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Sunday, 28 March 2021

Parade of 76th Anniversary Armed Forces Day held; State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Maha Thray Sithu Min Aung Hlaing delivers address

The Parade of the 76th Anniversary Armed Forces Day is in progress in Nay Pyi Taw on 27 March 2021.

The Senior General is addressing.

THE Parade of the 76th Anniversary Armed Forces Day took place at Nay Pyi Taw military parade ground this morning with an address by Chairman of the State Administration Council Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Maha Thray Sithu Min Aung Hlaing.

Military personnel of the Tatmadaw (Army, Navy and Air), female parade company of the Tatmadaw (Army), members of Myanmar Police Force and female parade company of MPF in columns which would participate in the parade ceremony took positions at the archway of the parade ground and participated in it on the parade agenda.

First, the Bagpipe Band and the Central Military Band and took the designated position in the parade ground. Antiquated mechanized artillery column, antiquated armoured vehicle col-

umn, the mechanized column of Directorate of Artillery, the mechanized column of Directorate of Missiles, the mechanized column of Directorate of Tanks, the mechanized column of the Office of Chief of Air Defence Troops, the mechanized column of Directorate of Military Engineers, the mechanized column of Office of Commander-in-Chief (Navy) led by column commander Brig-Gen Thein Htwe of the mechanized column, took the designated positions.

Then, the flag bearers led by Parade Commander Maj-Gen Soe Min Oo, followed by Anawyahtar Column led by Column Commander Brig-Gen Moe Zaw Tun comprising the parade companies representing the Burma Independence Army (BIA), Burma Defence Army (BDA), Burman National Army (BNA), Patriotic Burmese Forces (PBF), Burma Army (BA), torch holders,

and berets; Kyansitthar Column led by Column Commander Brig-Gen Aung Aung comprising the parade companies representing the Guard of Honour, Gurkha Hats, Point 303 Rifles, BA-52

To consistently uphold the National Policy: Our Three Main National Causes and foster democracy desired by people not to dissent from its route based on the principles of the Constitution with the entire people

sten guns, BA-63, women troops (Army, Navy and Air) (1957-1972), Tatmadaw (Navy) (1957-1972), Tatmadaw (Air) (1957-1972); Bayintnaung Command led by Column Commander Brig-Gen Tun Naing Oo comprising the

parade companies representing the Guard of Honour; Tatmadaw (Army) (1973-1988), Tatmadaw (Navy) (1973-1988), Tatmadaw (Air) (1973-1988), Tatmadaw (Army) (1989-1999), Tatmadaw

(Navy) (1989-1999), Tatmadaw (Air) (1989-1999), Tatmadaw (Army) (2000-2014); Aungzayya Column led by Column Commander Brig-Gen Kyaw Kyaw Htoo, comprising the parade companies representing the Guard of

Honour; Tatmadaw (Navy) (2000-2014); Tatmadaw (Air) (2000-2014); MPF (2000-2014); Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Navy), company 1 of Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Navy), Office of the Chief of Defence Industry, Directorate of Military Engineer; Hsinbyushin Column led by Column Commander Brig-Gen Maung Maung Soe comprising the parade companies representing the Guard of Honour; Office of Commander-in-Chief (Air), company 1 of Office of Commander-in-Chief (Air), Directorate of Signals, South-East Command, South-West Command, North-West Command, Directorate of Ordnance; Bandoola Column led by Column Commander Brig-Gen Soe Tint comprising the parade companies representing the Guard of Honour, female officer company of Office of Commander-in-Chief (Army), female

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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

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.

Dinner hosted to mark 76th anniversary of Armed Forces Day



The Senior General and wife are warmly greeting the diplomatic corps at the Armed Forces Day Dinner.

The 76th Anniversary Armed Forces Day Dinner is in progress yesterday.

SATE Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and wife Daw Kyu Kyu Hla hosted a dinner to mark the 76th anniversary of Armed Forces Day at Zeyathiri Beikman in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Firstly, SAC Chairman and wife warmly greeted the attendees to the ceremony before the

entertainment programmes.

Present on the occasion were Russian Deputy Defence Minister Colonel General Alexander Vasilyevich Fomin, SAC Vice-Chair Vice-Senior General Soe Win and wife Daw Than Than Nwe, members of SAC, UEC Chairman, Union Ministers, Union Civil Ser-

vice Board Chairman, Nay Pyi Taw Council Chairman, CBM Chairman, military personnel from the Office of the Defence Services (Army, Navy, Air), first, second and third-level independence heroes, retired senior military officers (Army, Navy, Air), family members of retired Senior Generals, Un-

ion Supreme Court Justices, members of the Constitutional Tribunal and UEC, delegations from the ethnic armed groups signed in Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, Nay Pyi Taw Council members, winners of Aung San Thuriya and Thura Titles, other relevant officials of militia, Foreign Military At-

tachés, retired ambassadors, Directors-General, Managing Directors of relevant ministries, members of Myanmar veterans organizations, winners of the competitions marking Armed Forces Day, delegates from the University for Development of National Races and other invited guests.—MNA

18 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 27 March, total figure rises to 142,377

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 142,377 after 18 new cases were reported on 27 March 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these confirmed cases, 3,206 died, 131,788 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Parade of 76th Anniversary Armed Forces Day held; State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Maha Thray Sithu Min Aung Hlaing delivers address

FROM PAGE-1

(other ranks) company of Office of Commander-in-Chief (Army), Southern Command, Coastal Region Command, Eastern Central Command; Aung San Column led by Column Commander Police Brig-Gen Han Tun comprising the parade companies representing the Guard of Honour, MPF female guard of honour, No. 1 female company, No. 2 female company, No. 1 male company, No. 2 male company, No. 3 male company No. 4 male company of Myanmar Police Force marched to the parade ground together with the military bands in accord with the agenda.

The Parade of 76th Anniversary Armed Forces Day was also attended by delegation led by Deputy Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation Colonel General Alexander Vasilyevich Fomin, Daw Kyu Kyu Hla, wife of the Chairman of the State Administration Council Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, Daw Than Than Nwe, wife of Vice-Chairman of the Council Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Soe Win, council members and their wives, the Union chief of justice, the chairman of Constitutional Tribunal, the chairman of Union Election Commission, Union ministers, Union attorney-general, Union Auditor-General, the chairman of Union civil service board, the chairman of Nay Pyi Taw council and



The Senior General is inspecting the parade columns.

the governor of Central Bank of Myanmar and their wives, senior military officers of Office of Commander-in-Chief (Army, Navy and Air) and their wives, Independence Mawgun First, Second and Third Class Award winners, retired senior military officers (Army, Navy and Air), families of retired commanders-in-chief of Defence Services, judges of the Union supreme court, members of Constitutional Tribunal and UEC members, representatives from the armed ethnic groups who have signed the NCA, members of the Nay Pyi Taw council, families and relatives of Aung San Thuriya title winners, officers and other ranks who were awarded Thura titles and gallantry medals and their families and relatives, members of the People's Militia (Transform), members of the People's Militia (original) and Border Guard Central Advisory

Group, military attachés and officials from foreign missions, retired ambassadors, directors general and managing directors of respective ministries, retired Tatmadaw who serves as directors general or managing directors of respective ministries, members of Myanmar War Veterans Organization, retired directors general from Myanmar Police Force, Myanmar Fire Brigade and Myanmar Red Cross Society, chairman of political parties, artistes who participated in movies honouring the Tatmadaw, winners in the marching and military songs, poem, short story and novel contests, Tatmadaw athletes who won medals in international sports events, donors of the Armed Forces Day, students from University for Development of National Races, members of the University Training Corps, instructors and train-

ees from marine youth training course and aviation youth training course, invited guests and local and foreign media.

The Senior General arrived at the parade ground and took a position at the reviewing stand. The Tatmadaw members from the military columns and members of the Myanmar Police Force saluted nineteen-gun salute. Then, the Senior General inspected the parade columns.

The Senior General, Tatmadawmen from the military columns and Myanmar Police Force members saluted the State Flag and fallen Tatmadawmen and recited the Four Oaths in chorus.

Then, the Senior General spoke on the occasion. (The speech is covered on page 4-5).

Tatmadaw members and MPF members of the columns led by Parade Commander Maj-Gen Soe Min Oo saluted the Senior General in military procession and left the parade ground.

During the time, three helicopters, an MI-17 transport helicopter and two MI-2M attack helicopters, of the Tatmadaw (Air) bearing the flag of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and three MI-2M P attack helicopters flags of (Army, Navy and Air) flew in Vic formation. A Bell-212 helicopter and two Bell-206 helicopters flew in mixed group formation, An H-125 helicopter and two H-120 helicopters flew mixed group formation saluted the Senior General.

Lt Daw May Zin Shan, a Chin national, and Lt Daw Phyu Thwe Kyaw, a Mon national, took part in the parade as the first female pilots of the

two H-120 helicopters.

Three MI-2 attack helicopters flew in Vic formation, one Eurocopter helicopter and two light PC-7 surveillance combat aircraft flew in mix formation, five Grob trainer aircraft flew in arrowhead formation, one Beech transport plane and two K-8 light combat aircraft flew in group formation, three JF-17 multipurpose light combat aircraft flew in Vic formation, three A-5 ground-attack aircraft and two F-7 interceptors flew in mixed arrowhead formation leaving yellow, green and red colour smoke trails representing the State Flag, five Yak-130 light combat aircraft flew in arrowhead formation, three K-8 light combat aircraft and two Yak-130 light combat aircraft flew in right echelon formation leaving yellow, green and red colour smoke trails representing the State Flag, five Mig-29 multipurpose combat aircraft flew in arrowhead formation and Fan Break formation in saluting the Senior General.

The Senior General cordially greeted the invited guests and left the parade ground, and the ceremony came to an end.

The honourable bronze statues of the founder kings of the First, Second and Third Myanmar Kingdoms, the Armed Forces Day Torch, and the plaque marking the 76th Anniversary Armed Forces Day could be seen with admiration. Moreover, the Burma Independence Army Flag, the Burma Defence Army Flag, the flags of Tatmadaw (Army, Navy and Air), the flags of the directorates of the Office of the Commander-in-Chief(Army), and the colourful flags bearing the labels of military commands, light infantry divisions and battalions and units were also fluttering on the ground.

Giant posters portraying the activities of Tatmadaw members (Army, Navy and Air) that promote patriotism and nationalistic fervour were erected along Yangon-Mandalay highway, and Pinlaung junction, Posters bearing the mottos of the Tatmadaw in Myanmar and English were erected or hanged along the parade route in honour of the 76th Anniversary Armed Forces Day. 100



The military personnel and civilian guests are attending the parade of 76th Anniversary Armed Forces Day yesterday.

Speech Delivered by Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Maha Thray Sithu Min Aung Hlaing at the Military Parade in Honour of the 76th Armed Forces Day on 27 March 2021

Comrades,

Today is the parade in honour of the 76th Armed Forces Day of Tatmadaw imbued with the immense prestige etched in the annals of history remained steadfast in its commitment to protecting the motherland in successive terms, and it is also intended to commemorate the 75th Anniversary (Diamond Jubilee) of Armed Forces Day postponed for COVID-19 pandemic.

First and foremost, I would like to mention that it is a great honour bestowed on Tatmadaw that seeks to uphold the virtuous traditions through the annals till the 75th Anniversary (Diamond Jubilee).

Comrades,

Our country, nestled in a serene shelter with a prosperous identity and unified multi-national races as an independent and sovereign State through the annals of history, relinquished independence and sovereignty in 1886 and fell into the suppression of Imperialists for hundred years. Thirty Comrades led by Thakhin Aung San and the patriotic leaders composed of multi-national races tried to learn hard the military tactics with the Japanese assistance to establish Tatmadaw for the repulsion to imperialists. With the leading role of Thirty Comrades by Thakhin Aung San. Burma Independence Army (BIA) was established in Bangkok, Thailand, on 27 December 1941 and then BIA entwined with patriotic people annihilated the British Imperialists. After the withdrawal of the British, people were brutally tortured, notwithstanding Japan declared nominal independence on 1 August 1943. On 27 March 1945, Tatmadaw in Collaboration with people, launched the triumphal and historical anti-fascist movement. Afterwards, Armed Forces Day was denoted on this date.

Comrades,

Burma Independence Army (BIA) was constituted in sequence as the Burma Defence Army (BDA) in 1942, Burma National Army (BNA) in 1943. Patriotic Burma Force (PBF) in July and Burma Army in September 1945. Tatmadaw is an institution hailed from the independence movement since Tatmadaw, to-

... the internal armed conflicts ignited from the spill-over effect of the divide-and-rule policy of Imperialists, ideological differences and ethnic diversity in Post-Independence

gether with people, restored independence from the regime of British Imperialist on 4 January 1948.

Comrades,

Since the internal armed conflicts ignited from the spill-over effect of the divide-and-rule policy of Imperialists, ideological differences and ethnic diversity in Post-Independence, Tatmadaw defeated the insurgents with much sacrifice not to relinquish the restored independence. Since the Burma Communist Party (BCP) went underground on 28 March 1948, other armed organizations came into existence. The international community recognized them as multi-coloured insurgents. At that time, General Ne Win, who holds the rank of Chief of Staff of Defence Forces, could restore the Nation's solidarity and stability by prevailing over the multi-coloured insurgents across the Nation with a handful of Infantry Units and Corps.

The internal armed conflicts did not occur between Tatmadaw and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOS) but between governmental bodies and ethnic groups, and Tatmadaw remained steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding the Nation and its sovereignty.

Comrades,

Tatmadaw has prevailed over the multi-coloured insurgency as well as the intrusion of Kuomintang (White Chinese Army) and Mujahedeen based in Rakhine State during 1950-61.

During 1962-72, Tatmadaw annihilated the insurgents in Bago and Delta Region. Likewise, the movement of BCP settled in the Bago mountain range came to an end in 1975 since Tatmadaw collaborated with people launched major operations by a four-cut strategy.

Comrades,

As Burma Communist Party launched an attack on Mong Yang with three columns in September

1988 to put the Tatmadaw in a predicament by taking advantage of the 1988 uprising, Tatmadaw engaged in the historical Mong Yang Battle for eight days; consequently, Kokang seceded from Burma Communist Party after they were defeated in Mong Yang Battle, and the BCP Northeast operation area came to an end in the collapse of the Burma Communist Party (Headquarters) due to the seizure of power by UWSA. Tatmadaw also defeated the insurgents who attacked the Methawor area, Karen State in September 1988.

The insurgent outposts stationed along the border of South-east Command were captured in 1989, and the insurgents encroached upon the Delta region were also annihilated in 1991.

The insurgents in the North-east border, furthermore, initiated the massive attack on Tatmadaw Headquarters and Units in Laukkai in February 2015 to occupy the whole Kokang area and

While building up the Standard Army, Tatmadaw has designed to broaden the war establishment and integrated weaponry for Army, construct and purchase the naval vessels and gears for the Navy, and seek advantage of modest form in aircraft modernization, production and possession of modern aircraft for Air Force.

to extend their area from Monekoe-Hpawnghseng to Northern Myanmar. Therefore, Tatmadaw conducted counter-insurgency operations, including urban operation with airstrike and artillery support and successfully captured the insurgents' outposts deployed along the border. Afterwards, the insurgents formed the Northern Allied Coalition, and Tatmadaw repelled the simultaneous attacks on the outposts such as Monekoe, Hpawnghseng,

Mankan, 105-mile and Monepaw in November 2016. I would like you to be aware that Tatmadaw put strenuous effort at risk of their lives, blood and sweat to protect from internal and external destructive elements since the independence movement to date.

Comrades,

At present, the Nation and Tatmadaw had already conferred gallantry titles, medals and certificates to military personnel, members of Myanmar Police Force and People Militia who shouldered the duties at risk of their lives in the interests of Nation and people as in (6) for Aung San Thuriya Title, (50) for Thiha Thura Title, (546) for Thura Title, (1,860) for Gallantry Record, (2,018) for Gallantry Medal, (339) for Certificate of Gallantry presented by Field Marshal, and (2,987) for Certificate of Gallantry presented by Commander-in-Chief. I would like to convey my great honour to those who gave many sacrifices for the Nation and people though they have not received any gallantry title, medals and certificates, family members of Aung San Thuriya Title winners are requested to have an honour of their company in this ceremony.

Comrades,

In honour of senior comrades, who gave many sacrifices,

strenuous efforts in counter multi-coloured insurgency operations in post-independence, antiquated artilleries and armoured vehicles are unveiled in this military parade. At present, it can be seen that such defective artilleries and armoured vehicles could be transformed into modern ones by the efforts of successive leaders.

Comrades,

Tatmadaw has a common aim to build up a Standard Army imbued with combat capability and combat power for conventional warfare to serve the national defence duty steadfastly. While building up the Standard Army, Tatmadaw has designed to broaden the war establishment and integrated weaponry for Army, construct and purchase the naval vessels and gears for the Navy, and seek advantage of modest form in aircraft modernization, production and possession of modern aircraft for Air Force.

Comrades,

The human resources of Tatmadaw make a substantial contribution to the development of the Tatmadaw and Nation-building sectors. In the immense value of HR development for Tatmadaw, there are about 1,200 DSc and PhD holders and 14,000 Master degree holders who are experts in medicine, engineering, technology and fields of specialization, and they prove their mettle in the accomplishment of assigned tasks for the Nation and Tatmadaw.

As it is an honour to the 75th March 2020. Tatmadaw conferred honorary awards for gallantry, service, fine arts, literature, business, technology, healthcare and sports. Moreover, Tatmadaw annually trains the athletes who highly represent and stand for the Nation and Tatmadaw. I would like to express my profound gratitude to remarkable military sportsmen in a major role for swimming, football, shooting, boxing and athletics in SEA Games, Asian Games and World Olympic Games.

Comrades,

Tatmadaw also assists in the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief programme for the Nation and People. Specialists, medical officers and

In honour and redolence of

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Speech Delivered by Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Maha Thray Sithu Min Aung Hlaing at the Military Parade in Honour of the 76th Armed Forces Day on 27 March 2021

FROM PAGE-4

members from Tatmadaw could provide healthcare services to over 2.5 million people for 8-year-tenure.

From 2011 to 2021, the Myanmar Navy could also rescue over 4,000 refugees stranded in the sea. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the total number of 1,150 Myanmar nationalities stranded in Malaysia and Port Blair, India, for years could be repatriated to the homeland by military ships in February and March 2021. The repatriation of the remnant is in progress. Moreover, military hospitals could provide healthcare services to a total number of 90,000 public out-patients, 30,000 in-patients and 6,000 maternity patients who encountered difficulty since people's hospitals could not function in February and March for unacquainted reasons.

As for the HADR programme, Myanmar Air Force cooperates in Search and rescue operations and catering services for foodstuffs and medicine to the stricken people to some extent. People, civil service, senior citizens and unhealthy people being stricken in the Rakhine conflict were evacuated by Tatmadaw helicopters.

Tatmadaw is ready and steadfast in the responsibility to deal with the dangers, including disasters that affected the Nation and its citizens within a second. I would like to urge you to be of assistance for the disaster-affected area regardless of someone else's order.

Comrades,

Tatmadaw puts an emphasis on those preventive measures for people with real virtue and the implementation of internal peace, which is essential for the Union based on democracy and federalism. The Government made offers for peace in successive terms. The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) has been signed with 10 Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) due to the peace offers made in the previous multiparty democratic period. Tatmadaw's stance for peace embarks on the road to Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) to achieve eternal peace through Six Peace Principles. Those principles are laid down

in consideration for the interests of the Nation and people.

Therefore, Tatmadaw declared a unilateral ceasefire to achieve eternal peace. At this juncture, the three committees composed of national solidarity and peace-making central committee, working committee and negotiation committee are organized to put great effort for eternal peace.

It is convinced that some armed organizations are asking for unilateral propositions towards self-interests and are conducting illegal trade and drug smuggling while others are heading towards peace. Our Nation stood under the rule of the Monarchy ever since before

Tatmadaw cooperates with the related departments in the fundamental things; food, clothing and shelter and socio-economic development, including demining in the respective areas for the return of displaced persons stranded on IDP camps.

Comrades,

Tatmadaw is an institution that has to abide by the promulgated law. It is also needed to abide by the law and be an institution of morale and morality. Tatmadaw, an example of discipline, needs to embrace virtuous traditions. Every single serviceman and servicewoman joined Tatmadaw by their consent and moral virtues for national defence. Therefore, I

Tatmadaw is an institution that has to abide by the promulgated law. It is also needed to abide by the law and be an institution of morale and morality.

she relinquished the independence but was governed by the different administrative system, including the parliamentary democracy system since independence. The Nation practices the multiparty democracy system by the people's desire since 2011 and embraces to stand tall as a Union based on democracy and federalism. Therefore, I would like to impart that it should not be acceptable to put propositions ahead by terrorism which can be harmful to State tranquillity and social security. It is a prerequisite to sit together for the constructive peace dialogue by putting the weapons aside to end the armed conflict, which is the major deterrence to the development of the Nation. Moreover, I would like to urge non-signatory Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) to sign NCA and the signatory ones to follow the agreements within the legal framework and to go hand in hand with Tatmadaw for eternal peace.

Comrades,

While NCA is in progress, Tatmadaw renders assistance to displaced persons stranded in some regions for their return.

would like to leave a word that military personnel need to be proud of vowing to sacrifice lives and to be ones entrusted by the Nation and Tatmadaw.

Comrades,

Tatmadaw assumed the State responsibility on 1st February 2021 due to the unacquainted reasons that occurred in the multiparty general election, which was held on 8 November 2020. There were 39.2 million eligible voters around the country in the multiparty democracy general election. Tatmadaw examined the voter list and controversially found over 10.4 million instances of irregularities, although Tatmadaw repeatedly asked for a free and fair election. Tatmadaw called for the NLD-led Government, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Union Election Commission to explain ongoing controversial issues several times. Still, they neglected and failed to respond to the requests and are proceeding to form a new government and to call respective Hluttaw. Such kinds of action lead to "The act or attempt to take over the sovereignty of the Union by wrongful forcible means"

mandated in Section 40(C) and Section 417 of the 2008 Constitution. Therefore, Tatmadaw unavoidably assumed the State responsibility by lawful means due to the unlawful acts of the NLD-led Government in the 2020 election. After the accomplishment of the State of Emergency provisions, a free and fair election will be re-run, and the handover of State responsibility will be continued. As Tatmadaw is a part of the Nation and military personnel are also a part of the people, Tatmadaw is seeking the commitment of the entire Nation and people who go through thick and thin to be able to nestle in a serene shelter with a prosperous identity. And Tatmadaw will also make sure of the socio-economic development of the Nationality.

Hluttaw Representatives who are going to conduct the enactment of legislation should be the epitome of law-abiding person. The democracy we desire would be the undisciplined one if they pay no respect to and violate the law. As the corruptions were found during the investigation, some party leaders are charged with corruptions by the law.

I would like to urge that the State Administrative Council is going to carry out the responsibility in pursuit of 5-Point Rode Map and Objectives for Political, Economic and Social affairs during temporary acceptance, and ensure the implementation of policies concerned with foreign, administrative and peace affairs in pursuit of the existing policies and law Comrades,

In the building of a country to become a peaceful and developed one, it is needed to have sustainable international cooperation and relation. Therefore, Tatmadaw practices a policy of diplomatic relation with not only neighbouring and regional defence forces but also international defence forces.

In International Relations, Tatmadaw is looking forward to regional ASEAN Armies and is putting an effort to enhance cooperation, exchange programme thought exercises and mutual understanding.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to the high-level delegation from the

Russian Armed Forces for the pleasure of their company in this military parade. I would also like to impart that the Russian Armed Forces are acknowledged and inscribed for their substantial support to Tatmadaw in a friendly manner though we are far apart.

Comrades,

Tatmadaw is originated from the avowed intention and has had a glorious past. Since there is no act of betrayal but loyal to the Nation and people, Tatmadaw always headed towards the act of selfless sacrifice for the Nation and people. Tatmadaw completed its people with the independent Nation, national flag and great sacrifice to the Nation and people in the past, and is moving forwards a peaceful and developed Union based on democracy and federalism in the present. I would like to urge that every single endeavour of Tatmadaw with selflessness and virtue is not meant for the Tatmadaw but for the interests of the Nation and people to stand tall on the world stage as a sovereign State and people.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate you to keep on achieving the objectives of the 76th Armed Forces Day as follows:

- To consistently uphold the National Policy: Our Three Main National Causes and foster democracy desired by people not to dissent from its route based on the principles of the Constitution with the entire people
- To protect people from all dangers including natural disaster in every single time and circumstances and assist in all sectors for the social security of the people
- To take part in the eternal peace process pivoted on the NCA framework not to dissent from the Three Main National Causes as the cessation of armed conflicts is the prerequisite while paving the way to democracy
- To be a strong and capable modernised Tatmadaw endowed with combat power and capability in safeguarding the peace and tranquillity of the State and its sovereignty.

Religious Titles Conferring Ceremony for 2021 held in Nay Pyi Taw



The Senior General, wife and military personnel attends the ceremony.



The Religious Titles Conferring Ceremony for the year 2021 is in progress in Nay Pyi Taw on 28 March 2021.

A ceremony to confer religious titles was held yesterday afternoon at Sasana Maha Beikman in Uppatasanti Pagoda compound, Nay Pyi Taw.

The ceremony was attended by State Sangha Maha Nayaka Chairman Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru Abhidhaja Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotika Bhamo Sayadaw Dr Bhaddanta Kumara Bhivamsa and State Sangha Maha Nayaka Thanlyin Min Kyaung Pahtamapyan monastery patron Agga Maha Pandita Agga Maha Jotikadhaja Dr Baddanta Candima Bhivamsa together with State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and his wife Daw Kyu Kyu Hla and other military personnel.

State Administration Council Chairman and his wife and attendees took five precepts from State Sangha Maha Nayaka Chairman Bhamo Sayadaw.

Then, Presiding Sayadaw Baddanta Gandhama of Myoma Monastery in Bago, who will be conferred the title of Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru, delivered an oration followed by Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture U Ko Ko explained religious affairs.

SAC Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing presented the title of Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru and related accessories to Presiding Sayadaw Baddanta Gandhama of Myoma Monastery of Bago Region.

SAC Vice-Chairman Vice-Senior General Soe Win presented Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru title to Presiding



The Vice-Senior General presents Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru title to Sayadaw Baddanta Aeindaka.

Sayadaw Baddanta Aeindaka of Nyaung Kan Monastery in Chanmyathazi Township of Magwe Region while General Mya Tun Oo to Sayadaw Baddanta Thuriya of Maha Weikza Theikpan Monastery of Monywa in Sagaing Region and Admiral Tin Aung San to Sayadaw Baddanta Malar Bhivamsa of Aungmye Thayar Wun Min Gyi Monastery in Yesagyo of Magway Region.

Abhidhaja Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotika title and related accessories were conferred to Sayadaw Baddanta Thumana of Zwe Kite Monastic School in Kawa of Bago Region by General Maung Maung Kyaw; to Sayadaw Baddanta Sanda Thiri of Sanda Yone Pariyatti Monastery in Tatkon of Nay Pyi Taw Council by Lt-Gen Moe Myint Tun; to Sayadaw Baddanta Canda Vera of Taung Taw Ya Monastery of Ngapu Taw in Ayeyawady by Mahn Nyein Maung, and Sayadaw

Baddanta Pinyavamsa of Shwe Pariyatti Monastery in Mawlamyine of Mon State by Daw Aye Nu Sein.

Afterwards, SAC member U Mounng Har presented Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru title and related accessories to Aung Mingala Monastery Sayadaw Dr Baddanta Pinya Sarmi in MraukU of Rakhine State while U Sai Lone Saing to Sayadaw Baddanta Sujhanar Bhivamsa of Moe Kaung Monastery in Chanayethazan Township of Mandalay Region, Dr Banyar Aung Moe to Sayadaw Baddanta Vasehta of Phet Pin Aine Monastery in Thingangyun Township of Yangon Region, SAC Secretary Lt-Gen Aung Linn Dway to Sayadaw Baddanta Jotika of Yadana Beikman Chantha Gyi of Mandalay and SAC Joint-Secretary Lt-Gen Ye Win Oo to Sayadaw Baddanta Veluriya of Min Kyaung Monastery in Myittha of Mandalay Region.



Mahn Nyein Maung presents Abhidhaja Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotika title to Sayadaw Baddanta Canda Vera.

Similarly, Abhidhaja Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotika title and accessories were presented to Sayadaw Baddanta Sudanra of Ashe Kyaung Monastery in Kyauktan of Yangon Region by Union Supreme Court Chief Justice U Tun Tun Oo, to Sayadaw Baddanta Saddhiya of Shwe Thu Won Monastery in Thingangyun of Yangon Region by Constitutional Tribunal Chairman U Than Kyaw, to Sayadaw Baddanta Kumara of Zeya Theikdi in Insein Township of Yangon Region by UEC Chairman U Thein Soe.

Then, Union Minister Lt-Gen Soe Htut presented Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru title and related accessories to Sayadaw Baddanta Thawma of Mani Yadana Monastery in Sittway of Rakhine State while Union Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin to Sayadaw Baddanta Visuta in Nigawdaryone Nyaung Pin Thar Monastery

in Patheingyi Township of Aye-yarwady Region, Union Minister Lt-Gen Tun Tun Naung to Sayadaw Baddanta Gandha Marlar Bhivamsa of Alal Taw Ya San Pya Monastery in Bahan Township of Yangon Region, Union Minister U Win Shein to Sayadaw Dr Baddanta Aggisa of Pali Kayi Monastery in Thakayta Township of Yangon Region.

Then, SAC Chairman and his wife and the audiences listened to the sermon of State Sangha Maha Nayaka Thanlyin Min Kyaung Pahtamapyan monastery patron Agga Maha Pandita Agga Maha Jotikadhaja Dr Baddanta Candima Bhivamsa and shared merit for the donations made.

During the ceremony, a total of 13 Sayadaws were conferred with the title of Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru and 7 Sayadaws with Abhidhaja Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotika for the year 2021. — MNA

Parade of 76th Anniversary Armed Forces Day held

State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services
Senior General Maha Thray Sithu Min Aung Hlaing delivers address

FROM PAGE-1



The military parade columns seen marching in the parade ground.



The artillery column.



The missiles column.



The Air Force.



The Navy.

Retired Tatmadaw senior officers paid obeisance on 76th Armed Forces Day

THE families of the Tatmadaw Armed Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force) paid obeisance to the retired Tatmadaw senior officers, who attended the 76th Armed Forces Day parade yesterday afternoon in Nay Pyi Taw.

Senior officers and wives from the Office of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces (Army, Navy and Air) led by Coordinating Commander (Army, Navy and Air) General Maung Maung Aye and his wife attended the ceremony to pay tribute to the Tatmadaw senior officers and wives.

On behalf of the State Ad-

ministration Council's Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Coordinating Commander (Army, Navy and Air) General Maung Maung Aye addressed the ceremony.

On behalf of the retired Tatmadaw officers, General Thura Saw Phyu (retired) and Lt-Gen Tun Kyi (retired) gave remarks after receiving the attendees' obeisance.

The Coordinating Commander (Army, Navy and Air) and the attended Tatmadaw officials respectfully presented the gifts to the retired senior Tatmadaw officers.—MNA



Tatmadaw families are paying obeisance to retired senior officers yesterday.

Bring the public train service back on track

PUBLIC transport system and electrification are two major needs for the daily life of the people.

The coronavirus pandemic has jeopardized the long-term health of the public transit systems that provide a crucial circulatory system for towns and cities— particularly for lower-income residents who depend on trains and buses to get to work, the market or the doctor.

Public transportation services are essential for the smooth flow of goods and trading, which people rely on for their livelihood.

lower-income people living in outskirts of the city are facing inconvenience.

Hence, those who fail to do their duty during this emergency period should understand that they are violating the civil service law, and it is worth facing the action under the law. Those who lead the CDM will also face legal action. Those who are still absent are urged to return to their units and to perform their duty.

Meanwhile, as there will be no immediate end to the lingering effects of the pandemic, authorities concerned need to ensure trains resume in accordance with the COVID-19 health guidelines.

It's essential that the most important public transit service must be put on track.

Contagious and concerning: What we know about Covid-19 variants

SEVERAL coronavirus variants with the potential to be more transmissible have caused global concern over whether existing vaccines will still protect the world from a virus that is constantly mutating.

Here's what we know about them and what this implies for the Covid-19 pandemic.

How many variants?

Viruses continually mutate as tiny errors are introduced each time they replicate. The SARS-CoV-2 virus is no different, and has already undergone several thousand mutations since it emerged in humans in late 2019.

Of the current known variants, three are particularly worrying: those initially detected in southeast England, South Africa and in travellers from Brazil arriving in Japan.

They circulate respectively in 125, 75 and 41 countries, according to a recent update from the World Health Organization.

It has designated them "variants of concern" because of their increased transmissibility and / or virulence, which worsens an epidemic and makes it more difficult to control.

There are also several "variants of interest" -- first identified in Scotland, the United States and Brazil -- under surveillance because of potentially problematic genetic characteristics.

Finally, many other variants are circulating, which are being tracked by the scientific community through genetic sequencing.

"The coming weeks and months will tell us whether they fall into the worrying category of variants that spread rapidly, or if they will remain as variants that circulate weakly," Etienne Simon-Loriere, head of viral evolution at France's Pasteur Institute, told AFP.

All variants are categorised according to the mutations they have acquired. Each occupies its own spot in the genetic family tree of SARS-CoV-2.

It's a tree that is constantly growing branches. Unlike events like viruses



The SARS-CoV-2 virus has already undergone several thousand mutations since it emerged in humans in late 2019. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

themselves, variants do not have a recognised international naming system, so their official titles tend to be somewhat technical.

For example, the strain that appeared in England is called 501YV1 or VOC202012 / 01 and belongs to the line B.1.1.7.

Given this, people have resorted to the snappier terms "English variant", "South African variant" and so on, although this has caused concerns that certain countries will be stigmatised.

More contagious?

Viruses normally accumulated mutations over time so the appearance of variants is not at all surprising.

Most of these changes will not have "a direct benefit to the virus or other public health impacts", according to the WHO.

It all depends on the mutations they carry. The English, South African and Brazilian variants all share a particular mutation -- named N501Y -- that is thought to increase infectiousness.

The mutation occurs on the virus' spike protein, which almost certainly makes it more effective at binding with human receptor cells.

And the South African and Brazilian variants carry another mutation, E484K, suspected

of reducing the immunity acquired either by a past infection (with therefore an increased possibility of reinfection), or by vaccines.

The three "variants of concern" are all understood to be more infectious.

The WHO estimates that the English variant is between 36 percent to 75 percent more contagious, while the South African strain is thought to be 1.5 times more transmissible.

It said data for the Brazil variant, known as P.1, is still preliminary, but a recent study of health data in the city of Manaus where the variant has spread widely had suggested it could be 2.5 times more contagious than previous strains.

For the moment estimates of transmissibility are largely based on observations about how fast a variant spreads.

But given that infection rates depend on a variety of factors such as social distancing measures, it can be difficult to quantify the potential increase in transmissibility.

Several teams of researchers around the world are also analysing the biological characteristics of these variants, to investigate the mechanics of infection.

"There are several hypotheses to study. Perhaps the viral load is higher, or that the

than the currently recommended 10 days after symptom onset may be needed," the researchers concluded.

But it will take several weeks or even months to get definitive answers.

More dangerous?

British authorities said in January that the strain that emerged in England was up to 40 percent more deadly, based on a number of studies in the UK.

One of these, which was published in the BMJ medical journal in March, found that the variant was 64 per cent more deadly than pre-existing strains.

For 1,000 cases detected, the English variant causes 4.1 deaths, against 2.5 for the classic coronavirus, it found.

Additionally, the WHO estimates that the South African variant "increases the risk of death in hospital by 20 per cent", based on research in the country.

Are vaccines still effective?

Several studies have shown that while vaccines maintain their effectiveness against the English variant, they may have a weaker effect against the South African and Brazilian strains, because of the E484K

mutation.

However, scientists say that does not mean that they are not effective at all.

Also, these studies focus on a single response of the body after vaccination -- the production of antibodies.

They do "not assess other types of potential immunity, such as memory T- and B-cell activity," said a group of US specialists, including government expert Anthony Fauci, in an article recently published in the journal Jama.

Meanwhile, manufacturers are working on updated vaccines, tailored to the variants.

Moderna announced in March that it was testing a new generation of vaccine in a clinical trial to evaluate their effectiveness against the South African variant.

As long as case figures remain high globally, the chances of significant mutations will also stay elevated.

This is why, experts say, it is crucial to vaccinate as many people as quickly as possible in order to limit the risk of new variants emerging. So measures such as distancing and mask wearing will continue to be vital, even as more and more people receive a vaccine.

SOURCE: AFP



Fabric face masks are displayed for sale at a store in Madrid. PHOTO: AFP

Request to health workers

1. It is appreciated for the strenuous efforts of the medical doctors, nurses, medical experts and other health workers at the respective departments under the Ministry of Health and Sports at the front-line in the fight against prevention, containment and treatment of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

2. As the vaccination programme of COVID-19 is being conducted for the public and the real-time healthcare services are required for the people, all the staff members at the respective departments under the Ministry of Health and Sports are strongly urged to return to their duties with taking the well-being of patients into consideration.

Ministry of Health and Sports
8 February 2021

သတင်းစာတစ်ပြည်သူများအနေဖြင့် မြန်မာ့အလင်း ကြော်ငြာ The Global New Light of Myanmar ရောင်းခွဲသတင်းစာများ မှာယူဖတ်ရှုလိုခြင်းနှင့် သတင်းစာများရောက်ရှိမှု မရှိခြင်းတို့ကြောင့် အခက်အခဲများဖြစ်ပေါ်ပါက အောက်ဖော်ပြပါ ဖုန်းနံပါတ်များသို့ ဆက်သွယ်နိုင်ပါသည်-

- သတင်းနှင့်စာမယ်ဒီယံဦးစီးဌာန(ရုံးချုပ်)၊ ဧပြီပြည်တော်၊ ဖုန်း-၀၅၅-၂၅၀၀၀၀၀
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- The Global New Light of Myanmar (ရန်ကင်း)၊ ဖုန်း-၀၁၀-၉၅၅၅၅၅၅၊ ၀၅-၄၄၀၀၀၀၀၀
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Step up in police checks on travellers amid 'critical' virus situation



The French government announced increased police checks on Friday to enforce travel restrictions in place in Paris and several other regions as coronavirus cases continue to soar around the country. **PHOTO: AFP**

THE French government announced increased police checks on Friday to enforce travel restrictions in place in Paris and several other regions as coronavirus cases continue to soar around the country.

Checks at train stations, airports and motorway toll booths will "increase from today", the prime minister's office said, describing the situation as "critical" with the arrival of a third wave of infections.

The move came after France placed three more de-

partments in limited lockdown, with around 20 million people, including those in the Paris region, prohibited from travelling further than 10 kilometres (six miles) from home except for essential reasons. There is also a nightly curfew in place nationwide starting at 7:00 pm.

Daily cases in France have nearly doubled since the start of the month, reaching over 45,000 on Thursday, with the number of people in intensive care now standing at 4,766, not far from the peak during the second wave in November. — AFP ■

Madrid: Haven for fun-starved Europeans but locals can't leave

WITH bars and restaurants open and its 11:00 pm curfew, Madrid has become a highly-prized haven for hoards of leisure-starved Europeans in a reality that has rankled residents who remain restricted from leaving the region.

"We left France to come to Madrid and it's completely surreal to drink a beer on a terrace when Paris is in lockdown.. it's magical!" smiles Mathieu de Carvalho, a 22-year-old student who landed in the city just two hours ago.

Visiting with three friends, he raises his glass, the tables around him packed with people on a warm spring evening.

Since the end of the first national lockdown in June 2020, Madrid has kept its doors firmly

open to foreign visitors with a steady stream of tourists coming to enjoy the sense of normality at its museums, bars, restaurants and theatres.

And it's not only in the Spanish capital.

With Easter on the horizon, large numbers of German tourists are expected to fly into Mallorca in the coming days, one of their favourite haunts in the Balearic Islands.

But it's a reality which has annoyed and angered Spaniards who are banned from leaving their own regions until April 9 to avoid a resurgence of Covid infections over Holy Week, a hugely popular holiday when people routinely travel to see family. —AFP ■



Compared with much of the rest of Europe, the Covid-19 atmosphere in Spain feels like a fiesta. **PHOTO: AFP**

Louvre puts entire collection online



A year of pandemic-related shutdowns has seen an explosion in visits to the Louvre's website. **PHOTO: AFP**

THE Louvre museum in Paris said Friday it has put nearly half a million items from its collection online for the public to visit free of charge.

As part of a major revamp of its online presence, the world's most-visited museum has created a new database of 482,000 items at collections.louvre.fr with more than three-quarters already labelled with information and pictures.

It comes after a year of pandemic-related shutdowns that has seen an explosion in visits to its main website, louvre.fr, which has also been given a major makeover.

"It's a step that has been in preparation for several years with the aim of serving the general public as well as researchers. Accessibility is at the heart of our mission,"

said president-director Jean-Luc Martinez.

The new database includes not only items on public display in the museum but also those in storage, including at its new state-of-the-art facility at Lievin in northern France.

The platform also includes the Delacroix museum, which is run by the Louvre, as well as sculptures from the neighbouring Tuileries gardens and works recovered from Germany since the end of the war in 1945 that are waiting to be restored to the families from which they were looted.

The museum announced earlier this month that it would intensify its efforts to restore items looted from Jewish families by the Nazi regime. —AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Thailand to lift tourist quarantine for popular beach island

THAILAND on Friday announced plans for an experimental quarantine-free model in ultra-popular beach destination Phuket, as the kingdom attempts to resuscitate its pandemic-battered economy.

Thailand has imposed massive restrictions visitor arrivals in order to stem coronavirus, but discouraging tourism has led to its economy recording the worst performance since the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

The impact has reverberated across the country's services sectors -- bruising entertainment, retail, hotels and restaurants. —AFP ■

Kenya imposes Nairobi lockdown, closes schools

KENYAN President Uhuru Kenyatta on Friday placed Nairobi and several nearby counties under a partial lockdown, and closed schools and bars in those areas, in an effort to contain the spread of Covid-19.

In a national address, Kenyatta ordered "that there shall be cessation of all movement by road, rail, or air into and out of the disease infected area... effective midnight tonight" in Nairobi and four other counties where cases are rising fast. —AFP ■

Ireland starts mandatory hotel travel quarantine

IRELAND began enforcing a mandatory hotel quarantine for travellers arriving in the state from 33 "high risk" countries on Friday in a bid to quash the spread of new coronavirus variants.

The government website said "all passengers arriving into Ireland from designated states... are now required to pre-book accommodation in a designated quarantine facility".

The quarantine -- announced by the government two months ago -- came into effect at 4:00 am (0400 GMT), the site confirmed. —AFP ■

EU regulator backs Pfizer vaccine storage at regular freezer temperature

VIALS of Pfizer/BioNTech's coronavirus vaccine can be kept at normal freezer temperatures for short periods instead of in ultra-cold storage, the EU's drugs regulator said Friday.

The change would help the "rapid roll-out" of vaccines across Europe, where vaccination campaigns are stalling due to supply and logistical issues, the European Medicines Agency said in a statement.

The EU regulator had "given a positive opinion to allow transportation and storage of vials of this vaccine at temperatures between -25 to -15 degrees Celsius (-13 to 5 Fahrenheit)...

heit)... for a one-off period of two weeks."

The EMA said this was the "temperature of standard pharmaceutical freezers"

"This is an alternative to the long-term storage of the vials at a temperature between -90 to -60 degrees Celsius in special freezers" the Amsterdam-based watchdog added in a statement.

"It is expected to facilitate the rapid roll-out and distribution of the vaccine in the EU by reducing the need for ultra-low temperature cold storage conditions throughout the supply chain." —AFP ■



Pfizer vaccine offers 97 per cent protection in preventing symptomatic disease. PHOTO: AFP

Pandemic fuels travel boom — in virtual reality



This illustration picture shows a virtual road trip on a computer and the travel application logo from Alcove, a platform for virtual reality travel which has gained momentum during the pandemic. PHOTO: AFP

JEM Jenkins Jones was stuck at home in Wales for much of the past year amid pandemic lockdowns but managed to fulfill a promise to her 10-year-old daughter to see the northern lights from Iceland and South Africa's game reserves -- in virtual reality. "She was amazed," she said, calling the VR travel experiences "a lifesaver for us."

Strict lockdowns and travel limitations during the pandemic have sparked fresh interest in immersive virtual travel experiences, which have become more accessible and affordable with new apps and VR hardware. Even those confined to their homes can take a virtual jaunt to Machu Picchu, the rainforests of Borneo or a road trip across the United States in a convertible.

Data on VR travel usage is limited but developers have

seen surging interest since the pandemic hit.

"It has been skyrocketing," said Cezara Windrem, creator of the Alcove VR platform at AARP Innovation Labs. "We're getting more adoption every month." Alcove enables users to visit exotic locales such as Australia's coral reef or the island of Malta, while adding a "shared" experience which enables people to interact and even "lead" a family member without the technical skills to navigate in a VR headset.

"We've heard from a lot of people who discovered Alcove and decided buy a headset for their elderly family members," Windrem said.

This allows for shared travel even during a lockdown and other kinds of experiences such as "playing chess with someone on the other side of the planet." —AFP ■

Vaccine leader Chile wrestles with rising Covid infection rate

CHILE is a world leader in its coronavirus vaccination program and has already given at least one dose to almost a third of its population.

By Thursday the narrow South American nation, hemmed in by the Andes mountains and the Pacific ocean, had given more than six million people a single dose and 3.1 million both doses, including most over-70s.

And yet that same day, the government put more than 80 per cent of the country's 19 million people in lockdown.

With new virus variants, believed to be more contagious, spreading across the continent, cases have been soaring in Chile despite its vaccination drive.

On Thursday it passed 7,000 new cases in the previous 24 hours: the second highest daily figure recorded.

"They are phenomena that run on totally different tracks,"

Darwin Acuna, the president of Chile's society of intensive medicine, told AFP about the seeming disconnect between high vaccination and contagion rates.

President Sebastian Pinera has urged the country to make "a last effort" and authorities expect the vaccination push to start bearing fruit next month.

Health Minister Enrique Paris said the lockdown "is tough but necessary," particularly in the Santiago metropolitan area -- the most populous in Chile.

The country has recorded more than 950,000 infections and over 22,500 deaths from Covid.

'More aggressive' wave

Chile began vaccinating health care workers on December 24 and from February 3 it started with the general population, initially the over 90s. —AFP ■



A soldier checks a pedestrian at a checkpoint in the Chilean capital Santiago as the country imposes a Covid-19 lockdown -- despite encouraging vaccination rates. PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

German business looks past virus to start spring upbeat

GERMAN business confidence brightened considerably in March, a key survey showed Friday, despite the third wave of the pandemic raging through Europe's top economy.

The Ifo institute's monthly confidence barometer, based on a survey of 9,000 companies, jumped 3.9 points from February to 96.6 points.

"It was the best score since June 2019," Ifo president Clemens Fuest said in a statement. —AFP ■

"100 per cent Brazilian" vaccine announced

SAO PAULO'S Butantan biomedical institute announced on Friday it is developing a "100 per cent Brazilian" vaccine against Covid-19 and expects to start using it in July.

Butantan is the largest vaccine producer in Brazil and makes the CoronaVac shot produced by Chinese firm Sinovac -- the most widely used against the pandemic in the South American country.

ButanVac will also be produced in Thailand and Vietnam and distributed to poorer countries. —AFP ■

Italy to restrict anti-vax health workers

ITALIAN Prime Minister Mario Draghi said on Friday the government would take action against healthcare workers who refuse to be vaccinated against coronavirus, following new reports of infections in hospitals. "The government intends to intervene," Draghi told a press conference. "It's absolutely not good that unvaccinated workers are in contact with sick people."

The prime minister said Justice Minister Marta Cartabia was preparing regulation, likely a decree, but the details have not yet been determined. On Thursday, Liguria region president Giovanni Toti called for a national law after at least 12 people were infected with coronavirus at two hospitals in the area due to two unvaccinated health workers. —AFP ■

UK, Chinese scientists confirm Beijing's air quality has improved significantly



Beijing's air quality has improved significantly in the last few years thanks to the emission reductions following the implementation of clean air actions. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

BEIJING'S air quality has improved significantly in the last few years thanks to the emission reductions following the implementation of clean air actions, according to the latest report released by the Atmospheric Pollution and Human Health (APHH) in a Chinese Megacity (APHH-Beijing) programme that unites British and Chinese scientists.

The APHH-Beijing program was funded by Britain's Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and Medical Research

Council (MRC) as part of the UK-China Research and Innovation Partnership Fund, and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC).

A team of more than 150 scientists spent five years conducting one of the largest air pollution field campaigns in Beijing, generating new insight into air pollution and human health using novel observational and modelling tools, said a press statement on the website of the University of Birmingham.

The scientists have found

that sources of key air pollutants in the city center, including fine particles, volatile organic compounds (VOC), and black carbon are much lower than predicted basing on the still relatively high concentrations in 2016 and 2017.

"We confirmed that Beijing's air quality has improved significantly in recent years," said Professor Roy Harrison, lead UK principal investigator of the largest project within APHH-Beijing (AIRPOLL), from the University of Birmingham. —Xinhua ■

Guatemala's Pacaya volcano continues erupting after 50 days

THE Pacaya volcano close to Guatemala's capital is maintaining "high levels" of activity with strong eruptions, ash clouds and rivers of lava spewing out, officials said on Friday.

The 2,500-metre (8,200-foot) volcano that lies 25 kilometers to the south of Guatemala City has been erupting for 50 days, damaging plantations in the path of the lava.

Pacaya is expelling ash up to 500 metres from its crater, located 2.5 kilometres southwest of the cone, the volcanology institute said in a statement.

Falling ash was registered in the El Rodeo and El Patrocinio communities, the institute said, adding that "the volcanic activity is considered at high levels."

The activity has produced a lava flow 2.2 kilometres long

on the west flank of the volcano.

The national disaster coordination body said the lava had caused "fire and the destruction of coffee and avocado plantations."

Despite the spectacular eruptions, inhabitants of the surrounding villages have chosen to stay at home.

The civil protection body has asked authorities to prohibit people from approaching either the crater or the lava flows due to the risk of falling debris.

On Tuesday, a change in wind direction forced the closure of the country's only international airport for almost 24 hours due to ash.

A powerful eruption of the Pacaya volcano in May 2010 killed a television journalist covering the event. —AFP ■

US authorities probing alarming spike in manatee deaths

US authorities are investigating an alarming increase in manatee deaths in Florida, after the bodies of more than 500 of the giant marine mammals have been found so far this year -- 349 more than died in all of 2020.

Nearly 540 dead manatees were found in Florida waters just between January 1 and March 19, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

That is almost as many manatee deaths as were counted in the last three years combined. About 175 manatees usually die in Florida every year. The FWC said in a statement Wednesday that the situation could now be classed as an Unusual Mortality Event (UME). "Preliminary information indicates that a reduction in food availability is a contributing factor," the commis-



A manatee feeds on cabbage in the aquarium at the Vincennes zoological gardens in Paris on April 4, 2019. **PHOTO: AFP**

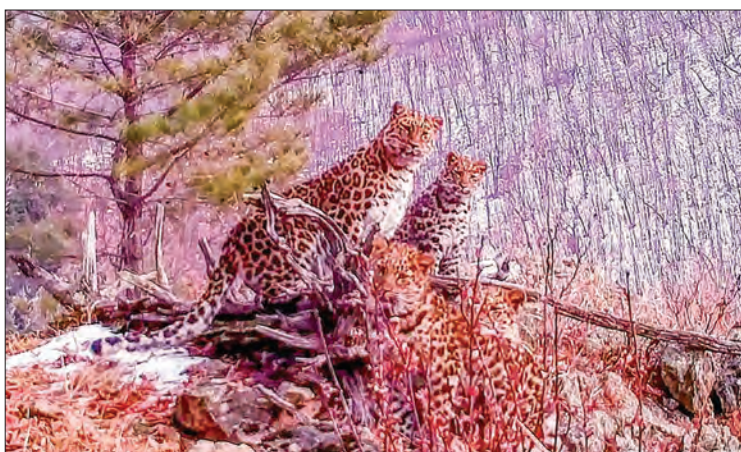
sion's statement said.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, a UME is defined as event that "involves a significant die-off of any marine mammal population; and demands immediate response," in accordance

with the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

"The FWC will continue to coordinate closely with our federal partners, participate in the investigative team and conduct analyzes into the cause of the UME," the agency said. —AFP ■

Russia hails rare sighting of Amur leopard mum with cubs



The video footage shows the feline family standing on top of a hill in the Land of the Leopard National Park. **PHOTO: AFP**

RUSSIAN conservationists hailed Friday a rare sighting of an Amur leopard mother with three cubs in the Far East as proof of the efficiency of the country's efforts to boost the population of the endangered species. Scientists in a Russian national park located in the Primorye region on the border with China obtained the stunning images using a remote camera trap.

The video footage shows the feline family standing on top of a hill in the Land of the Leopard National Park.

In the video, the young mother, identified as Leo 117F, is seen spotting a mystery animal and then leaving the scene, apparently walking closer towards it.

Soon her cubs also discover the animal and begin to watch their mother's interaction with the "intruder" intently, the park said. None appeared to be afraid.

Ivan Rakov, spokesman for the national park, said it was the first time that Leo 117F, who is believed to be four years old, had been caught on video with her cubs.

"We've discovered that she has been able to raise a family," Rakov told AFP from the Pacific port city of Vladivostok.

"This is her first litter."

He said raising three cubs at once in Russia's taiga was no mean feat and required a "lot of space and a lot of food." —AFP ■

COVID-19 cuts jobs, boosts stocks, widening economic gap in Japan

THE coronavirus pandemic has brought significant economic impacts in Japan, with the widening gap between the rich and the poor being a prime example.

The pandemic has cost many jobs, especially in the dining and travel industries, while stock and other asset markets are booming on the back of global monetary easing.

At Isetan department store in Tokyo's Shinjuku district, which posts the highest sales of all department stores in Japan, a jewelry buyer calls strong sales last summer "mysterious."

"Despite a lack of exuberance at the store, we experienced very high sales," the buyer said, recalling the situation after the government lifted the country's first state

of emergency over COVID-19 last May.

Main customers were the store's wealthy regulars and the so-called "new rich," including young managers of information technology firms and YouTubers who increased their earnings by taking advantage of the pandemic.

Such customers apparently had already chosen what to shop during the stay-at-home period and just wanted a final check of shapes and weights of the goods at the store.

Jewellery worth several million yen was sold on the fly, the buyer said.

Sales of luxury import cars priced over 10 million yen (\$92,000) and higher were also brisk. Sales totaled 22,712 units in 2020, surpassing year-earlier levels.

"Buying things whenever



Consultation service offered for people facing economic hardship in Tokyo on Dec. 31, 2020. PHOTO: KYODO

they want is what we call rich people," said a person involved in the auto industry. "Situations around them do not necessarily affect them."

Massive stimulus and

monetary easing measures by Japan, the United States, Europe and elsewhere to bolster pandemic-hit economies have sharply boosted asset prices.

—Kyodo New ■

Germany ratifies €750bn EU virus recovery fund



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. PHOTO: AFP

THE German Constitutional Court on Friday abruptly stopped Europe's biggest economy from ratifying a 750-billion-euro (\$885 billion) EU coronavirus recovery fund, after a last-minute legal challenge was filed against the move.

Following approval by both the upper and lower house of parliament, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier was due to sign off on the fund to complete Germany's formal ratification process.

But five individuals filed a challenge, prompting the court to decide that the ratification "shall not be executed pending the decision of the Federal Constitutional Court on the temporary injunction application".

The court gave only the first alphabet of each of the challengers' names. The far-right AfD party had vowed to fight passage of the EU fund.

Lawmakers' approval of the huge fund marked a breach in a German taboo against pooled debt.

German leaders have argued that it was necessary to get the bloc back on the road to growth after a pandemic that has ravaged the economy.

"The vote is a clear signal for European solidarity and strength," said Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, stressing that it was in Germany's interest that the entire bloc emerged strong from the crisis. —AFP ■

UK retail sales attempt recovery from lockdown slump: ONS

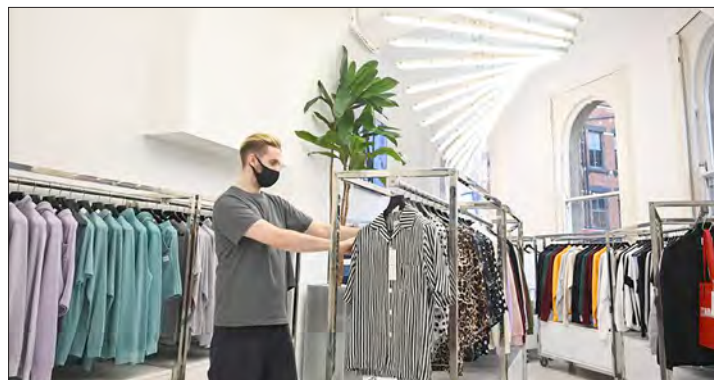
BRITISH retail sales recovered somewhat in February, helped by demand for home improvements and garden items from locked-down consumers, official data showed on Friday. Sales by volume rose 2.1 per cent in February from January, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

The ONS noted that sales "only partly recovered" last month after an 8.2-per cent slump in January on the back of England's third round of virus curbs.

Sales of household goods jumped 16.1 per cent in February. "Anecdotal evidence from household goods stores

suggested that the monthly growth... could be attributed to the purchase of DIY products as consumers continue to improve their homes during lockdown," the ONS said. "Retailers also noted that there was evidence of consumers buying outdoor products earlier in preparation for the easing of lockdown restrictions, particularly the ability to meet friends and relatives in private gardens as the weather improves".

Nevertheless, overall sales remain 3.7 per cent lower than the same month a year earlier, just before the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. —AFP ■



Non-essential retail, such as clothing sales, suffered the largest slump in February, with volumes down 50.4% compared with a year earlier. PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Australia threatens WTO action as China hikes duty on wine

AUSTRALIA'S trade minister threatened to take China to the World Trade Organization on Saturday over its "unjustifiable" decision to hike duties on Australian wine imports for up to five years. In the latest salvo between Beijing and Canberra, China's commerce ministry announced levies ranging from 116.2 per cent to 218.4 per cent would be slapped on Australian wine imports from Sunday.

Trade Minister Dan Tehan said the tariffs meant it was "basically impossible" for Australian wine to be competitive in the Chinese market. "This decision which has been taken by the Chinese government is extremely disappointing and completely unjustifiable," Tehan told reporters in Melbourne. —AFP ■

BOJ to begin feasibility study on digital currency in April

THE Bank of Japan said Friday it will begin a feasibility study on digital currency next month, accelerating preparation for the issuance of its own virtual currency following swift moves by China and some other countries to do the same.

Although the BOJ said it "currently has no plan to issue central bank digital currency," or CBDC, it will gear up preparation as part of its efforts to swiftly supply the virtual unit when needed. The central bank will first test the technical feasibility of the core functions and features required for the digital currency, which is expected to be used for cashless payments via smartphones or electronic cards.

"There is a reasonable possibility for CBDC to provide a means of payments and for such systems to become global standards," BOJ Executive Director Shinichi Uchida said Friday at the first meeting held online with participants of the experiment, including financial and fintech industry representatives. —AFP ■

Biden invites 40 world leaders, including PM Modi, to virtual climate summit

US President Joe Biden has invited 40 world leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to the Leaders' Summit on Climate to underscore the urgency and the economic benefits of stronger climate action, the White House said. The two-day summit will be held virtually on April 22-23 and will be telecasted live for public viewing.

"It will be a key milestone on the road to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) this November in Glasgow," the White House said on Friday.

Besides Modi, other leaders invited for the summit include Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Saudi Arabia King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Bhutanese



President Joe Biden is directing the U.S. to rejoin the international Paris Climate Agreement, which aims to cut global greenhouse gas emissions. Here, activists rally on Dec. 12, 2015. **PHOTO:AFP**

Prime Minister Lotay Tshering are the other two leaders from South Asia to be invited for the two-day mega conference on climate change.

The White House said a key objective of both the Leaders' Summit and the COP26 will be to catalyze efforts to keep limiting

warming 1.5 degree Celsius' goal within reach. The summit will also highlight examples of how enhanced climate ambition will create good paying jobs, advance innovative technologies and help vulnerable countries adapt to climate impacts, it added.

By the time of the summit,

the United States will announce an ambitious 2030 emissions target as its new Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement, the White House said.

In his invitation, Biden urged leaders to use the summit as an opportunity to outline how

their countries also will contribute to stronger climate ambition, it said.

The summit will reconvene the US-led Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate, which brings together 17 countries responsible for approximately 80 per cent of global emissions and global GDP. Biden also invited the heads of other countries that are demonstrating strong climate leadership, are especially vulnerable to climate impacts, or are charting innovative pathways to a net-zero economy. A small number of business and civil society leaders will also participate in the summit, the White House said.

Key themes of the summit will include galvanising efforts by the world's major economies to reduce emissions during this critical decade to keep a limit to warming of 1.5 degree Celsius within reach and mobilising public and private sector finance to drive the net-zero transition and to help vulnerable countries cope with climate impacts, it said. — **AFP** ■

Bangladesh deploys border guards after deadly anti-Modi protests

BANGLADESH has deployed border guards to help maintain order, a senior officer said Saturday after deadly protests by hardline Islamists against a visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi rocked the Muslim majority nation.

The violence, which began Friday at the main mosque in the capital Dhaka, spread to several key districts in the South Asian nation of 168 million, leaving five people dead and scores

injured.

Facebook has been restricted in the country, a company spokesman said after users complained they could not access the site since late Friday afternoon as images and reports of the violence were shared in social media.

A spokesman for the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), which also acts as a reserve paramilitary force to maintain law and order, said it had deployed

troops since Friday night.

"With the instructions of the home ministry and in aid of the civil administration, required number of BGB has been deployed in different districts of the country," Lieutenant Colonel Fayzur Rahman told AFP, without disclosing the numbers involved.

Rahman, who is the operations director of the force, said there had been no reports of violence after their deployment.

"Situation is normal," he said.

The disturbances came as Bangladesh marked 50 years of independence with rights groups calling for an end to growing authoritarianism including forced disappearances and extra-judicial killings.

Police said four bodies of members of Hefazat-e-Islam, a hardline Islamist group, were brought to Chittagong Medical College Hospital after violence erupted at Hathazari, a rural town where the group's main leaders are based.—**AFP** ■



Five people were killed Friday during clashes between police and activists of the Hifazat-e-Islam group protesting against Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh. **PHOTO:AFP**

3 Russian nuclear subs emerge from under Arctic ice for 1st time



Tula K-114 SSBN. **PHOTO:RUSSIAN MOD/FILE**

THREE nuclear-powered missile submarines broke thick ice and surfaced in the Arctic Ocean simultaneously for the first time in the history of the Russian Navy, Navy Commander-in-Chief Nikolai Yevmenov said Friday.

The submarines shattered 1.5-metre-thick ice and ascended to the frozen sea surface at the same time in an area with a radius of 300 metres, Yevmenov reported to Russian President Vladimir Putin via video link.

The maneuver was part of the "Umka-2021" (meaning

polar bear) comprehensive Arctic expedition that the Russian Navy has been carrying out in the Franz Josef Land archipelago since March 20.

More than 600 military and civilian personnel, and about 200 pieces of military and special equipment and weapons are involved in the expedition, Yevmenov said, adding that the "Umka-2021" includes 43 events, with 35 of them having been completed.

Two MiG-31 fighters flew past the geographic point of the North Pole with refueling in the air, he said.—**AFP** ■

US children's author Beverly Cleary dead at 104

AMERICAN children's author Beverly Cleary, the creator of iconic characters including Ramona Quimby and Henry Huggins, has died at 104, her publisher said Friday.

The librarian-turned-writer died on Thursday in Carmel, California, her home since the 1960s, Harper Collins Publishers said in a statement.

With titles like "Henry Huggins" (1950) and "Ramona and Her Father," (1978) beloved by generations of young readers, Cleary's works explored everyday life through the eyes of children. And she did it with wit and sympathy, touching on topics ranging

from lunchroom antics and sibling rivalries to a parent's job loss.

Cleary was inspired to start writing when "a little boy faced me rather ferociously across the circulation desk and said: 'Where are the books about kids like us?'" her publisher quoted her as saying. "I wanted to read about the sort of boys and girls that I knew in my neighbourhood and in my school," she told NPR in 1999.

"And in my childhood, many years ago, children's books seemed to be about English children, or pioneer children. And that wasn't what I wanted to read. And I think children like to find themselves in books." —AFP ■



Beverly Cleary (2nd R) is pictured with president George W. Bush (center) in this November 12, 2003 photo, along with other recipients of the National Medal of Art (from L) blues musician Buddy Guy, dancer Suzanne Farrell and director Ron Howard. PHOTO: AFP

Egypt train collision kills 32



Rescuers gather around the overturned wreckage of two passenger trains that collided in the Tahta district of southern Egypt, killing at least 32 people. PHOTO: AFP

A collision between two trains killed at least 32 people and left more than 160 injured Friday in southern Egypt, a country plagued by fatal rail accidents widely blamed on crumbling infrastructure and poor maintenance.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi pledged tough punishment for those responsible for the crash, which came as his government wrestles with another major transport challenge: a giant container ship blocking the Suez Canal.

Medical reinforcements were routed from Cairo and more than a hundred ambulances were mobilized to transport the injured to hospital from the scene in the Tahta district of Sohag province, 460 kilometres (285 miles) south of the capital.

The health ministry gave an updated casualty toll of at least 32 dead and 165 people hospitalised with injuries, 70

per cent of them fractures.

Dozens of technicians were working through Friday evening to remove five dislocated and damaged train wagons, an AFP correspondent on the scene said.

"We were at the mosque then a child came and told us (about the incident). We heard the collision, so we rushed and found the carnage," said one witness, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"The first ambulances arrived around half an hour after the explosion... there were children who removed (debris) using wooden ladders," the source, who spent the day helping the rescue workers, said.

Surveillance camera footage of the accident seen by AFP showed a carriage being violently thrown into the air in a cloud of dust when a speeding train rammed into another as it rolled slowly down the tracks. —AFP ■

Mexican child, 9, dies trying to enter US: border patrol

A nine-year-old Mexican child died while trying to cross the Rio Grande River into the United States, the Border Patrol said on Friday amid a surge in migrants seeking to enter the country.

The child was found together with a Guatemalan woman and her three-year-old, all unconscious and stranded on an island in the middle of the river which demarcates the US-Mexico border in Texas on March 20.

"Agents found the individuals and immediately began administering first aid while transporting the migrants to shore," the Border Patrol said in a statement that did not state the deceased child's gender.

The woman and the

three-year-old regained consciousness but the nine-year-old could not be revived.

The three, who were not identified, were some of the 500 migrants rescued from dangerous situations in the past five months as thousands attempt to cross the border every day.

A senior Border Patrol official said on Friday that the numbers continue to increase: some 6,000 undocumented migrants were caught on Thursday trying to enter the country. Unlike in the past, when most of those caught crossing the southern border illegally were single adults, most recently about half have been either in family units or as unaccompanied children. —AFP ■



Asylum seekers await transport by U.S. Border Patrol agents after their group of immigrants crossed the Rio Grande into Texas on March 25, 2021 in Hidalgo, Texas. PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Over 180 people trapped in Mozambique hotel after insurgent attack

MORE than 180 people including expatriate workers are trapped inside a hotel in a northern Mozambique town under siege by insurgents for three days, workers and security sources said Friday.

Several people were reportedly dead, according to witnesses and a rights group, after the attack in Palma near a liquefied natural gas site in Cabo Delgado province.

French oil giant Total is the principal investor in the \$20 billion (16.9 billion euros) project — Africa's largest — with six other international firms including ExxonMobil involved in the area.

Jihadist militants began a raid on the coastal town on Wednesday afternoon, forcing terrified residents to flee into surrounding forest as LNG and government workers sought shelter at the Amarula Palma hotel. —AFP ■

French football legend Thierry Henry quits social media over 'toxic' racism, abuse

FORMER French national team striker Thierry Henry has said he is quitting all social media until platforms do more to tackle racism and harassment, becoming the latest celebrity to scale down their online presence over abuse.

In a statement shared with his combined 14.8 million followers on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, the former Arsenal player said he would remove himself from all social media as of Saturday.

"The sheer volume of racism, bullying and resulting mental torture is too toxic to ignore," he wrote, calling for greater "accountability" online.

"It is far too easy to create an account, use it to bully and harass without consequence and still remain anonymous," he added. —AFP ■

FIFA to decide future hosts of Women's World Cup

THE global football body FIFA will decide the upcoming hosts for the Women's World Cup following a videoconference meeting held this week.

"Until now, the decision has been taken by the FIFA Council, most recently in June 2020 when

the hosting rights for the 2023 edition were awarded to Australia and New Zealand. As FIFA seeks to raise the profile of the women's game, this represents a significant step to bring the FIFA Women's World Cup in line with the flagship men's competition,

the FIFA World Cup," FIFA authorities said.

"The FIFA Council recognized that the highest priority in football is the health of the players, and therefore the discussion around the release of players for international duty must maintain

this perspective, especially as the public health situation develops around the world. The Bureau of the FIFA Council had extended to April 2021, the temporary amendments to the Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players regarding

the release of players for international duty, and FIFA, the confederations, and FIFA's member associations remain in dialogue with national authorities about exemptions from quarantine rules for national team players", the officials added. —GNLM

IOC slashes guest list for Tokyo Olympics



The number of guests at the Tokyo Olympics will be reduced as will non-essential staff, the International Olympic Committee said Friday, mirroring the decision by Japan to ban overseas spectators from attending the summer showpiece. **PHOTO: AFP**

THE number of guests at the Tokyo Olympics will be reduced as will non-essential staff, the International Olympic Committee said Friday, mirroring the decision by Japan to ban overseas spectators from attending the summer showpiece.

"The International Olympic Committee Executive Board has decided to grant accreditation only to people

who have essential and operational roles at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020," the IOC said in a statement.

"This will significantly reduce the number of accredited people at the Games.

It will be implemented by reducing a number of programmes, including the IOC Guest Programme."

The decision is a further consequence of staging the

Games during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Tokyo Games should have been held in 2020 but were put back a year due to the spread of the coronavirus. They will be staged in the Japanese capital from July 23 until August 8.

Friday's decision also affects the Paralympics which will also be held in Tokyo. —AFP ■

USA, Mexico eye Tokyo Olympic berths in CONCACAF semi-finals

THE United States and Mexico will look to seal Olympic berths Sunday when they headline the semi-finals of the qualifying tournament for North and Central America and the Caribbean.

The United States will take on Honduras and Mexico faces Canada in the semi-finals at Estadio Jalisco, with both finalists punching their tickets to the Tokyo Games. Mexico emerged as winners of Group A with a 1-0 victory over the USA on Wednesday. Both teams had beaten Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic in earlier group matches, making their rights only. But it was a sobering moment for a US squad trying

to get the country back into the Olympics for the first time since 2008. "The next game is the one we have to win," US manager Jason Kreis said after the Mexico defeat. "It's all still there for us. Nothing has changed." The US-Honduras contest is a rematch of the October 2015 qualification game won by Honduras 2-0. Honduras coach Miguel Falero said he expected a strong challenge from a US side determined to return to the Games, but Honduran midfielder Edwin Rodriguez was confident. "Nobody wants to miss these big events like the Olympic Games," Rodriguez said. "We have what it takes." —AFP ■



Mexico's Uriel Antuna, celebrating a goal in a victory over the United States, hopes to be celebrating a win over Canada on Saturday to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

UEFA to make Champions League reforms decision on Wednesday: European Leagues



UEFA has put forward plans for a new format from 2024 featuring one 36-team league replacing the current group stage. **PHOTO: AFP**

UEFA will decide next week on a revised format for the Champions League which will likely overhaul Europe's top football competition from 2024, European Leagues revealed on Friday.

Lars-Christer Olsson, the president of a body which brings together professional leagues and club associations from 30 European nations, told reporters that UEFA would make its decision "during

its executive committee on (Wednesday) March 31".

Olsson said the meeting will be preceded the previous day by a "club competitions commission" charged with defining the details of the reforms.

Among the potential changes are an increase of participating clubs from 32 to 36 and the end of the current group stage, in which teams are divided up into eight sets

of four.

The new pre-knockout stage would consist of one single table with clubs taking part in a so-called 'Swiss system' inspired by chess, in which teams play 10 matches instead of the current six. One of the four new entrants is expected to be a fourth team from France's Ligue 1, and one of the key issues regarding the new format is how to decide on the other three. —AFP ■