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Financial year should be set in conformity with the country: Senior General



State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing presides over the SAC meeting 12/2021 in Nay Pyi Taw on 7 June 2021.

AS the financial year term was changed, the government, businesspersons and farmers were not convenient in the work process, said State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at the 12/2021 SAC meeting at the SAC Chairman's Office in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning.

In his speech, the Senior

General said the Council has taken State responsibilities for more than four months but has been facing progress as well as some challenges. In recent days, peaceful and tranquil moves of local people were seen in Mon and Kayin states where the Senior General paid visits. During the visit, local people were delighted with renaming the Thanlwin Bridge (Chaungzon). Moreover, instructions were given to officials from

states to provide assistance to local farmers to have local food sufficiency and surplus to increase income and systematically cultivate the crops for raising the per-acre yield of crops.

The financial year of the State was set by the previous government from 1 October to 30 September. Being an agro-based country, Myanmar's financial year was set depending on the yield of crops and taxes.

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Moreover, instructions were given to officials from states to provide assistance to local farmers to have local food sufficiency and surplus to increase income and systematically cultivate the crops for raising the per-acre yield of crops.

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Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Nine Objectives

1. Political affairs

- (a) To build a Union based on democracy and federalism, through a disciplined and genuine multiparty democratic system that is fair and just.
- (b) To emphasize the achievement of enduring peace for the entire nation in line with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).
- (c) To continue implementing the principle of peaceful co-existence among countries through an independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy.

2. Economic affairs

- (a) To enhance production based on agriculture and livestock through modern techniques and strengthen all-round development in other sectors of the economy.

- (b) To develop a stable market economy and promote international investment in order to enhance the economic development of the entire National people.
- (c) To promote and support local businesses to create employment opportunities and increase domestic production.

3. Social affairs

- (a) To ensure a strong and dynamic Union spirit, the genuine spirit of patriotism.
- (b) To respect and promote the customs and traditions of all National peoples and preserve and safeguard their cultural heritage and national characteristics.
- (c) To enhance the health, fitness and education quality of the entire nation.

Five-Point Road Map of the State Administration Council

1. The Union Election Commission will be reconstituted and its mandated tasks, including the scrutiny of voter lists, shall be implemented in accordance with the law.
2. Effective measures will be taken with added momentum to prevent and manage the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Actions will be taken to ensure the speedy recovery of businesses from the impact of COVID-19.
4. Emphasis will be placed on achieving enduring peace for the entire nation in line with the agreements set out in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.
5. Upon accomplishing the provisions of the state of emergency, free and fair multiparty democratic elections will be held in line with the 2008 Constitution, and further work will be undertaken to hand over State duties to the winning party in accordance with democratic standards.

Goods and foods flow between Ayeyawady and Yangon regions

CONSUMER goods and foods are flowing via waterway between Ayeyawady Region and Yangon, the economic hub of Myanmar.

Shipping between the two regions has declined when road transport has become more convenient and efficient. The inland waterway freight and tourism sector are still active in Ayeyawady Region, where there are many rivers.

“Rice is mainly sent to Yangon from Ayeyawady Region and various foods and consumer goods from Yangon to Ayeyawady Region.

“Waterway is important for both of the regions as there are places that are accessible through waterway only,” said U Thein Naing Oo from a shipping association.

As boats and ships need to arrive before the opening of the Yangon commodity markets, night navigation needs to be faster, he added.

With over 60 single or double-deck vessels, consumer goods and a variety of foods are transported from Yangon to Patheingyi, Myaungmya, Pyaw, Bogale, Mawlamyinegyun, Kyaukse and Labutta townships in Ayeyawady Region, as well as oils, rice and water products from Ayeyawady Region to Yangon.

During the cold season, goods and tourism are booming in the waterways. Daily cargo and passenger vessels run smoothly from Yangon to Ayeyawady Region. — Nyein Thu/GNLM



With over 60 single or double-deck vessels, consumer goods and a variety of foods are transported from Yangon to Patheingyi, Myaungmya, Pyaw, Bogale, Mawlamyinegyun, Kyaukse and Labutta townships in Ayeyawady Region, as well as oils, rice and water products from Ayeyawady Region to Yangon.

All need to control the trade harming domestic production and local economy

ALL the people need to use the domestic products with patriotic spirit. All need to control the trade harming the domestic production and local economy.

(Excerpt from the speech to the Management Committee meeting made by the Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on 21 May 2021)

Financial year should be set in conformity ...

FROM PAGE-1

As the financial year term was changed, the government, businesspersons and farmers were not convenient in the work process. So, Council members need to discuss the amendment of the financial year in conformity with the country.

With regard to the outbreak of COVID-19, the infectious rate rise up now. Infection is seen in northern Chin State, western Sagaing Region and Taninthayi Region. So, some townships in Chin State were enlisted in the stay-at-home programme. People need to abide by the COVID-19 restrictions. It is necessary to mainly supervise the students and teachers to follow the COVID-19 restrictions not to cause infection.

Some schools cannot be reopened, especially in Sagaing Region. Schools are reopened for the interests of the State and individual students. Arrangements are being made to reopen the private schools.

Some riots can be seen in regions and states. Terror acts were committed against schools, administrative offices and specific persons based on a personal grudge.

Officials need to remind all regions and states to take

preventive measures against natural disasters in order to mitigate risks of natural disasters. The region and state national natural disaster management committees need to do immediate rescue and relief tasks when natural disasters fall.

The Senior General said he received the Minister of Foreign

on evasion of terrorism involved in the ASEAN consensus, the emergence of error voter lists in the 2020 multiparty general election, findings on inspection, situation to hold the election when the State is peaceful and stable, cooperation of Myanmar in the issue of humanitarian aid, and an interview given to Phoe-

industrial zone, formation of medial development body, and review on implementation of the hydropower project.

Secretary Lt-Gen Aung Lin Dwe reported on the designation of public holidays and change of financial year together with Council Members U Thein Nyunt, Dr Banyar Aung

take action against the offenders. Effective punishment will be sentenced in terror cases for ensuring the rule of law. Action will be taken against CDM participants who impose coercion and threat to current in-service personnel. Those are required to inform the officials about intimidation and threats.

The Senior General stressed the need to extend the cultivation of edible crops to ensure local oil sufficiency. These crops must be milled under modern technologies.

The Senior General expressed his attitude that fuel-fired power generation will not be encouraged in regions and states for meeting the electricity demand. Electricity must be generated from renewable energy to electrify the states on priority fully. The government is cooperating with the private sector in the flow of information so as to speed up the media response.

The Senior General then highlighted cultivation of cotton, local industries and small scale industries in regions and states, guarantee for the athletes who brought the prestige to the State, and public cooperation in taking security measures at schools. —MNA

Cases of bribery and corruption will be scrutinized to take action against the offenders. Effective punishment will be sentenced in terror cases for ensuring the rule of law. Action will be taken against CDM participants who impose coercion and threat to current in-service personnel.

Affairs of Brunei Darussalam, who is Special Envoy of the ASEAN Alternate Chairman, and the ASEAN Secretary-General, and discussed to take about preventive measures of COVID-19, the situation of any ASEAN countries which did not point out and release announcements to bar terror acts and explosions committed by unlawful CRPH and NUG in Myanmar based

nix Media.

The Council members discussed significant topics, including exposing and taking action against corruption committed beyond the authority not in line with the constitution, effective action to be taken against those who admit terrorists and supporters, the sufficiency of cooking oil in Rakhine State, the continuation of Hteekhee

Moe and Daw Aye Nu Sein.

In his response, the Senior General said it is necessary to consider the designation of office holidays for the people for the sake of the State, not to cause the loss for employers and employees. The financial year should be set in conformity with the country.

Cases of bribery and corruption will be scrutinized to

Cases of ex-president U Win Myint, ex-state counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and ex-chairman of Nay Pyi Taw Council heard at special court in Zabuthiri Township

THE special court in Zabuthiri Township heard the cases against ex-president U Win Myint, ex-state counsellor

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and ex-chairman of Nay Pyi Taw Council Dr Myo Aung yesterday. The township judge and

the township law officer coordinated with plaintiffs and defendants from the cases and their lawyers on the crime man-

agement programmes for hearing the cases. Before the crime management programme, U Win Myint, Daw Aung San Suu

Kyi, and Dr Myo Aung were allowed to meet their lawyers freely. —MNA

Union Minister for Foreign Affairs U Wunna Maung Lwin attends Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in celebration of 30th anniversary of dialogue relations

UNION Minister for Foreign Affairs U Wunna Maung Lwin participated in the Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in celebration of the 30th anniversary of dialogue relations, which was held on 7 June 2021 at 3:00 pm, in Chongqing, China. The Meeting was co-chaired by Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines, Teodoro Locsin Jr., and State Councilor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Wang Yi and the Meeting was participated by Foreign Ministers and High-Level delegation from the ASEAN Member States. The Secretary-General of ASEAN also attended the Meeting.

Following the Opening Remarks by China and the Philippines, Foreign Ministers reviewed the ASEAN-China dialogue relations in conjunction with the 30th anniversary of the partnership and later exchanged views on regional and international issues. At the Meeting, Union Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin, while thanking the Co-chairs Teodoro Locsin Jr., and Wang Yi for hosting this important meeting, highlighted



that the strategic partnership between ASEAN and China had been truly significant and that Myanmar was confident that the partnership between ASEAN and China would continue to grow in the future for the peoples of ASEAN and China.

He also said that Myanmar was happy with the success of the implementation of the Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity (2016-2020) and

that ASEAN and China should continue to deepen partnership, based on the past achievements while implementing the new Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity (2021-2025). He also appraised China for becoming the largest trading partner of ASEAN and encouraged China to continue to enhance trade and investment to ensure inclusive growth and welcomed China's ratification

of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and encouraged others to do so to jointly promote the early entry into force of the RCEP as it was ratified by Myanmar in May 2021.

On the Developments in Myanmar, the Minister apprised the Meeting that the only way to ensure the democratic system that is disciplined and genuine was through the five-point future programme that was declared in February.

He also pointed out that

most of the points, such as the formation of the new Union Election Commission to scrutinize the election fraud, preventive COVID-19 measures, and economic recovery efforts have been carried out with a view to preventing delays in the implementation of the future programme.

He also informed the Meeting of the recent visit to Myanmar by Minister of Foreign Affairs II of Brunei Darussalam and Secretary-General of ASEAN, where discussions were made cordially on developments in Myanmar, including on the five-point consensus of the ASEAN, Leaders' Meeting, matters pertaining to the provision of humanitarian assistance in Myanmar. In the morning, Union Minister also attended the Informal Breakfast Meeting of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers.

In the evening, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs U Wunna Maung Lwin and Senior Officials attended the dinner hosted by the State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China Wang Yi for the Heads of Delegations of ASEAN Member States.—MNA

Tatmadaw provides treatments to over 236,000 outpatients

TATMADAW keeps providing healthcare services for patients at the military hospitals and temporary treatment hospitals in the townships of regions and states.

Tatmadaw medical teams, which comprise Tatmadaw doctors, specialists, medical assistants and nurses, have given medical treatments to the people to solve their difficulties in healthcare services. A total of 236,225 outpatients and 70,493 inpatients reached these hospitals from 5 February to date.

Senior medical experts, medics, medical assistants and nurses have conducted 10,999 major operations and 5,667 minor operations. The senior doctors gave intensive treatments to the severe cases.

These hospitals managed the birth of 13,793 babies to date. Of those, 5,617 cases are done in the caesarean section and 8,176 cases in ordinary

delivery.

In addition to providing medical care to patients in need of hospitalization, Tatmadaw is making arrangements for the well-being of hospitalized patients and caregivers.

Moreover, a military mobile medical team of Western Command provided health care services for locals people at the assembly hall of Setiyingana monastery in Yathedaung Town, Rakhine State, yesterday.

Similarly, a military mobile medical team of North-Western Command provided local people residing in Phanaing village, Matupi Township, Chin State, with healthcare services at the Basic Education High School-Branch (Phanaing).

The commanders and military officers visited the places where giving medical services and instructed the necessary. — MNA



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CIRCULATION & DISTRIBUTION

(+95) (01) 8604532,
Hotline - 09 454237515

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

(+95) (01) 8604530,
Hotline - 09 251022355

marketing@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com
subscription@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

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gnlmnews@gmail.com
www.gnlm.com.mm
www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

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Union Minister U Aung Naing Oo meets Bago Region Investment Committee members, inspects investments

UNION Minister for Investment and Foreign Economic Relations, Vice-Chairman of Myanmar Investment Commission U Aung Naing Oo, met the Bago Region Administration Council chairperson and members, and region Investment Committee members yesterday.

During the meeting, the officials discussed the facilitation of investment in line with the Myanmar Investment Law, Rules and procedures, supervisory structure for permitted industries as per law and procedures and implementation of a community for investors in local manufacturing and service sectors.

Then, the Chairman of the Region Administration Council/Investment Committee pre-

sented the region's investment sector, ongoing work plans and measures to promote the investment in the region.

The Union Minister also inspected the office operations of the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration and met the staff.

The Union Minister and party then visited the garment factory of Karisma Apparel (Myanmar) Co., Ltd, Sleeping Bag production factory under the CMP system of Bellmart (Myanmar) Co. Ltd. It implemented an industrial park i-Land Park Myanmar Limited in Baw Nat Gyi Village-tract.

The officials of companies clarified their work plans and the Union Minister instructed the necessary things. — MNA



Bamauk residents choose peanuts as more profitable crop



The peanut workers get K1,500 or K2,000 per basket. Therefore, if they can harvest the peanut between four or five baskets per day, they can get K8,000-K10,000.

SOME village residents in Bamauk Township of Katha District in the Sagaing Region start harvesting the groundnuts. The farmers gain extra income from cultivating the peanuts.

The nuts are grown to start Nadaw, and they take about 100 days. It earns K13,000 per basket of peanut, and each acre can produce between 80 and 100 baskets of peanuts. Currently, the demand for peanut is high, and the nut farmers earn between K1.5 million and K2 million per year.

The peanut workers get K1,500 or K2,000 per basket. Therefore, if they can harvest the peanut between four or five baskets per day, they can get K8,000-K10,000.

The farmers from Bamauk Township planted only paddy more than ten years ago, and now they do not want swift to

other crops. However, they go to other regions as migrant workers. But now, they plant peanuts or other seasonal produce in their areas without going anywhere.

“More than ten years ago, the people went to other regions after they harvested the paddy. Now, we grow seasonal crops, especially the groundnuts in our farmlands. We get about between K1.5 million and K2 million per year after we use the expenses for labour. We get that much amount during three months, and so it can cover the cost of our family,” said peanut farmer U Maung Naing from Pin Hin Kha Village.

The peanut price is K13,000 per basket, and the cost of peanut oil is between K65,00 and K7,000 per viss. — Hlaing Bwar (Bamauk)/GNLM

YRTC to provide free school buses to schools in Yangon region

THE Yangon Region Transport Committee (YRTC) said that they would provide school buses for one month free of charge if the primary schools request them in June, the first month of reopening schools under the Yangon Region Administration Council's guidance.

The YRTC will operate its model school buses according to the Road Transport of the Ministry of Transport and Communications' regulations, with more than 10-seaters buses that install a security system at doors. Every vehicle has a nurse kit, two fire extinguishers, bus attendants and “D” licensed drivers. The

speed limit will not be allowed to exceed 40 km/h so that students will be safe.

The YRTC is now filming an advertisement for school buses to be broadcast on TV.

“We are now filming an advertisement for school buses, and it will be broadcast on Television soon. We planned to provide model school buses to the schools in need under the supervision of the Yangon Region Administration Council in June,” said the Joint Secretary of the YRTC.

A total of 150 school buses have been reportedly earmarked to help primary schools in Yangon if there is a

need for school buses.

The YRTC's school bus project aims to run as corporate social responsibility (CSR), and CCTV will also be installed in the bus for the safety of the students.

“We, YRTC, do not run school buses for commercial purpose but the purpose of running as CSR. So, private school buses pay special attention to follow the rules systematically,” he added.

The model school buses will use only 12 seats of a 24-seater-bus following the COVID-19 guidelines. — Maung Sein Lwin (Myanma Alinn)/GNLM

Namyong Creek channel crowded with visitors

NAMYOUNG Creek channel in Mongyawng Township of eastern Shan State is crowded with people, especially on the weekend or public holidays. The number of visitors to the creek is more than that of the previous year.

Similarly, the people pay a visit to Monglite dam, Namyong suspension bridge near Kawt Khawal village and other famous pagodas. — Sai Aung Zaw Linn/GNLM



Fishery exports plunge to \$536.57 mln as of 28 May

EXPORT earnings from the fisheries sector in nearly eight months (1 Oct-28 May) of the current Financial Year 2020-2021 touched a low of US\$538.6 million, a significant decrease of \$115.79 million from the year-ago period, according to statistics released by the Commerce Ministry.

The figures stood at \$652.37 million during a year ago period. Myanmar's fishery exports have slightly declined this year, owing to the COVID-19 impacts and the transport difficulty amid the political changes.

The fishery exports through the Sino-Myanmar border has ground to a halt following the consequences and safety measures on the imported seafood amid the COVID-19 pandemic, traders stressed.

Myanmar's fishery export was experiencing a downturn due to the import restrictions triggered by the detection of the COVID-19 on fish imports in China.

China was the second-largest buyer of Myanmar's fishery products, accounting for US\$254 million out of overall fishery export value of \$850 million in the past financial year 2019-2020.

At present, the fishery sector is dependent on maritime trade only.



Myanmar exports fisheries products, such as fish, prawns, and crabs, to markets in 40 countries, including China, Saudi Arabia, the US, Japan, Singapore, Thailand, and countries in the European Union.

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO) issued guidelines to ensure food safety during the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020.

Permitted companies are advised to carry out food safety plans, follow the WHO and FAO guidelines, formulate the safety management system and suspend the exports in case any suspicious foodborne virus or virus infection risk is found in the products. The export is likely to resume once the products meet food safety criteria set by the General Administration of Customs

of the People Republic of China (GACC).

Myanmar Fisheries Federation stated that only the G2G pact could tackle problems faced in exporting farm-raised fish and prawns and ensuring smooth freight movement between countries in order to bolster exports.

During the last FY2019-2020, MFF expected to earn more than \$800 million from fishery exports, and it reached a target.

Myanmar exports fisheries products, such as fish, prawns, and crabs, to markets in 40 countries, including China, Saudi Arabia, the US, Japan, Singapore,

Thailand, and countries in the European Union.

The MFF is making concerted efforts to increase fishery export earnings by developing fish farming lakes that meet international standards and adopting advanced fishing techniques.

The foreign market requires suppliers to obtain Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) and Good Aquaculture Practices (GAQP) certificates in order to ensure food safety.

Fishery products must be sourced only from hatcheries that are compliant with GAQP to meet international market standards.

The MFF works with fish farmers, processors, and the Fisheries Department under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation to develop the GAQP system.

Processors can screen fishery products for food safety at ISO-accredited laboratories under the Fisheries Department.

Myanmar's economy is more dependent on the agricultural sector to a large extent. Also, the fisheries sector contributes a lot to the national gross domestic product (GDP). Its fishery production, including shrimps and saltwater and freshwater fish, is far better than the regional countries. There are 480,000 acres of fish and prawn breeding farms across the country and more than 120 cold-storage facilities in Myanmar.

Myanmar exported 340,000 tonnes of fishery products worth \$530 million in the 2013-2014FY, 330,000 tonnes worth \$480 million in the 2014-2015FY, 360,000 tonnes worth \$500 million in the 2015-2016FY, 430,000 tonnes worth \$600 million in the 2016-2017FY, 560,000 tonnes worth \$700 million in the 2017-2018FY and 580,000 tonnes worth over \$730 million in the 2018-2019FY respectively, according to the Commerce Ministry. — KK/GNLM

Cultivation of sesame succeeds in Myothit

LOCAL people in Phayagyi ward, Myothit township, Magway region are growing the black sesame the whole year using underground water. Their cultivation has succeeded.

The people are ploughing their fields systematically even though it has not yet rained. The black sesame seeds started to be grown on 24 April. After having the nursery plants, the plants are transplanted in one acre of farmland and irrigated with water

spraying through a pipe sprinkler system.

The sesame plants could yield after 100 days of cultivation, said U Kyaw Soe, a sesame grower.

Myanmar exports the sesame to China mainly via the border route. Sesame is cultivated in the country throughout the year. Myanmar especially grows white sesame, brown sesame and black sesame and exports them. — Myint Myint Htway (IPRD)/GNLM



Sesame is cultivated in the country throughout the year. Myanmar especially grows white sesame, brown sesame and black sesame and exports them.

String bean growers earn daily income in Kyaukse

THE growers of the string bean, also known as the long bean, earn daily income in Kyaukse township, Mandalay region.

The growers from Kyaukse township are cultivating paddy, peanut, sesame, sunflower, black bean, onion, green gram, chilli, banana and cotton. They also grow various flowers and vegetables next to the river, creek and on farmlands.

The long bean is a crop that does not require much workforce regarding the growing of string beans. But the growers need to take care of the long bean daily because it is a favourite plant of leaf beetles and pods. If it is necessary, the growers should spray the pesticide. The long bean cultivation also requires irrigation water.

"The long bean is a vegetable harvested every other day and sold back in the market. The price of long beans varies every single day. Now,



The growers from Kyaukse township are cultivating paddy, peanut, sesame, sunflower, black bean, onion, green gram, chilli, banana and cotton. They also grow various flowers and vegetables next to the river, creek and on farmlands.

the bean fetches K800 per viss. The long bean traders are demanding daily the long beans from the growers. This is the reason why the growers from Kyaukse township are growing the long bean on a manageable scale," said Daw Aye Yu San, a local long bean grower from Tada Lae village.

The cultivation of two packs of long bean seeds costs K6,000. It could start to harvest after two months of cultivation. In the

harvesting season, it can yield over 30 visses of long beans. The bamboo poles that are used in the growing of long beans can be used for up to four years once purchased.

The long bean is a necessary crop for the housewives and the Myanmar noodle soup (locally called Moat Hin Khar) sellers. So, the local growers are happy, making a profit by selling the long beans. — Thet Maung (Kyaukse)/GNLM

Thousands homeless as Sri Lanka floods death toll hits 17

ARMY relief workers in aluminium dinghies handed out rice and other food to residents in submerged parts of the Sri Lankan capital as the death toll from monsoon floods across the country rose to 17 Monday.

The monsoon hits the South Asian country twice a year, bringing vital rain for irrigation and hydro-power generation, but it can be deadly and destructive.

At least 17 people have died since Friday, after heavy downpours inundated 10 of the country's 25 districts.

"Our kitchen is still flooded and we managed thanks to cooked food distributed by the military," Kusuma Dahanayake told AFP by telephone from Gampaha, the worst-affected district, just outside Colombo.

The 73-year-old said it was the worst flooding she had experienced at her home since she moved there in 1995.



Residents make their way through floodwaters after heavy monsoon rains in Kelaniya, on the outskirts of Colombo on 6 June 2021. PHOTO: AFP

Officials said floodwaters in the area were receding, but about 161,000 people were still unable to return to their homes.

The flooding in the area was exacerbated by the illegal filling of low-lying lands reserved

for stormwater retention, they added.

Residents of Kelaniya, on the outskirts of Colombo, waded through waist-deep waters, while some used makeshift rafts and oars to get around on

streets which now resembled canals.

In Malwana, just northeast of Colombo, Hassen Maulavi told AFP he had to negotiate flooded streets for an urgent medical appointment on Monday, from

his partially submerged two-storey home.

Soldiers on Monday rescued 27 people marooned in a region north of Colombo, after earlier operations to pluck hundreds of people from their flooded homes over the weekend.

The Disaster Management Centre said conditions overall appeared to be improving Monday, although a mudslide warning remained for the 10 districts.

In the central Kegalle district, rescuers said they were guided by a pet dog to a home where four members of a family had been buried by a mudslide on Sunday.

All four — aged between 23 and 57 — had died, the officials added. While Sri Lanka's monsoon is seasonal, the nation — a member of the 48-country Climate Vulnerable Forum — faces more frequent floods as a result of global warming, experts have warned. — AFP ■

Nikon to end camera body production in Japan by end of year



Supplied photo shows Nikon Corp's D6 digital single-lens reflex camera. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

NIKON Corp will end its camera body production in Japan by the end of this year, according to its officials, as the digital camera market is dwindling due to the improved photo functions of smartphones.

As part of its structural reforms, the camera giant will transfer such production from a plant in Miyagi Prefecture, its sole domestic camera manufacturing site, to a major factory in Thailand. "The quality level of our products can be sustained even if they are made overseas," a company official said.

Nikon has been leading the camera industry with Canon Inc. since launching its first camera in 1948. But the

company has been facing intensified competition in recent years, logging its largest group net loss of 34.4 billion yen (\$314 million) in the last fiscal year ended March.

Domestically, Nikon manufactures only the D6 model, a digital single-lens reflex camera known as the top model targeting professional photographers, at its factory in Natori in the northeastern Japanese prefecture of Miyagi.

The company will maintain employment at the factory by continuing the production of some camera parts and distributing workers to growth sectors such as health care and sensors. — Kyodo News ■

US approves first new Alzheimer's drug in almost two decades

THE United States on Monday approved a drug called Aduhelm to treat patients with Alzheimer's, the first new medicine against the disease in almost two decades and the first to address cognitive decline linked to the condition.

The decision was highly anticipated but also contentious, because an independent expert panel convened by the regulatory Food and Drug Administration last November found insufficient evidence of Aduhelm's benefit and recommended against approval.

"Aduhelm is the first treatment directed at the underlying

pathophysiology of Alzheimer's disease, the presence of amyloid beta plaques in the brain," said the FDA's Patrizia Cavazzoni.

Nevertheless, the decision falls under the FDA's "Accelerated Approval" pathway which it uses when it believes a medicine may provide meaningful benefit over existing treatments but there is still some uncertainty.

"As is often the case when it comes to interpreting scientific data, the expert community has offered differing perspectives," said Cavazzoni in a statement acknowledging the controversy.

Aduhelm, a monoclonal an-

tibody also known by its generic name aducanumab that is administered intravenously, was tested in two late-stage human trials known as Phase 3 trials.

It showed a reduction in cognitive decline in one, but not the other.

But in all studies, it convincingly showed a reduction in the build-up of a protein called beta-amyloid in the brain tissue of Alzheimer's patients. One theory holds that Alzheimer's disease comes from an excessive accumulation of these proteins in some people's brains as they age and their immune systems decline. — AFP ■

Airlines hope for quick decision on US-UK flights

BRITISH and US airlines on Monday said they were hoping for a quick decision to restart transatlantic flights, citing vaccination campaign successes and the need to maintain economic ties.

Leaders of the G7 wealthiest nations, including British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and US President Joe Biden, meet in Cornwall, southwest England, this weekend.

At an online news conference, bosses at major airlines

and London's Heathrow airport said the high-profile meeting was the right moment to announce the restart of flights.

"The borders have been shut down since March 2020," said Shai Weiss, chief executive of Virgin Atlantic, referring to the start of the first coronavirus lockdown in Britain.

"We're asking Prime Minister Boris Johnson and President Biden to lead the way and open the sky. They need to do that at the G7 summit."

Weiss' counterpart at United Airlines, Scott Kirby, said if that happened, flight capacity could be well on the way back to normal levels by the end of the month.

"We could be back and add significant capacity in a four-week period. It's the peak travel season. Every single day is a day lost for the recovery," he told reporters.

Airlines, which have taken a battering from the global health crisis due to a slump in passenger numbers and travel restrictions, insisted flying was safe. — AFP ■

Place barren hills, deforested areas and dry zones under the shade of forests

MYANMAR is striving for setting the areas of the forest reserves and protected public forests, accounting for 30 per cent of the country's area in 2030 in order to conserve the forest ecosystem in the country.

So far, the country has set 25.61 per cent of the area as forest reserves and protected public forests across the nation. Of the 10 per cent of the country's area set for establishing natural habitats for bio-diversity, 6.08 per cent has been completed. Myanmar has 48.52 million acres of cultivable land, 17.3 million acres of which are placed under paddy plantations.

That is why the entire national people should place barren hills, deforested areas and dry zones under the shade of forests for greening the environments in order to mitigate climate change and global warming as much as they can.

and ecosystem.

All the people need to serve the national duty for conservation of the environment in the country. Forests are tangibly and intangibly beneficial to the residents by giving foods and shade as well as shields to prevent natural disasters. For example, trees and mangrove forests saved the lives of people in the unprecedented cyclonic storm Nargis as much as possible.

That is why the entire national people should place barren hills, deforested areas and dry zones under the shade of forests for greening the environs in order to mitigate climate change and global warming as much as they can.



UN health agency urges nations to donate 250 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine

Some two billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been distributed globally but only 0.5 per cent have reached low-income countries where frontline health workers and the elderly have yet to receive a shot, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Friday.

“THIS week, we'll probably pass the two billion doses - if we have not already passed it...in terms of number of doses of these vaccines, these new COVID vaccines that have actually been developed. And these have been distributed now in over 212 countries,” said Dr Bruce Aylward, Head of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACTA) Hub.

Dr Aylward, who is also Senior Advisor to the WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, noted that of those two billion doses, “over 75 per cent” had gone to just 10 countries, notably China, the US and India.

This trio “account for about 60 per cent of those doses”, said Dr Aylward, speaking via Zoom, adding that “at the other end of that spectrum” only about “point five per cent of doses” had reached the lowest income countries, which account for about 10 per cent of world population.

“Two track recovery”

This had led increasingly to “a two-track recovery”, characterized by the successful rollout of vaccines to high-risk populations and even younger populations in higher income and vaccine-producing countries.

By contrast, “in the lower income countries, they're still struggling to get sufficient product just to be able to vaccinate the health care workers, older populations, who are really the key to getting out of the health, societal and economic crisis that we're in the midst of”, Dr Aylward explained, in an urgent appeal for 250 million doses to protect frontline workers and the most vulnerable people.

“The call is for a quarter of a billion doses through the period through end of September, to be donated, at least 100 million of those in June and July - that's what we need to get the system going.”

80 million doses from the US

He noted that on Thursday the United States had helped to kickstart the appeal and bolster the UN-partnered equitable vaccine distribution scheme COVAX with the announcement that it intended to donate up to 80 million doses, including an initial 25 million shots, this month.

“That's an important start (but) we need many other countries to be joining and important for the US, crucially, is they said these doses are going



An elderly Moroccan man receives a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. PHOTO: AFP

to come in June.”

It was “absolutely ridiculous” that some countries were still unable to protect their key workers amid “escalating epidemics” even though vaccines had been available for six months, he said.

Briefing reporters in New York on Friday, the UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric welcomed the announcement made by the Biden administration that it will be sharing millions of vaccine doses with both the COVAX facility as

well as bilaterally with countries in particular need.

He said Secretary-General António Guterres was extremely grateful to the US Government for the inclusion of UN personnel and Member States delegates serving in the US, in its national vaccination programme, “and for the generous offer to provide vaccines for United Nations frontline personnel serving in the most challenging and dangerous locations around the world.”

“The Secretary-General renews his call to the international community to come together to address the unprecedented challenge of this pandemic, and for countries to share vaccines, particularly with those that are struggling to cope with new surges and variants” he added.

Funding gap

Highlighting the progress made against the coronavirus compared with a year ago, veteran emergency health expert Dr

Aylward, insisted that the development and increasing number of COVID-19 vaccines should not distract from the continued need by all countries to test, trace and treat their populations.

People will continue to die unless a \$16 billion funding gap is filled to pay for sufficient personal protective equipment, ventilators, oxygen and steroid medication to help the poorest nations treat their sick, Dr Aylward insisted.

“We still do not understand well enough this pandemic, because we are not enough testing enough”, he said.

“Remember, Tedros talked about ‘test, test, test’ literally months and months and months ago...we've made highly accurate, highly affordable rapid diagnostic tests, but with the fixation on vaccines, we're not getting the money (needed) over there. And we've all seen what happens when this disease hits a country that doesn't have the oxygen and dexamethasone.” Globally, as of 4 June 2021, there have been 171,708,011 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 3,697,151 reported deaths, according to WHO.

SOURCE: UN

Delta variant ‘40 per cent more transmissible’: UK health minister

The Delta variant of the coronavirus is estimated to be 40 per cent more transmissible than the Alpha variant that caused the last wave of infections in the UK, Britain's health minister said Sunday.

BUT people who have received two doses of vaccine, should be equally

protected against either variant, he added.

“That figure, around 40 per

cent more transmissible, is indeed the latest advice I have,” Health Secretary Matt Hancock told Sky

News.

The Delta variant, also known as the Indian variant, is now the dominant strain in the UK, according to Public Health England figures.

It was the Alpha variant, previously known as the Kent variant, that forced the UK into lockdown in January.

Hancock said the 40 per cent figure came from the government body of scientific advisors, SAGE.

Concerns are mounting over whether the emergence of the Delta variant threatens the government's provisional June 21 deadline for lifting virus restrictions.

Hancock acknowledged that the Delta variant “does make the calculation more difficult for June

21”.

“We'll look at the data for another week and then make a judgement,” he told the BBC on Sunday, stressing that the government was “absolutely open” to delaying the lifting of restrictions.

Double vaccinations effective

The minister nevertheless stressed that those who have had two doses of vaccine should be protected against illness from the Delta variant.

Public Health England said last month that research showed double vaccination was similarly effective against both the Kent and Delta variants.

“The best scientific advice I have at this stage is that, after one jab, it's not quite as effective

against the new Delta variant, but after both jabs, it is,” Hancock told the BBC.

So far hospitalizations are “broadly flat”, with very few hospitalized after receiving both vaccine doses, he added.

The UK has so far given more than 27 million people two doses - more than 50 per cent of adults - while more than 40 million have had one dose.

Hancock said the government was “taking clinical advice” on whether to extend the vaccination programme to children over 12, who are believed to be playing a major role in spreading the virus. But this would not be mandatory, he added.

SOURCE: AFP

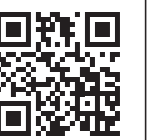


UK has declared the Delta variant as the dominant strain. PHOTO: AFP

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Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 4:00 pm Monday 7 June 2021)

BAY INFERENCE: Monsoon is strong over the Andaman Sea, South Bay and weak to moderate over the Eastcentral Bay and Northeast Bay of Bengal. Weather is partly cloudy elsewhere over the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL MORNING OF THE 8 June 2021: Rain or thundershowers will be scattered in Nay Pyi Taw, Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway regions and Kayah State, fairly widespread in Bago Region and Shan State and widespread in the remaining regions and states with likelihood of isolated heavyfalls in Yangon, Ayeyawady, Taninthayi regions and Chin, Rakhine, Kayin, Mon states. Degree of certainty is (80%).

STATE OF THE SEA: Squalls with moderate to rough seas are likely at times Gulf of Mottama, off and along Mon -Taninthayi Coasts. Surface wind speed in squalls may reach (30-35) mph. Sea will be moderate elsewhere in Myanmar waters. Wave height will be about (8- 10) feet in Gulf of Mottama, off and along Mon-Taninthayi Coasts and about (5- 7) feet in Deltaic, off and along Rakhine Coast.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Continuations of increase of rain in Bago, Yangon, Ayeyarwady, Taninthayin regions and Rakhine, Kayin and Mon states.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 7 June 2021: Isolated rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (80%).

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 7 June 2021: Some rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (100%).

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 7 June 2021: Isolated rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (80%).

Trucks line roads to block wild elephants in SW China

LONG rows of trucks have lined roads in southwestern China to try and block the path of 15 wild elephants that have caused havoc on the outskirts of a city of millions.

The elephants wandered 500 kilometres north from their natural habitat — the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve in Yunnan province — and have stomped through rural communities near the provincial capital Kunming, home to more than eight million people.

State broadcaster CCTV on Sunday showed a long convoy of trucks parked along a small countryside road, lined on both sides by lush green foliage, in a bid to keep the herd away from densely populated areas.

“We are here to block the elephants,” one truck driver in a red vehicle told CCTV.

“Traffic police officers said they need some trucks. As long as I’m needed, I will

stay here.”

Authorities have also mobilized thousands of people to track the herd’s movements with drones and infrared cameras.

CCTV showed the elephants wandering casually into villagers’ backyards over the weekend, leaving flattened trees and crumpled garage doors in their wake. “The herd was wandering in the village all day long,” one nervous villager told CCTV. “We came out and saw an elephant about three metres tall. It really scared us.” State TV showed food and bowls scattered on the floor of one kitchen after an elephant had trampled through.

Since mid-April, the elephants have wrecked around 56 hectares of crops, causing an estimated 6.8 million yuan (\$1.07 million) in losses, CCTV said.

It is not clear exactly why they migrated from their original habitat.

Chinese social media users have been captivated by the journey and have widely speculated on possible causes.

One user on the Twitter-like Weibo platform posted a screenshot of several news articles about rainforest destruction in the elephants’ habitat, writing: “I hope officials can give a response.”

It received more than 31,000 likes since it was posted Sunday.

“The media always focus on the ‘cute’ aspect of the elephants’ migration, which I find quite disgusting,” read a reply that received over 6,000 likes.

“Normally animals migrate when there’s not enough to eat.”

The wild elephant population in southwestern Yunnan is around 300, up from 193 in the 1980s, reported official news agency Xinhua.— AFP ■

Philippine investigators accuse ex-Wirecard COO of fraud, cybercrime

PHILIPPINE investigators have lodged criminal complaints against a former executive of collapsed German payments firm Wirecard and others for alleged bank fraud and cybercrime offences, the justice secretary said Monday.

Wirecard was once a rising star in the fintech sector until it filed for bankruptcy last year after admitting that 1.9 billion euros (\$2.3 billion) was missing from its accounts.

The money was supposedly held in trust in two Philippine lenders to cover trading risks carried out by third parties on Wirecard’s behalf.

But in June 2020 longtime auditors Ernst & Young said they were unable to find it, forcing the company to admit the money did not exist.

The Philippine central

bank has said previously the money never entered the country’s financial system.

The National Bureau of Investigation lodged complaints on 31 May against the company’s former chief operating officer Jan Marsalek, as well as a Manila lawyer and bank employees, Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra told AFP.

State prosecutors were conducting a preliminary investigation, he said, which would determine if charges would be filed.

Marsalek, who remains at large after failing to turn himself into German investigators, was responsible for Wirecard’s Asia business, which became the focus of accounting irregularities. —

AFP ■



(FILES) In this file photo taken on 24 June, 2020, the company logo is seen at the headquarters of German payments provider Wirecard in Aschheim near Munich, southern Germany. Philippine investigators have lodged criminal complaints against a former executive of collapsed German payments firm Wirecard and others for alleged bank fraud and cybercrime offences, the justice secretary said on 7 June, 2021. PHOTO: CHRISTOF STACHE / AFP

Taliban demand ‘remorse’ from fearful Afghan interpreters



(FILES) In this file photo taken on 28 May 2021 Afghan former interpreters for the French forces gather during a demonstration at Shahr-e Naw Park in Kabul. Afghan translators with NATO and US forces fear regular threats and deadly violence against both them and their families will only increase ahead of a looming deadline for the alliance’s planned withdrawal. PHOTO: AFP

THE Taliban said Monday that Afghans who worked with foreign forces in the past have nothing to fear once international troops leave, as long as they “show remorse”.

Thousands of Afghans have received visas to live abroad after serving alongside US and NATO troops — particularly as interpreters — but hundreds more are scrambling to leave before US President Joe Biden’s September 11 withdrawal deadline. In recent weeks many interpreters have demonstrated in Kabul, demanding foreign forces and embassies that they worked with help them relocate. “They shall not be in any danger on our part,” the Taliban said in a statement.

“The Islamic Emirate would like to inform all the above people that they should show remorse

for their past actions and must not engage in such activities in the future that amount to treason against Islam and the country.”

While Afghans were viewed as foes when they worked with foreign forces, they will not face any issues “when they abandon enemy ranks”, they added. “Hence they should not remain fearful.” Over the past two decades, dozens of Afghan translators have been killed and tortured in targeted assaults by the Taliban.

Afghan interpreter Mohammad Shoaib Walizada, who worked with the US army, dismissed the Taliban’s assurance.

“I don’t believe the Taliban... They are targeting journalists and media workers, why would they spare us?” Walizada told AFP on Monday.— AFP ■

The ‘French Doctors’ who came to the aid of Soviet-occupied Afghans

SLOWLY the caravan of heavily loaded-up horses and mules snakes its way around the snow-capped peaks of northeastern Afghanistan.

Silent but for the clip-clop of the animals’ hooves on the stone pathways, the scene was captured on film in 1986 as a handful of French doctors and nurses brought supplies and medical care to the war-torn country.

With four tonnes of medicine and equipment in tow, they were to set up two field hospitals for Doctors Without Borders (MSF) under the noses of the Afghan government and occupying Soviet forces.

Founded just 15 years earlier, the organisation’s work in the valleys of Badakhshan or Panjshir under bombardment from Soviet MiGs has become an almost legendary part of its 50-year history.

“We managed to practise medicine in what was at the time a health desert and a country at war,” said French anaesthetic nurse Regis Lansade, now aged 65. The scenes filmed in 1986 by Juliette Fournot, the MSF head of mission for Afghanistan for a decade, were included in her 2006 documentary “A Ciel Ouvert” (Under an Open Sky).

MSF teams first went into Afghanistan shortly after its invasion in 1979 by Soviet forces, when a mass exodus of people fled towards neighbouring Pakistan to escape the deadly repression by the Soviets. Within weeks, a million refugees had gathered in tribal border regions.

MSF geared up to go into Afghanistan to help — but would have to do so secretly as the organization had been banned by both Islamabad and Kabul.

“It didn’t take long to decide” whether to go, said Claude Malhuret, MSF president at the time, pointing out that the organization was founded with the aim of going wherever medical care was needed.— AFP ■

Israel's Netanyahu denies 'incitement' as political tensions boil

ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday rejected accusations of incitement against his political opponents, after security services warned of an escalation in violent discourse.

In power for 12 consecutive years, Netanyahu faces being toppled by a motley coalition of lawmakers united only by their shared hostility towards him.

Mired in a court battle on corruption charges that could see him face prison time, the veteran political mastermind has mobilized his supporters to peel off defectors ahead of a confirmation vote.

On Saturday, the head of Israel's Shin Bet internal security agency Nadav Argaman issued a rare public statement warning of a "severe escalation in violent and inciting discourse" on social

media.

"This discourse could be understood by certain groups or individuals as enabling illegal violence that could even cost a life," Argaman said, calling on public officials to "issue a clear call to stop this discourse".

A spokesperson for the Shin Bet would not tell AFP whether Argaman was referring to a certain group or person being threatened, merely saying: "This is a general atmosphere that must stop."

Politicians opposing Netanyahu and some local media outlets, however, have interpreted Argaman's statement as a warning to the premier.

"There is a very thin line between political criticism and inciting violence," Netanyahu said Sunday.

"We can't say that when

criticism comes from the right, it's incitement to violence, and when it comes from the left, that it's a justified use of freedom of expression," he told a meeting of Likud party members.

"I condemn all incitement to violence," he added.

'Worrying attitude'

Netanyahu claimed he himself was the target of an "even more serious" campaign and again called the coalition that seeks to replace him a "dangerous left-wing government".

The alliance comprises three right-wing, two centrist and two left-wing parties as well as an Arab Islamic conservative party.

Under the coalition agreement, Naftali Bennett of the right-wing nationalist Yamina party would be premier for two years, to be replaced by the cen-



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (C) and Cabinet Secretary Tzahi Braverman (R) attend a Health Ministry-organized appreciation ceremony for health system personnel and partner agencies for their contribution against the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, in Jerusalem on 6 June 2021. PHOTO: AFP

trist Lapid in 2023.

Bennett, in a television appearance later Sunday, urged Netanyahu to call off his "violent" campaign against right-wing

lawmakers in the new coalition.

"On the one hand, there is legitimate criticism, on the other, a worrying attitude," he said. — AFP ■

Mexico president suffers setback in legislative elections

MEXICAN President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's party lost its absolute majority in the lower house in elections Sunday, initial results indicated, in a setback to his promised "transformation" of the country.

Lopez Obrador's Morena party was set to take between 190 and 203 of the 500 seats, the National Electoral Institute said, though it could still secure an absolute majority with its allies. The polls were seen as a referendum on his more than two years in office overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic and cartel-related violence.

Dozens of politicians have been murdered in the months leading up to the midterm elections for the lower house

of Congress, 15 of 32 state governors and thousands of local politicians.

On the eve of the election, gunmen killed five people helping to organize voting in southern Mexico, while two human heads were left at polling stations in the border city of Tijuana. Lopez Obrador was elected in 2018 for a term of six years, vowing to overhaul Mexico's "neoliberal" economic model, root out corruption and end profligacy by a privileged elite.

The future of the left-wing populist's reform agenda — such as seeking greater energy independence — hinged on whether voters would punish him for issues such as the pandemic. — AFP ■



People queue to cast their votes at a polling station in Nahuatl community of Ayahuatlampa, Guerrero state, Mexico, on 6 June 2021. PHOTO: AFP

UK's Johnson faces aid cut rebellion on eve of G7

BRITISH Prime Minister Boris Johnson is facing on Monday his first possible parliamentary defeat since his 2019 landslide election, over cuts to the overseas aid budget, just days before hosting the G7 summit.

Breaking a manifesto promise, Johnson's Conservative government — which enjoys an 80-seat majority — insists it must slash spending on aid by billions of pounds this year to help mend pandemic-battered public finances. But the decision to no longer meet its legally enshrined commitment to spend 0.7 per cent of gross national income (GNI) on British overseas aid has sparked a rebellion within the ruling party.

Dozens of Tory lawmakers oppose to the move, including former prime minister Theresa May, who argue the cut to 0.5 per cent of GNI would leave Britain as the only member of the Group of Seven wealthy nations not meeting the target.

The rebels believe they have the numbers to inflict a humiliating defeat on Johnson when parliament votes on related legislation later Monday, in the same week that he hosts G7 leaders at a summit in Cornwall, southwest England.

"The eyes of the world are truly upon us," lawmaker Andrew Mitchell, a former international development secretary who is spearheading the rebel-

lion of dozens of Conservatives, wrote in *The Guardian*.

"But in this moment Britain is found wanting, because we have removed a foundational piece of our own global leadership," he added, noting it was the only G7 country to be cutting aid.

"We are doing it at a time when both the need for aid around the world is rising and when other countries are stepping up." Mitchell said the cuts are already having a "devastating effect" on projects around the world.

"In crisis situations, these cuts will result in hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths," he added. — AFP ■

France fines Google 220 mn euros over online ad dominance

FRANCE'S competition regulator on Monday fined Google 220 million euros (\$267 million) after finding it had abused its dominant market position for placing online ads, the latest move by European authorities to take tougher stances against US tech giants. The penalty is part of a settlement reached after three media groups — News Corp, French daily *Le Figaro* and Belgium's *Groupe Rossel* — accused Google of effectively having a monopoly over online ad sales. The *Autorite de la Concurrence* determined that Google gave preferential treatment to its own ad auction service AdX and Doubleclick Ad Exchange platform, a real-time auction platform.

Clients trying to place ads on internet sites or mobile apps using rival platforms often found they were paying more than those using both of Google's services, since regrouped under the Google Ad Manager brand. The regulator said Google did not contest its findings and has committed to operational changes including improved interoperability with third-party ad placement providers.

"It is the first ruling in the world to scrutinize the complex algorithmic processes for the auctions that determine online 'display' advertising," the authority's president Isabelle de Silva said in a statement. — AFP ■

Yemen's unique 'dragon's blood' island under threat



The broken trunk of a Dragon's Blood Tree at Homhil in the northeast of the Yemeni island of Socotra attests to storms that batter the Indian Ocean archipelago, on 12 April 2021. The archipelago's remote location helped it forge its astonishing nature millennia ago - a third of the main island's plants are unique, from bulbous bottle and cucumber trees to alien aloes. But the 130 Km (80 mile) long island also oversees busy global shipping lanes at the crossroads between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. **PHOTO: AFP**

CENTURIES-OLD umbrella-shaped dragon's blood trees line the rugged peaks of Yemen's Socotra — a flagship symbol of the Indian Ocean archipelago's extraordinary biodiversity, but also a bleak warning

of environmental crisis.

Forests of these ancient trees are being decimated by increasingly intense storms, while replacement saplings are gobbled by proliferating goat herds, leaving the fragile biological hotspot

vulnerable to desertification.

"The trees bring water, so they are so important," said Adnan Ahmed, a mathematics teacher and tour guide whose passion is Socotra's famous flora and fauna.

"Without trees, we will be in trouble."

Lying in turquoise seas between Arabia and Africa some 350 kilometres (215 miles) south of Yemen's coast, Socotra is home to over 50,000 people and has remained relatively untouched by the bloodletting of the civil war raging on the mainland.

Naming it a World Heritage site in 2008, UNESCO described the main island as one of the world's "most biodiversity rich and distinct". It has also been dubbed the "Galapagos of the Indian Ocean".

Ahmed said islanders traditionally don't fell dragon's blood trees for firewood, both because they perpetuate regular rainfall and because its blood-red sap is medicinal.

But scientists and islanders warn that the trees will largely die out within decades, buckling under pressure from global warm-

ing driving cyclones, as well as invasive species and overgrazing.

"Goats eat the seedlings, so young trees are only found on cliff faces in the most inaccessible places," said Ahmed.

The trees take nearly half a century before they reproduce, he explained. "If nothing is done, it will not take long before all are gone," he said.

'Running out of time'

The shrinking forests are a canary in the mine for Socotra's environmental challenges, said Belgian biologist Kay Van Damme, from the University of Ghent. "It remains a treasure trove of biodiversity," said Van Damme, chair of the Friends of Socotra support group. "But we may soon be running out of time to protect Socotra's most iconic flagship species."

Each lost tree drives a reduction in the hydrological cycle on which all life depends. — AFP ■

Coronavirus: Latest global developments

HERE are the latest developments in the coronavirus crisis:

Delta variant 'more transmissible'

The Delta variant of the coronavirus first identified in India is "around 40 per cent more transmissible" than the Alpha variant that caused the last wave of infections in Britain, health minister Matt Hancock says.

Delta has since become the dominant strain in the UK, according to official data, threatening next steps in the country's reopening plan later this month.

Israel to vaccinate teenagers

Sunday is the first day for 12- to 16-year-olds in Israel to get vaccinated, with 55 per cent of the population so far having received two doses in the Middle Eastern nation.

The move came despite the country's health ministry recently releasing findings suggesting a "possible link" between the Pfizer/BioNTech shot and cases of myocarditis -- inflammation of the heart muscle -- among younger men.

US donates vaccines to Taiwan

Washington will donate 750,000 vaccine doses to ally Taiwan, a cross-party delegation of US senators say as they arrive on the island.

The high-profile delegation and gift come as Taiwan accuses China of hampering its efforts to secure enough doses as part of Beijing's ongoing campaign to keep the island isolated.

Over 3.7 million dead

The novel coronavirus has killed at least 3,723,381 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 10:00 GMT Sunday.

The United States is the worst-affected country with 597,377 deaths from 33,357,240 cases.

After the US, the hardest-hit countries are Brazil with 472,531 deaths, India with 346,759, Mexico with 228,754 and Peru with 186,073.

The World Health Organization estimates that the pandemic's overall toll could be two to three times higher than official records, because of the excess mortality that is directly and indirectly linked to Covid-19. — AFP ■

Delhi, Mumbai loosen lockdowns as India virus crisis eases in cities

INDIA'S capital New Delhi and financial hub Mumbai began a gradual easing of restrictions on Monday as coronavirus infections in the country fell to a two-month low.

Hospitals in the megacities — which have a combined population of some 40 million — were overwhelmed by a deadly Covid-19 wave in April and May, with severe shortages of oxygen and other critical medicines.

The huge spike saw India report record-breaking numbers of cases and deaths to become the second worst-hit nation after the United States with just under 29 million infections.

Authorities in Delhi and Mumbai, as well as other cities and states, imposed restrictions on movement and activities to combat the surge.

"We have to stay safe from corona infection and also bring the economy back on track," Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted Monday as some shops and malls reopened.

Delhi Metro services were allowed to operate at 50 per cent capacity.



A pedestrian walks past a wall mural representing awareness measures against the Covid-19 coronavirus featuring a frontline medical staff as a guardian angel, in Navi Mumbai on 7 June 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

The northern city was reporting an average of 25,000 daily cases during its peak. It fell to 381 infections on Sunday, officials said.

Maharashtra, India's richest state of which Mumbai is the capital, eased restrictions based on infection rates and hospital bed occupancy.

In Mumbai — where the caseload soared to 11,163 in early April — there were just 794 new infections on Sunday.

Malls were allowed to reopen in the city with restrictions, but were reopened fully in cities with lower infection rates such as Nagpur and Aurangabad.

"This is a step in the right

direction," said Rajendra Kalkar of Phoenix Mills, which manages three shopping centres in Maharashtra.

"Businesses at our malls are coming back slowly. This is a very welcome step for thousands of mall staff and retail employees."

The Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India estimated that more than two million jobs were lost during the Maharashtra lockdown.

"We are very happy to open our doors again today," the restaurant manager of the Mumbai branch of popular eatery Social, who gave his name as Malay, told AFP. — AFP ■

Asian markets mixed on Yellen rate comments, G7 tax plan

ASIAN markets were mixed Monday as investors mulled comments by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on interest rates and weighed the impact of the G7 global tax plan on tech giants.

Yellen told Bloomberg News that President Joe Biden should push ahead with his \$4 trillion recovery plan for the world's top economy even if it triggers inflation and leads to higher interest rates.

While optimism about the global economic recovery and vaccine roll-outs have spurred markets, trading floors remain worried that the rebound will stoke inflation and in turn force central banks to hike rates.

Yellen said any rise in prices due to Biden's massive plan to

revitalise the US economy would be transitory and that higher interest rates would actually be positive.

"If we ended up with a slightly higher interest rate environment, it would actually be a plus for society's point of view and the Fed's point of view," the former Federal Reserve chair said in an interview Sunday with Bloomberg.

"We've been fighting inflation that's too low and interest rates that are too low now for a decade," she said, adding she wanted them back to a normal level.

Yellen was speaking after returning from a meeting of G7 finance ministers in London which endorsed a global minimum corporate tax rate of at

least 15 per cent, rallying behind a US-backed plan targeting tech giants and other multinationals accused of not paying enough.

Wall Street posted solid gains, with all three main indexes closing higher Friday after a tepid jobs report eased concerns the expanding economy would force the Fed to pull back on stimulus.

The optimism wavered in Asia, with markets mixed in Monday trade.

Hong Kong was down 0.7 per cent, Sydney was off 0.2 per cent, and Taipei slipped 0.4 per cent.

Tokyo trimmed earlier gains but still closed up 0.3 per cent, Seoul added 0.4 per cent and Singapore was 0.7 per cent higher.

Shanghai recovered from an early dip to end 0.2 per cent high-



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen speaks during a press conference at Winfield House in London on 5 June 2021, after attending the G7 Finance Ministers meeting. **PHOTO: AFP**

er after traders shrugged off lower-than-expected trade growth figures for May, with imports expanding at the fastest pace in more than a decade, up 51 per cent year on year, and exports

expanding a solid 28 per cent. "To be honest, that is a cracking number by anybody's standard and show that global demand remains robust," said OANDA's Jeffrey Halley.— AFP ■

Spain opens borders to all vaccinated travellers

SPAIN opens its borders to vaccinated travellers from all over the world on Monday, hoping an influx of visitors will revitalize its all-important tourism sector which has been battered by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Spain is a safe destination," Health Minister Carolina Darias insisted, adding that the country was "in the process of reclaiming its global leadership in tourism".

Non-vaccinated Europeans — who can currently enter Spain with a negative PCR test taken within 72 hours — will from Monday be able to take a cheaper antigen test instead.

But in a setback, the United Kingdom, a huge tourism

market for the country, has not yet removed Spain from its list of at-risk countries, meaning British travellers will have to quarantine on their return home as well as pay for expensive Covid-19 tests.

The British normally make up the largest contingent of tourists to Spain — in 2019 over one-fifth of Spain's 83.5 million arrivals were from the United Kingdom. Regardless, those in the tourism sector are still hoping for a summer surge of visitors.

Jose Luis Prieto, president of Spain's travel agents' union (Unav) is hoping for a "spectacular recovery" starting from Monday.

According to him, over the last few weeks tour operators in Britain, France and Germany — Spain's three main markets — have been receiving a large number of enquiries. Across the country, from the Costa del Sol to the Canary Islands, hotels and restaurants are reopening after months of closure, and airlines have restarted routes dropped during the height of the pandemic.

Malaga airport was expecting around 20 different flights on Monday morning alone, from places around Europe such as Berlin, Lille, Frankfurt and London. Spain will also begin allowing cruise boats into its ports again from Monday. — AFP ■



People walk on the promenade at Bogatell Beach on 6 June 2021 in Barcelona. Spain will allow all vaccinated travellers to visit the country from 7 June as the tourism hotspot aims to revive its virus-battered travel industry. **PHOTO: AFP**

Japan's key electronics show to be held online again amid pandemic

JAPAN'S annual electronics and information technology show will be held fully online again this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, its organizer said Monday, changing the initial plan to prepare both virtual and physical venues.

The Combined Exhibition of Advanced Technologies was held virtually last year for the first time in its 20-year history. CEATEC is scheduled for October 19 through 22 this year under the theme of "Toward Society 5.0 with the New Normal."

Further details will be announced later this month, the organizer Japan Electronics and Information Technology Industries Association said.

"As CEATEC welcomes about 150,000 visitors during a four-day period, we have judged that it would be difficult to provide a venue at the Makuhari Messe that would enable visitors and exhibitors to make exchanges actively under a safe and secure environment this year," JEITA said in a press release.

CEATEC had been held at the convention center in Chiba Prefecture near Tokyo, giving electronics makers an opportunity to showcase their products. In recent years, the event has evolved from an electronics show to one that better reflects a shift toward the internet of things, or connected world. — Kyodo News ■

German industrial orders down as domestic demand falls

GERMAN industrial orders unexpectedly fell for the first time in four months in April as domestic demand dropped, official data showed Monday.

Orders were down 0.2 per cent compared to March, according to federal statistics office Destatis, though analysts surveyed by financial data firm Factset had expected another month of growth.

On an annual basis, however, new orders surged by 79 per cent compared April 2020, when they dropped to their lowest level

on record as economic activity shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Industrial orders are closely watched as a key indicator of future economic activity, especially in manufacturing powerhouse Germany.

Germany's economy shrank in the first quarter as restrictions were imposed to counter a winter surge in Covid-19 cases. Domestic orders fell by 4.3 per cent in April after sharp growth the previous month, while foreign orders rose 2.7 per cent. — AFP ■

Trial in MH17 crash to start hearing evidence

DUTCH judges will on Monday start hearing evidence against three Russian suspects and a Ukrainian in the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over war-torn Ukraine in 2014.

The trial formally began in March 2020 but has so far been dealing with legal arguments, mainly about the admissibility of evidence in the crash in which 298 passengers and crew were killed.

The four suspects — Russian nationals Oleg Pulatov, Igor Girkin and Sergei Dubinsky, and Ukrainian citizen Leonid Kharchenko — are all being tried in absentia. Only Pulatov has legal representation.

“The court will open the MH17 criminal trial proper and, through examining and discussing the content of the prosecution file, elucidate the key questions which it has already begun to address,” the



Presiding judge Hendrik Steenhuis (C), other trial judges and lawyers view the reconstructed wreckage of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, at the Gilze-Rijen military Airbase, southern Netherlands, on 26 May 2021. Judges inspect wreckage of flight MH17 as part of criminal trial of four suspects. **PHOTO: AFP**

court said in a statement.

“Was flight MH17 shot down by a BUK missile? Was a BUK missile fired from an agricultur-

al field near Pervomaiskiy? Did the accused play a role in this?” the statement added. The Boeing 777 jet was travelling from

Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport to Kuala Lumpur when it was shot down over part of eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Rus-

sian rebels.

An international investigation concluded that a BUK missile that had originally come from the Russian army’s 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade based in the city of Kursk was responsible. All four suspects are accused of being key figures among the separatist rebels battling Kiev.

‘Emotionally loaded’

The trial is being held in the Netherlands, in a secure courtroom near Schiphol airport, because it was the point of departure for the doomed plane, and because 196 of the victims were Dutch.

The court said that the “hearing on the merits” will begin Monday with general topics including the investigation by the examining magistrate, followed by three more days of discussion from Tuesday to Thursday. — AFP ■

Fujimori edges ahead of Castillo in tight Peru presidential vote



Peruvian presidential candidate, right-wing Keiko Fujimori, waves to her supporters as she leaves the polling station after casting her vote, during the presidential runoff election in Lima, on 6 June 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

RIGHT-WING populist Keiko Fujimori held a narrow lead over radical leftist Pedro Castillo following a partial vote count in

Peru’s presidential election on Sunday.

With 52.9 per cent of the vote counted after 42 per cent

of polling stations were tallied, Fujimori edged ahead in a see-saw battle for the presidency after Ipsos pollsters declared a “statistical draw” following an earlier exit poll and quick count.

Peru’s new leader will need to tackle a country in crisis, suffering from recession and with the worst coronavirus fatality rate in the world after recording over 184,000 deaths among its 33 million population.

Peruvians will also look to the winner to end years of political turbulence after four presidents in the last three years, and with seven of the last 10 of the country’s leaders either having been convicted of or investigated for corruption. — AFP ■

Momentum with Merkel party after victory in key state poll

ANGELA Merkel’s conservatives were heaving a sigh of relief on Monday after a convincing win in the last regional vote before a general election that also exposed the weaknesses of the Green party, their main rival at the national level.

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) under new party chief Armin Laschet won around 37 per cent of the vote in Saxony-Anhalt on Sunday, partial results showed, well ahead of the second place far-right AfD party on around 21 per cent.

The Greens, who had until recently been polling neck-and-neck with the CDU and its smaller Bavarian CSU sister party at the national level, scored a disappointing result of around six per cent.

The outcome in the former East German

state is a huge boost for conservative would-be chancellor Laschet ahead of Germany’s general election on 26 September — the first in 16 years not to feature Merkel. “Laschet is still a long way from the chancellor’s office,” the Sueddeutsche Zeitung daily said. But the poll result has brought him “much closer to it”.

Berenberg Bank’s chief economist Holger Schmieding noted that national polls in the last ten days have shown the CDU and CSU slightly ahead of the Greens again after falling behind earlier in the year.

“After the CDU did well in Saxony-Anhalt, this nascent reversal of fortunes in favour of the CDU will likely continue,” he said. — AFP ■

NEWS

IN BRIEF

Kamala Harris’s plane forced to turn around due to technical fault

US Vice President Kamala Harris’s plane was forced to land soon after take-off on Sunday due to a technical problem on her way to Guatemala for her first international trip.

“I’m good. I’m good,” Harris told reporters, giving a thumbs-up after exiting the plane when it returned to Joint Base Andrews on the outskirts of Washington. “We all said a little prayer, but we’re good.”

The vice president switched planes, and a pool report said she arrived safely in Guatemala Sunday evening. Her spokeswoman Symone Sanders said that no major delays in her itinerary were expected.

The crew “noticed the landing gear was not storing as it should which could lead to further mechanical issues. While there was no immediate safety issue, out of an abundance of caution, they returned to Joint Base Andrews,” Sanders said. — AFP ■

Five dead in election-related attack in Mexico

GUNMEN ambushed and killed five people helping to organize elections in southern Mexico, prosecutors said Sunday, part of a wave of violence linked to the polls.

The attack happened on Saturday when electoral authorities were delivering ballot boxes and other voting materials to a community in the Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacan municipality in the state of Chiapas.

Armed individuals arrived at the scene and attacked poll organizers, wounding one person, the state prosecutor’s office reported.

Residents tried to take the injured man to a medical centre, but on the way they were intercepted by an armed group that forced their pick-up truck off the road.

The attackers approached the vehicle and shot the five occupants, prosecutors said. A manhunt was launched for the perpetrators as well as an investigation into their motive.

The legislative and local polls have been overshadowed by political bloodshed that has seen more than 90 politicians murdered since the electoral process began in September. — AFP ■

Steam rises as India and Pakistan take basmati battle to EU



In this picture taken on 31 March 2021 workers unload sacks of rice for a refining process at the Al-Barkat Rice Mills on the outskirts of Lahore. From biryani to pilau, Pakistan and India's shared culinary landscape is defined by basmati, a distinctive long-grain rice now at the centre of the latest tussle between the bitter rivals. **PHOTO: AFP**

FROM biryani to pilau, Pakistan and India's shared culinary landscape is defined by basmati, a distinctive long-grain rice now at the centre of the latest tussle between the bitter rivals.

India has applied for an exclusive trademark that would grant it sole ownership of the basmati title in the European Union, setting off a dispute that could deal a major blow to Pakistan's position in a vital export

market.

"It's like dropping an atomic bomb on us," said Ghulam Murtaza, co-owner of Al-Barkat Rice Mills just south of Lahore, Pakistan's second-largest city. Pakistan immediately opposed India's move to gain Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) from the European Commission.

India is the largest rice exporter in the world, netting \$6.8 billion in annual earnings, with

Pakistan in fourth position at \$2.2 billion, according to UN figures. The two countries are the only global exporters of basmati.

"(India) has caused all this fuss over there so they can somehow grab one of our target markets," said Murtaza, whose fields are barely five kilometres (three miles) from the Indian border. "Our whole rice industry is affected," he added. From Karachi to Kolkata, basmati is a staple in everyday diets across southern Asia.

It is eaten alongside spicy meat and vegetable curries, and is the star of the endlessly varied biryani dishes featured at weddings and celebrations across both countries, which only split following independence from British colonial rule in 1947.

They have since fought three wars, with the latest skirmish in 2019 involving the first cross-border airstrikes in nearly 50 years.

Diplomatic relations have been tense for decades and both countries routinely attempt to malign each other on the international stage. — AFP ■

Japan launches study to verify COVID vaccines' effects on citizens

JAPAN'S government has launched a study to verify the effect of coronavirus vaccines on its citizens as the country grapples with the pandemic and seeks to speed up its inoculation rollout, sources close to the matter said Sunday.

The study, targeting around 1,500 people, aims to assess the effect of US pharmaceutical company Pfizer Inc.'s vaccine on Japanese people after the government approved its use based on data from clinical trials conducted by the company abroad. In Pfizer's clinical trials, which targeted around 40,000 people in the United States and other locations, the vaccine achieved 95 per cent efficacy in preventing the coronavirus. But the efficacy rate fell to 74 per cent among Asians, although their participation was small in the trials.

A separate trial conducted in Japan showed results signaling the vaccine's efficacy, but there was insufficient data as the trial only had 160 participants.

In the government's efficacy test, a health ministry research group separates the 1,500 participants into two groups — those who are vaccinated and those who are not — and then observes them for six months to determine the number of people who become infected and which ones develop coronavirus symptoms, as well as the amount of antibodies in their blood, the sources said. — Kyodo News ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Australian soldier sues media over Afghan war crimes allegations

A defamation trial opened Monday pitting one of Australia's most decorated soldiers against three major newspapers that accused him of war crimes in Afghanistan.

Ben Roberts-Smith, a former member of Australia's elite Special Air Services regiment, is suing the newspapers as well as individual journalists from all three over articles from 2018 that alleged he committed murder and other atrocities while serving in Afghanistan. The defendants, including the Sydney Morning Herald, The Canberra Times, and Melbourne's The Age, will argue the reports were truthful, according to court documents. Australia's military and police are both investigating numerous war crimes alleged to have been committed by members of elite SAS soldiers in Afghanistan. — AFP ■

Toyota settles with family over worker's suicide due to harassment

TOYOTA Motor Corp has come to a settlement with the family of a male employee who killed himself in 2017, acknowledging that his suicide was caused by harassment from his superior, a senior Toyota official said Monday. Toyota President Akio Toyoda has met with the family and offered an apology. The settlement was reached on 7 April. Toyota did not disclose the amount of compensation it would pay.

Local labor authorities had determined that the then 28-year-old employee was suffering from adjustment disorder as a result of harassment from his superior, who constantly abused him verbally by calling him names like "moron" and telling him "You'd be better off dead," according to a lawyer for the family. Toyota has put in place measures to prevent a recurrence of such incidents. — Kyodo News ■

Pakistan express trains collision kills at least 40

AT least 40 people were killed and dozens injured Monday when a packed Pakistani inter-city train ploughed into another express that had derailed just minutes earlier, officials said. Several people were still trapped in the mangled wreckage near Daharki, in a remote part of rural Sindh province, which took rescue workers with specialist equipment hours to reach.

The double accident happened around 3:30am (2230 GMT) when most of the 1,200 passengers aboard the two trains would have been dozing.

"We tumbled upon each other, but that was not so fatal,"

Akhtar Rajput, a passenger on the train that derailed, told AFP. "Then another train hit us from nowhere, and that hit us harder. When I regained my senses, I saw passengers lying around me, some were trying to get out of the coach."

The Millat Express was heading from Karachi to Sargodha when it derailed, spilling carriages onto the track carrying the Sir Syed Express from Rawalpindi in the opposite direction.

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said the incidents were just minutes apart.

"I was disoriented and trying to figure out what happened to us when the other train hit," Shahid, another passenger, told AFP.

Senior Daharki police officer Umar Tufail said 40 people were killed and dozens injured.

"One coach is under the engine, and we can see three bodies trapped inside," he told AFP. — AFP ■



Security personnel carry out rescue operations at the site of a train accident in Daharki area of the northern Sindh province on 7 June 2021, as at least 40 people were killed and dozens injured when a packed Pakistani inter-city train ploughed into another express that had derailed just minutes earlier, officials said. **PHOTO: AFP**

Venues, fixtures of Suzuki Cup to be set on 10 August

THE ASEAN Football Federation (AFF) recently announced that the official draw ceremony for this year AFF Suzuki Cup tournament would be held on 10 August 2021. Venues and fixtures for the Suzuki Cup will also be consequently released, officials said.

Federation President, Major General Khiev Sameth, said, "We are delighted to announce the Official Draw date for the AFF Suzuki Cup this year. While AFF intends to stage the tournament in its full format and schedule like home and away matches at all stages, we also recognize the need to explore and be prepared for the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in order to include possible alternative formats using centralized venues.

The health and safety of our stakeholders will continue to be our top priority when we consider the various options for the tournament. A further announce-



The ASEAN Suzuki Cup trophy is a dream for every ASEAN member football team. **PHOTO: SUZUKI CUP**

ment of the event will be made in July," the AFF president added.

Malcolm Thorpe, the event's commercial partner, said, "We are working hard to support AFF and its member associations in order to review potential contingency measures which may be required depending on the prevailing situation in each of the member countries. We are confident that

all measures will be taken to ensure the safety of all participants and fans."

Ten of the ASEAN football teams, including Myanmar, are members of the Suzuki Cup tournament.

In the previous year, the tournament was postponed due to the global outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. —GNLM ■

Euro 2020 set to capture continent's attention but pandemic challenges remain



Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo hugs Spain's midfielder Marcos Llorente at the end of the international friendly football match between Spain and Portugal at the Wanda Metropolitano stadium in Madrid in preparation for the UEFA European Championships, on 4 June 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

THE Covid-19 pandemic was responsible for its postponement but, with the health situation on the continent gradually improving, the delayed Euro 2020 finally kicks off on Friday in Rome when Italy host Turkey while Cristiano Ronaldo and Portugal prepare to defend the title they won in France five years ago.

When the action gets underway in front of a planned 16,000 fans at a quarter-full Stadio Olimpico the overwhelming

feeling for European football's governing body UEFA will be of relief following the unprecedented decision to put the tournament on hold last year.

This time the month-long competition — being staged for the first time in 11 cities across Europe rather than in just one or two host countries — will focus the attention of the continent as it begins to open up for its summer season, with coronavirus infection rates drop-

ping and vaccinations picking up pace.

Yet challenges remain, especially after UEFA chose to stick with the pan-European format.

Dublin and Bilbao were dropped from the list of host cities after refusing to give guarantees over spectator numbers, but Seville stepped in for the latter while Dublin's games went to London and Saint-Petersburg. —AFP ■

Filipino-Japanese teen Saso wins US Women's Open

FILIPINO-JAPANESE teenager and Japan LPGA Tour player Yuka Saso won the US Women's Open on Sunday, beating Japan's Nasa Hataoka in a three-hole playoff after the pair finished the final round tied for the lead at 4-under.

A dual citizen with a Filipino mother and Japanese father, Saso tied Park Inbee as the youngest champion at the tournament, exactly the same age — 19 years, 11 months, 17 days — as the South Korean was when she won in 2008.

Only two other women with Japanese citizenship have won majors before her — Hisako Higuchi at the 1977 LPGA Championship and Hinako Shibuno at the 2019 Women's British Open.

After finishing the final round at San Francisco's

Olympic Club one stroke ahead of the overnight leader, American Lexi Thompson, Saso and Hataoka remained deadlocked through two playoff holes which they both parred.

A nicely played wedge shot from the rough gave Saso a birdie putt for the tournament on the third playoff hole, and she sunk it to become the first men's or women's major winner from the Philippines, the country she represents in competition.

"I was just glad and thankful that I was here and able to play in this tournament," said Saso, who overcame back-to-back double bogeys early in the final round to make the playoff. "I'd like to thank my family. I wouldn't be here without them."

Saso is expected to play for the Philippines at this summer's Tokyo Olympics. She won two gold medals for the country at the 2018 Asian Games, one in the individual event and another in the team event. — Kyodo News ■



Filipino-Japanese golfer Yuka Saso holds up the championship trophy after winning the US Women's Open at the Olympic Club in San Francisco, California, on 6 June 2021. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

New poll finds half of Japanese back Olympics this summer

HALF of Japan's public favours holding the Tokyo Olympics this summer, a new survey showed Monday, suggesting support for the contentious Games is rising seven weeks before the opening ceremony. The latest poll by the Yomiuri Shimbun daily showed 50 per cent of respondents want the Games to be held this summer, with 48 per cent in favour of cancellation. Postponement was not given as an option.

National polls have tended to show that a majority of respondents oppose holding the Games this summer, backing either a further postponement or cancellation.

In early May the same paper found 59 per cent of respondents wanted the Games

to be scrapped, with only 39 per cent calling for them to go ahead as planned. The latest figures come as Covid-19 infection rates in Japan gradually fall while emergency measures remain in place in several areas including Tokyo.

Vaccinations are also on the rise after a cautious start to the rollout, although just over three per cent of the population is fully inoculated so far.

The same poll showed Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's approval rating has fallen from 43 to 37 per cent — its lowest since he took office in September last year — while the government's disapproval rating has gone from 46 to 50 per cent since May. — AFP ■