dominant search engine provider after Google was blocked in 2010 - and in recent years has branched into services including maps and food delivery. PHOTO: AFP

CHINESE search engine company Baidu on Thursday said it was seeking as much as \$3.6 billion in a secondary listing on the Hong Kong stock exchange.

Nasdaq-listed Baidu, which said in a filing that it plans to sell 95 million shares for as much as HK\$295 (\$38.01) per share, is set to become the latest Chinese firm to make a

secondary offering in the Asian financial hub.

Fellow US-listed tech giant JD.com raised almost \$4 billion in a blockbuster Hong Kong offering in 2020, amid a wave of Chinese companies eschewing Wall Street because of rising tensions between Washington and Beijing.

Baidu on Thursday said it

intended to use its proceeds from the listing on developing its artificial intelligence and mobile services.

Baidu, founded in 2000, became China's dominant search engine provider after Google was blocked in the country in 2010.

The company has in recent years branched out into services including maps and food delivery, while pouring funds into artificial intelligence applications like autonomous "robotaxis." Baidu said in its filing to the US Securities and Exchange Commission Thursday that its earnings last year had been "significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic," resulting in a five percent year-on-year dip in revenue from online marketing services, its largest revenue source.

The company said it plans to set the price for its Hong Kong listing by around March 17. —AFP ■



PHOTO: ONE CHAMPIONSHIP

ONE Championship: Fists of Fury III to be launched on 19 March

A special event of the ONE Championship named “Fists of Fury III” featuring the bouts of world-class

fighters will be held on 19 March at Singapore Indoor Stadium in Singapore, according to the ONE Championship.

There will be a total of six fights: four men’s bouts and two women’s bouts.

In the main card of the event or Men’s Lightweight Kickboxing World Championship, Regian Eersel of Suriname will fight against Mustapha Haida of Italy.

In the Women’s Atomweight Muay Thai bout, Alma Junku of Australia will battle with Janet Todd of United States.

In the Men’s Straw weight Fight, Alex Silva

of Brazil will take on Hiroba Minowa of Japan.

In the Women’s Straw weight Fight, Maira Mazar of Brazil will fight with Jenelyn Olsim of the Philippines.

In the Men’s Flyweight bout, Roshan Mainam of India will meet Aziz Calim of Indonesia.

Next, in the other Men’s Flyweight fight, Rodkaikaw Fairtex of Thailand will fight against Hu Yong of China.

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, officials stated.—GNLM ■

Juve pick themselves up and head for Cagliari after UCL exit

TURIN — Cristiano Ronaldo’s Juventus dust themselves down and head for lowly Cagliari on Sunday, focussed on salvaging their bid for a 10th consecutive league title with their Champions League ambitions buried for another season.

Juventus crashed out in the last 16 for the second consecutive year, losing on away goals to FC Porto in Turin, and now also risk finishing the season without the Serie A trophy.

Andrea Pirlo’s side are third – 10 points off leaders Inter Milan who travel to relegation-threatened Torino – but having played a game less. Second-placed AC Milan, four points ahead of Juventus, host Napoli, in sixth, where a slip-up by Stefano Pioli’s side could let the champions close the gap. “We’ll have time to improve now and work on the



Cristiano Ronaldo’s Juventus dust themselves down and head for lowly Cagliari on Sunday, focussed on salvaging their bid for a 10th consecutive league title with their Champions League ambitions buried for another season. PHOTO: AFP

things we didn’t have the chance to do before with all the back-to-back games,” said Pirlo, looking for positives after their European

shortcomings. “We need to dive into the championship because we are only in March and still have many games.”—AFP ■

Wimbledon chiefs say players must stay at official hotels

LONDON — Wimbledon chiefs ruled on Friday (Mar 12) that players at this year’s tournament must stay in official hotels as part of strict coronavirus control measures.

The All England Club is determined to minimize the risks to the event, which was cancelled last year for the first time since World War II.

The decision may not go down well with some players, who prefer to rent private homes in London for the Grand Slam.

“In line with UK government and public health guidance, we are putting in place a variety of infection control measures in line with our as-

piration to stage a safe, best practice and trusted event in 2021,” said a statement from the All England Club.

“One of the priority measures is to create a minimized risk environment for the players.

“As such, based on current guidance, there will be official hotels for all players, their support teams, and key groups such as officials, which will be a mandatory requirement for entry into this year’s Championships.”

Wimbledon is scheduled to start on Jun 28, a week after the government plans to lift all legal limits on social contact.—AFP ■

South Korea to host North Korea for World Cup qualifiers



South Korean supporters often wave ‘Unification flags’ at sporting fixtures involving the two Koreas. PHOTO: AFP

SEOUL — South Korea will host North Korea for a series of World Cup and Asian Cup qualifiers later this year, the Asian Football Confederation said on Friday.

South Korea, who reached the 2002 World Cup semi-finals on home soil, are one of eight countries hosting their respective Asian qualifying groups, in a new format intended to reduce coronavirus risks.

China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Japan are among the other hosts for the postponed games, which will be played from May 31 to June 15.

In October 2019, the two Koreas drew 0-0

in the North Korean capital Pyongyang in a pre-Covid World Cup qualifier where fans and foreign media were barred and there was no live TV broadcast. It was the first competitive game between the Korean men’s teams hosted by the North. In their last World Cup qualifier in South Korea, the home side won 1-0 in Seoul in 2009.

Elsewhere, China will host Syria, the Philippines, Maldives and Guam in Group A, while Kuwait will hold the Group B games, also involving Australia, Jordan, Nepal and Taiwan.—AFP ■