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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.

Defence Services Medical Academy (DSMA) is already on the recognized list of the World Federation for Medical Education, says Senior General



State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Maha Thray Sithu Min Aung Hlaing receives the salute of the cadet companies at the parade ground of the Defence Services Medical Academy in Yangon on 20 December 2021.

IN order to raise the life span of our country, it is necessary to upgrade the level of living standards, literacy and economy, said Chairman of the State Administration Council Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Maha

Thray Sithu Min Aung Hlaing at the passing out parade of 22nd Intake of Defence Services Medical Academy took place at the parade ground of DSMA in Yangon yesterday morning.

First, the Senior General accepted the salute of the ca-

det battalions and inspected the graduate company. The Senior General presented the Best Cadet Award to Cadet Zeyar Myo Naung, Excellent Award in Training Cadet Myat Min Thu and Excellent Award in Studies Cadet Set Naing Aung.

Afterwards, the Senior General delivered an address. He said: Everyone is longing for long and healthy life. To have such a long and healthy life, one has to take great care of himself and on the other hand, healthcare services of healthcare workers are

also very important. While giving healthcare services, not only giving treatment but also preventive measures for diseases are to be carried out in advance. For everyone to be healthy, it is essential for giving health education services

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Public Notice

1. The government seizes/uncovers illegal arms and ammunition, mines, communication equipment and other related materials in addition to terrorist attacks of NUG and CRPH, which were declared as terrorist groups in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, and their subordinates PDF groups with homemade guns, gunpowder, mines and accessories, as well as arms and ammunition, mines, communication equipment and other materials imported via border areas by some ethnic armed organizations aiming to make political and military profits on a daily basis, and it also exposes the cases of the terrorists who possess firearms in various ways.
2. Moreover, some terrorists take advantage of the honesty of the people and they make them keep their illegal arms and ammunition, mines, communication devices and other related materials, including restricted materials using different ways and forms.
3. Therefore, in order to prevent unnecessary legal action against those who are not related to the terrorists, all the citizens should hand over the illegal arms and ammunition, mines, communication equipment and other related materials, including drugs banned by the government according to the law no later than 31 December 2021 to the respective wards/village administration offices/security forces if they keep these things in their houses, apartments and other places for various reasons and ways, and if they are found after the deadline, action will be taken against them under the existing laws.

Information Team
State Administration Council

Judgements given on 2 special criminal appeals, 5 special civil appeals; 5 cases heard

A special appeal tribunal, consisting of Union Chief Justice U Htun Htun Oo and Judges of the Supreme Court of the Union U Myo Maung, U Khin Maung Gyi, U Tin Hone, and Daw Khin May Yi, was convened yesterday morning at the Supreme Court of the Union and passed the judgements on two special criminal appeals, No. 5/2021 (Mon) and 6/2021 (Taninthayi),

and five special civil appeals, No. 89/2019 (Mon), 96/2019 (Mandalay), 97/2019 (Mandalay), 8/2020 (Yangon) and 11/2020 (Magway).

In addition, a total of five special civil appeals, special appeal No. 14/2020 (Magway), 16/2020 (Mandalay), 20/2020 (Mandalay), 21/2020 (Mon) and 23/2020 (Shan), were heard under the COVID-19 prevention and control guidelines. — MNA

Decision to end hosting the office of Ms Christine Schraner Burgener in Nay Pyi Taw

THE office of Ms Christine Schraner Burgener, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General on Myanmar was opened in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 17 December 2018. Myanmar has steadfastly opposed the mandates emanated from the country-specific resolutions. However, Myanmar extended its cooperation to Ms Christine Schraner Burgener on the case by case basis and hosted her office in Nay Pyi Taw as a gesture of cooperation with the United Nations.

It is learnt from the United Nations' press release on 25 October 2021 that the United Nations Secretary-General announced the appointment of his new Special Envoy on Myanmar who succeeds Ms Christine Schraner Burgener. It is, therefore, learnt from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that since the activities of Ms Christine Schraner Burgener have concluded, the Ministry informed the UN side of its decision to end hosting her office in Myanmar on 20 December 2021. — MNA

COVID-19 tests conducted free in Kengtung Township

THE Shan State officials conducted the free COVID-19 test on the travellers at the Naungnun inspection camp in Kengtung Township of Shan State (East) on 19 December.

The officials of the department concerned, health officials and police organized an education campaign and daily free tests under the supervision of township administrator U Hline Maung Maung for the people and send the positive patients to the hospital.

On 19 December, a total of 377 people took COVID-19 tests at Naungnun joint inspection camp, general hospital and township health department of Kengtung Township and the results showed negative. — Aung Zin Myint (IPRD)/GNLM



Kengtung locals receive free test for COVID-19.
PHOTO: AUNG ZIN MYINT (IPRD)

MoC facilitates daily imports of anti-COVID-19 devices, medical aid

THE Ministry of Commerce is overseeing the imports of essential medical supplies plus anti-COVID equipment that are critical to the COVID-19 prevention, control and treatment activities, through trading posts, international airports and seaports.

Anti-COVID-19 equipment was imported by three companies using five vehicles. A total of two liquid oxygen storage containers, two oxygen distributors and 19 tonnes of masks were imported via the Muse 105th Miles Trading Zone and Chinshwehaw border post yesterday.

Officials from the relevant departments are cooperating to facilitate and ex-



Boxers carrying liquid oxygen are ready to distribute them to states and regions.

pedite the standard operating procedures, including online registration for the import process.

It is reported that the Ministry of Commerce is coordinat-

ing with relevant departments and treatment of COVID-19 as well as contact persons for inquiries can be reached through the Ministry's Website — www.commerce.gov.mm. — MNA

127 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 20 December, total figure rises to 528,380

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 528,380 after 127 new cases were reported on 20 December 2021 according to the Ministry of Health. Among these confirmed cases, 505,761 have been discharged from hospitals. Death toll reached 19,226 after 6 died. — MNA

Defence Services Medical Academy (DSMA) is already ...



The Senior General presents the silver sword to Best Cadet awardee.

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to practise preventive measures for each disease respectively, to do physical exercises in line with the motto, “**Exercise is Medicine**”, and to lead a healthy lifestyle. Furthermore, it is really necessary to learn peculiar diseases as well as advanced medical science subjects continuously and at the same time, it is necessary to do researches concerning the development in medical science.

One’s expected life span in Myanmar is 67.78 years, working out by the United Nations Population Department of the World Health Organization. In the year 2020, the expected life span in Myanmar would be taking the position of 150 on the world’s list, the 6th position among the neighbouring countries and the 10th position among the ASEAN countries which is the least. While rating the life span basically, it is mainly based on the situations of pregnant women and children, education systems, socio-economy, lifestyle and child mortality rate. Moreover, people’s physical development in our country is not as satisfactory as that in other countries. To raise the life span of our country, it is necessary to upgrade the level of living standards, literacy and economy.

Regardless of time, place, race and religion, to give healthcare services widely not only to the Tatmadaw men and their families but also to the national races all over the country, the

Tatmadaw Medical Corps are now fulfilling the needs of the national health sector by deploying military mobile medical teams. Moreover, staff from the military medical corps including specialists and medical officers are now giving their services not only at their assigned hospitals/medical corps but also at the remote areas where there is the majority of ethnic groups of our country where there is hardly any communication.

Our Tatmadaw will still be taking an important role in the tasks of controlling and giving treatment as well as rebuilding

since the COVID-19 can’t be completely driven out but it will always be by our side. Thus, I’d like to address you all to participate actively in the tasks of preventing and giving treatment of the COVID-19 pandemic in the respective regions where you are assigned.

Concerning public health, as the saying goes “**Nothing is more important than human’s life**”, it is necessary for the Tatmadaw to work hard to give much better health care services for the public and to help medical science develop.

Since medical science is a difficult subject, only when there are well-qualified teachers, adequate teaching-learning aids, learners’ interests and creative thinking then they can help to produce efficient military doctors. At present, the Defence Services Medical Academy (DSMA) is already on the recognized list of the World Federation for Medical Education and medical subjects are taught in line with the international syllabus.

In order to keep abreast with the other international medical institutes, well-qualified specialists have already been assigned as academic instructors. They are to cooperate with International Medical Corps, to take postgraduate and doctorate courses abroad and also to cooperate with the civilian medical experts. In this way, our Tatmadaw has been working hard from all sources for the development of human resources.

You yourselves are carrying out national defence duties

Our Tatmadaw will still be taking an important role in the tasks of controlling and giving treatment as well as rebuilding since the COVID-19 can’t be completely driven out but it will always be by our side. Thus, I’d like to address you all to participate actively in the tasks of preventing and giving treatment of the COVID-19 pandemic in the respective regions where you are assigned.

and you are also giving medical cover to the other military men who have already sacrificed their lives so that you all have basic noble spirits. By strengthening these basic noble spirits, build yourselves to become a well-disciplined military man. To become a military doctor, the nation and Tatmadaw have trained you all by spending much money and time and on the other hand, you have to try and train yourselves to become well-behaved and well-qualified doctors and officers so that you could upgrade your respective life as well as your parents’ hope.

After taking the salute of cadet companies, the Senior General left the parade.

After the parade, the Senior General received outstanding award winner cadets at the parlour of the headquarters of

the academy and spoke words of thanks.

In his speech, the Senior General urged those outstanding cadets to practise self-control for themselves with conscience, mindfulness and content not to lose their goals. They have to repay the debt of gratitude to the Tatmadaw with the behaviour of a good soldier for obtaining knowledge and skills from the Tatmadaw and also repay the debt of gratitude to the parents who nurtured them from childhood to the life of university students. They also serve the Tatmadaw members and their families with healthcare services. They all have to successfully meet the goals with self-control and hardworking as well as sustain the prestige of nationality and that of a good soldier. — MNA



State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Maha Thray Sithu Min Aung Hlaing inspects the cadet companies of the Defence Services Medical Academy in Yangon on 20 December 2021.

Full collection of taxes

Officials need to supervise systematic levying of commercial tax at the border areas. Relevant departments need to eye on the full collection of taxes and expose those who commit malpractice in the tax collection.

(Excerpt from the speech delivered by Chairman of the State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at the meeting 3/2021 of the Union Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar on 3-12-2021)

Virtual Tourism Committee Meeting (2/2021) held

UNION Minister for Hotels and Tourism Dr Htay Aung attended a virtual meeting of the Tourism Committee (2/2021) at the Sapphire Hall of the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism yesterday morning.

The directors-general, deputy permanent secretary, deputy directors-general, and departmental officials attended the meeting in person, while the Nay Pyi Taw Council member, Tourism Committee member, ministers in charge of Hotels and Tourism from regions/states governments, tourism professionals, representatives from private tourism organizations and regional and state branch officials, including Nay Pyi Taw Council Area, attended online.

At the meeting, the Union Minister, in his capacity as Chairman of the Working Committee, said that the COVID-19 epidemic was a genetic mutation and that it was spreading locally and in some neighbouring countries.



MoHT Union Minister Dr Htay Aung joins the virtual meeting of the Tourism Committee 2/2021 in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

“There have been inquiries about cross-border travel, so there is a need for health safety procedures. Once the rules and regulations have been set, it is necessary to be prepared to accept them,” the Union Minister said.

He said the widespread implementation of nature-based

tourism, rural tourism, agro-based tourism and community-based tourism in each region and state including the Nay Pyi Taw Council Area and that could greatly contribute to the socio-economic development of the local people.

Next, the Secretary of the Working Committee Depart-

ment of Hotels and Tourism director-general explained the status of applying for national level certificates in line with the Enchanting Myanmar Health and Safety Protocol (HSP) programme.

Afterwards, state/regions ministers discussed the situation of visitors and revenue,

completion of the COVID-19 vaccination to the hotels and tourism staff, and identification of new destinations.

Quarantine hotels and 360-degree video recording status for travel promotion and business requirements were also discussed according to relevant sectors.

Next, tourism experts discussed the situation of wellness tourism for regional development, job creation in the country, the hotel guest list management system and introducing mutual recognition programmes between ASEAN countries in the hotel and tourism sector.

Representatives of private tourism organizations also discussed ASEAN tourism awards and accreditation issues, facilitating the application process on the HSP website and real-time reporting of tourist information in states and regions.

The Union Minister clarified the matter and made concluding remarks. —MNA

Defence Services Medical Academy holds 22nd convocation

THE Defence Services Medical Academy (DSMA) held the 22nd Convocation yesterday afternoon in Mingaladon Township, Yangon. The ceremony was attended by Acting Commandant Col. Zaw Mann Phyto of the Academy, Acting Rector of the Academy Lt-Col Khun Tun Hlaing and members of the Dean of Faculties.

The Acting Commandant, the Acting Rector and members of the Dean of Faculties entered the Convocation Hall and took their seats at the designated places. Then, the National Anthem was played and the convocation ceremony was opened. Afterwards, the Acting Rector announced the holding of the convocation and pledged to abide by the code of conduct for the graduates.

The Acting Rector presented certificates to 33 medical

graduates and six graduates in dentistry and allowed them to wear uniforms corresponding to the degrees and signed the convocation record book.

Afterwards, Acting Commandant delivered the convocation speech and announced the closing of the ceremony.

To date, the DSMA has conferred master degrees in medical science on 2,136 students, PhDs in Basic Medicine and Clinical Practice on 138 students, postgraduate diplomas in medical education on 207 students, and postgraduate diplomas in medicines on 189 students. At present, there are four trainee officers are attending the 26th postgraduate course of medical science, 167 trainee officers in the 27th, 232 trainee officers in the 28th, and 304 trainee officers in the 29th postgraduate course of medical science, total-



The 22nd Convocation of the Defence Services Medical Academy in progress.

ling 707 postgraduate officers.

The honours and scholastic awards that these cadets received were given accordingly to the examination of not only by the rector, professors and

department heads of the DSMA but also by rectors, professors and examiners from various medical universities across the country.

The curriculum of the

DSMA has been coordinated with other medical universities, and specialization and honours are being conferred keeping in line with the medical curriculum. —MNA

Appointment ceremony held for graduates of 22nd Intake of Defence Services Medical Academy as gazetted officers

THE Appointment Ceremony of graduates from the 22nd Intake of Defence Services Medical Academy as gazetted officers was held yesterday at the Convocation Hall of the academy.

The ceremony was attended by Military Appointment-General Lt-Gen Lin Aung of the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Army), senior military officers, Acting Commandant of the Academy Colonel Zaw Mann Phyto and graduates.

At the ceremony, Lt-Gen

Lin Aung, senior military officers and the Acting Commandant of the Academy took seats on the stage, and Lt-Gen Lin Aung handed over appointment certificates to each of the graduates.

The ceremony was concluded with the remarks of Lt-Gen Lin Aung. — MNA

One of the DSMA graduates receives the appointment certificate.



Over 12-year-old students receive 2nd dose of COVID-19 vaccine in Bhamo

A total of 240 students aged above 12 in Dawphoneyang town in Bhamo District, Kachin State, received their second dose of COVID-19 vaccine yesterday.

The inoculation was carried out under the close supervision of the township administrator, and healthcare personnel, departmental staff and education officers worked together for the systematic vaccination keeping in line with COVID-19 rules and regulations set by the Ministry of Health.

The Ministry of Health also handed over the vaccination certificates of the students for being fully immunized against



Inoculation is underway for students aged 12 and above in Bhamo.

the COVID-19 disease to respective school headmasters, according to the Town's General Administration Department. — Dawphoneyang (IPRD)/GNLM

Nearly 6,000 people vaccinated during 5th batch of COVID-19 vaccination in Singaing

THE Ministry of Health is conducting the 5th batch (second phase) of the COVID-19 vaccination for people over the age of 18 in Singaing Township, Kyaukse District in Mandalay Region. As of 17 December, a total of 5,905 people have been reportedly vaccinated and the inoculation will also continue for the rest of the people, according to the Township Public Health Department.

In Singaing, departmental staff, fire brigade members,

ward/village administrators, and members of charity associations are carrying out health campaigns to raise awareness of COVID-19 variants, including Omicron as well as to prevent and contain the disease transmission. They are also working together to spray pesticides in wards and villages and also monitoring the compliance of the guidelines set by the Ministry of Health and local rules and regulations. — Nyo Nyo Win (IPRD)/GNLM



Singaing locals get jabbed against COVID-19. PHOTO: NYO NYO WIN (IPRD)

Public Notice

1. The Anti-Corruption Commission has established corruption prevention units within ministries to effectively curb corruption.
2. The ACC used SMS on the mobile phone to ask the public who seek services at an office of the department of the relevant ministries via Short Code No "1111" for feedbacks, including the Public Feedback Programme-PFP.
3. According to the PFP, the right replies of the citizens via Short Code No "1111" will provide the quality of services of each department and the requirements for corruption prevention to be fixed.
4. Therefore, the public should make a reply to the questions of the ACC and corruption prevention units of the ministries via SMS at Short Code No "1111" and such doing is a supportive measure for PFP and the people are urged to cooperate in the operations.

Anti-Corruption Commission

Answer "1111" to fight against corruption
Answer "1111" to improve services
Let's work together to eliminate corruption towards prosperity

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Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish "Letter to the Editor" that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.

COVID-19 vaccination continues in different states, regions

DOCTORS and nurses from public hospitals, medical teams, healthcare workers and volunteers are working hard to give COVID-19 vaccines in various states and regions as the vaccination programme is one of the most important activities

in the prevention, control and treatment of the COVID-19 disease.

COVID-19 vaccine is being administered daily to target groups regardless of race and religion, including Buddhist monks and nuns, local people

over the age of 55, religious leaders, prisoners, people with disabilities, ethnic armed organizations, people with chronic diseases and people in IDP camps, respectively.

Doctors and nurses from public hospitals, medical teams, relevant healthcare workers in collaboration with volunteers have already jabbed COVID-19 vaccines to 5,304 people from 12 townships in northern Shan State, 2,640 people from five townships in eastern Shan State, 9,765 people from 14 townships in Kayin and Mon states, 6,320 people from Myeik and Pulaw townships in Taninthayi Region, 4,272 people from three townships in Yangon Region, 26,500 people from 26 townships in Ayeyawady Region, 15,995 people from 10 townships in Rakhine



Vaccination programme is underway for residents in Bago Region.



Locals gets inoculated against COVID-19 in Mon State.

State, 8,740 people from seven districts in Mandalay Region and 1,544 people from Toungoo and Htantabin townships, Bago Region respectively.

Similarly, healthcare officials gave the vaccines to 1,164 students from Lashio Township, northern Shan State, 28

students from Mongpyin Township, eastern Shan State, 980 students from 26 townships in Ayeyawady Region, and 350 students from Toungoo Township, Bago Region.

It is reported that officials visited the site and coordinated the necessary work. —MNA

Myanmar-Thai border trade up to US\$195 mln till 10 December

THE Myanmar-Thailand border trade has increased by US\$195.1 million between 1 October and 10 December this mini-budget year of 2021-2022FY, according to the Ministry of Commerce. The country's export to neighbouring Thailand reached \$545.09 million, while its import shared \$319.53 million.

During the corresponding period of the FY2020-2021, Myanmar-Thailand border trade touched a high of \$669.52 million.

The country mainly conducts border trade with Thailand through seven land borders — Tachilek, Myawady, Kawthoung,

Myeik, Hteekhee, Mawtaung and Meisei. From 1 October 2021 to 10 December 2022, the Myawady checkpoint topped with the most bilateral border trade value of \$478.69 million.

Myanmar's exports to Thailand were primarily agriculture and livestock products, and imports from Thailand were mainly non-alcoholic beverages, fabric and yarn, motorcycles and related parts, and construction material.

Thailand is Myanmar's second-largest trade partner and third-largest foreign investor. — ACM/GNLM



Thailand is Myanmar's second-largest trade partner and third-largest foreign investor.

Corn prices stable at K700 per viss



Of 2.3 million tonnes, the majority of corn was delivered to Thailand, whereas the remaining corn was conveyed to China, India and Viet Nam.

THE prices of corn remain unchanged these days, touching around K700 per viss (a viss equals 1.6 kilogrammes), market's data showed. The exchange rate is correlated with corn price stability. The fixed exchange rate is quite stable at present so the corn price is expected to remain stable, the traders said.

At present, the exchange rate of a US dollar is pegged at around K1,800. The FOB price of corn stood at approximately \$250 per tonne.

Myanmar's corn is shipped to the Philippines, India, Viet Nam, Laos and Singapore via maritime trade, said U Min Khaing, chair of the Myanmar Corn Industrial Association said.

"The price of corn is higher than the rates recorded in the previous years," he continued.

Myanmar has exported more than 2.3 million tonnes of corn to foreign countries in the financial year 2020-2021, according to the Myanmar Corn Industrial Association. Of 2.3 million tonnes, the majority of corn was delivered to Thailand, whereas the remaining corn was conveyed to China, India and Viet Nam.

During the FY2019-2020 ended 30 September, the country exported 2.2 million tonnes of corns to external markets, with an estimated value of \$360 million, the Ministry of Commerce's data showed. Thailand gives the green light to corn imports through Maesot under the zero tariff (with Form-D), between 1 February and 31 August.

Thailand has granted tax exemption on corn imports between February and August.

However, Thailand imposed a maximum tax rate of 73 per cent on corn import to protect the rights of their growers if the corn is imported during the corn season of Thailand. During last FY2019-2020 ended 30 September, the country exported 2.2 million tonnes of corns to the external market, with an estimated value of \$360 million, the Ministry of Commerce's data showed.

Myanmar is the second-largest exporter of corn among regional countries. At present, corn is cultivated in Shan, Kachin, Kayah and Kayin states and Mandalay, Sagaing and Magway regions. Myanmar has three corn seasons — winter, summer and monsoon. The country yearly produces 2.5-3 million tonnes of corn. — NN/GNLM

Daily newspapers available online

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News and Periodicals Enterprise

Mini Gems Emporium 2021 continues into fourth day

THE Mini Gems Emporium 2021 showcased pearl and jade lots on its fourth day (20 December) at Mani Yadana Jade Hall as per the health protocols for COVID-19.

Both local and foreign jade traders observed jade lots displayed inside and outside of Mani Yadana Jade Hall.

On the third day of the emporium, the number of jade lots from 1 to 250 were on sale through an open tender system and 199 lots have been sold. The number of lots from 251 to 500 was also sold through the open bidding yesterday. The traders carefully observed jade lots and submitted their bids.

Bidding was closed at 3 pm and the winners for those jade lots will be declared at 11 am on 21 December.

Union Minister U Khin Maung Yi of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, Deputy Minister U Min Min Oo and members of the Myanmar Gems Emporium Central Committee inspected the showcase and bidding system.

Furthermore, 330 pearl lots were also sold through an open tender system between 18 and 19 December at the emporium. Jade lot numbers from 501-780 will be put on sales on 21 December as well. — MNA



Gem merchants are purchasing pearl and jade lots through an open tender system.



Gem traders are seen evaluating the jade lots.



Chilli from Sagaing region cultivated for exporting to China



Sagaing region started its chilli cultivation in October 2021. About 3,216 acres of dried chilli and 4,489 acres of fresh chilli have been grown so far, according to the Sagaing Region Agriculture Department.

THE chillies from the Sagaing region are cultivated to export to China, said U Win Hlaing Oo, head of the Sagaing Region Agriculture Department.

“The cultivation of both fresh and dried chilli in the Sagaing region has developed. Some of the chilli from ChaungU and Yinmabin townships have been cultivated to export to China. Thus, our department will encourage local farmers to expand fresh chilli cultivation this winter season,” said U Win Hlaing Oo.

In the 2021-2022 financial year (FY), more than 7,000 acres of chillies have been cultivated in the Sagaing region.

Sagaing region started its chilli cultivation in October 2021. About 3,216 acres of dried chilli and 4,489 acres of fresh chilli have been grown so far, according to the Sagaing Region Agriculture Department.

According to the department's statistics, a total of 3,216 acres of dried chilli and 4,489 acres of fresh chilli were cultivated across the region, including 30 acres of dried chilli and 21 acres of fresh chilli in Mawlaik district, 186 acres of fresh chilli in Tamu district, 66 acres of fresh chilli in Kalay district, 118 acres of fresh chilli in Hkamti district, 44 acres of fresh chilli in Naga zone,

281 acres of dried chilli and 1,612 acres of fresh chilli in Monywa district, 1,454 acres of dried chilli in Yinmabin district, 1,339 acres of fresh chilli in Shwebo district, 1,163 acres of dried chilli and 855 acres of fresh chilli in Sagaing district, 288 acres of dried chilli and 169 acres of fresh chilli in Katha district and 79 acres of fresh chilli in Kawlin district.

The cultivation cost of the chilli cost K1.5 million for the owned land and K2.5 million for rented land. The chilli crops can be picked up every 15 days and can be harvested for up to six months. An acre of chilli plantation yielded about 100 visses. Next week, it has yielded between 400 visses and 500 visses.

The farmers are urged to provide the fertilizers systematically to improve chilli yield and quality. Then, the departmental staff conducted field awareness to local farmers to develop chilli yield, irrigate systematically and use the natural antibiotic, according to the Sagaing Region Agriculture Department. — Lu Lay/GNLM

Black gram price in bear market upon large supply

AS the newly harvested black grams are constantly flowing into the market, the price stayed on downward trend these days.

The price of black gram (urad called in India) drastically dipped to K1,080,000 per tonne on 20 December, whereas it fetched K1,345,000 per tonne on 14 December. It touched a high of K1,425,000 per tonne (FAQ/RC) on 1 December. It showed a drastic drop of K345,000 per tonne within 20 days.

Additionally, the black grams will be harvested in January as well. Consequently, the price is likely to remain on a down side.

Furthermore, the pulses price is directly related to the international market. At present, the exchange rate is stable at around K1,800 per USD.

Last September, prices hit an all-time high of K2 million

per tonne tracking Kyat weakening against the US dollar in the local forex market when the black gram was highly demanded by the foreign trade partners. The US dollar value reached the highest of over K3,000 in history.

Over 88,328 tonnes of black gram with an estimated value of US\$77.5 million were shipped to the foreign trade partners as of 19 November in the current mini-budget period (October 2021-March 2022).

Myanmar conveyed US\$1.57 billion worth of over two million tonnes of various pulses to foreign trade partners in the financial year 2020-2021. The country shipped \$966.4 million value of 1.24-million-tonne pulses and beans to foreign markets through sea route, and \$604.3 million worth of 786,920 tonnes were sent to the neighbouring countries through land borders. — GNLM

Save lives of unemployed persons by helping hands

GLOBAL countries are facing a tremendous challenge about unemployment problems in successive eras while leaders of those countries have been seeking the best or proper solution to mitigate the employment rate of their countries.

The rate of unemployment is based on the ratio of unemployed people to the total population of the relevant country. Roughly, most of the countries set 18 years old of the people as the youngest age of the employee.

Hence, all the citizens need to stretch their hands so as to give a helping hand to unemployed persons with the creation of jobs deserved for their skills and knowledge as much as possible for contributing to the prosperous society.

Those people above 18 are ready to work. Indeed, the unemployment rate does not count military personnel, prisoners, those in the lunatic asylum, housemaids, retired persons and students.

Root causes of the people facing unemployment are based on low education qualification and discrimination on gender, age and race. Such root causes become a drive to raise the poverty rate which pulls down the unemployed people into the lower living standard. If so, those from the lower living standard do not afford to successfully struggle from their vicious circle. Consequently, they become disqualified in education, knowledge, vocational techniques and regular income due to lack of any supports.

Gradually, they are far from skills in any profession. Again, they would have to seek the jobs deserved for their kills but they would miss the chance to have any jobs. That is why they unavoidably accept the vicious circle of poverty and low living standard. As such, not

only the government but the people above the lower living standard, affordable to stand tall in the society on their strengths need to save those unemployed people with efforts for uplifting their strata to be familiar with the society.

Unemployment may be a motive to cause the crimes such as drinking, drug abuse, and violence at home based on depression. According to the research results, the high unemployment rate may raise divorce, diverse opinions in the society, discrimination and suicide cases.

If so, the high unemployment rate reflects the problems in financial, social and mental processes, individual life, health, economy and the whole society in addition to the image of the country in the global community.

Hence, all the citizens need to stretch their hands so as to give a helping hand to unemployed persons with the creation of jobs deserved for their skills and knowledge as much as possible for contributing to the prosperous society.



COVID-19 cases and deaths in the Americas triple in 2021

Compared to the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 was "undoubtedly worse" for the Americas, where infections and deaths tripled, the top UN health official there reported.

DR. Carissa Etienne, Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), delivered her final briefing of the year, providing a regional update and reflections on the crisis.

A heavy toll

Since the start of the pandemic, more than 98 million people in the Americas have developed COVID-19 and more than 2.3 million have died from the disease.

More than a third of all cases reported worldwide, and one in four deaths, have occurred in the region.

"And when we compare 2020 to 2021, this year was undoubtedly worse. We saw triple the number of COVID infections and deaths in this second year of the pandemic than we did in 2020," Dr Etienne told journalists.

She said hospitals were stretched thin, stocks of vital medicines and supplies ran low, and health systems "were put to

the test like never before."

Regional overview

PAHO is the regional office of the World Health Organization (WHO). Over the past week, more than 926,056 new COVID-19 infections were reported across the Americas, a nearly 19 per cent increase over previous weeks.

North America is experiencing a resurgence in cases as Mexico witnesses a reduction in infections.

Cases are down in Central America, except in Panama, where they have steadily increased over the last month.

"We're seeing a shifting picture in South America," Dr Etienne reported. "Cases have dropped in Bolivia for the first time since September, just as COVID infections increased in Ecuador, Paraguay and Uruguay, and cases remain steady in Brazil and Peru."

Although infections are down overall across the Caribbean,

Trinidad and Tobago reached its highest weekly case count, while Saint Lucia also saw cases rise by 66 per cent over the last week.

The Cayman Islands reported the highest weekly incidence of any country or territory in the Americas.

Vaccine inequity persists

While 2021 has been "a sobering year", COVID-19 vaccines have protected millions against the worst of the coronavirus, said Dr Etienne. More than 1.3 billion doses have been administered in the region to date.

"Although rollout of vaccines has not been as rapid as we would have liked, or as evenly distributed, today 56 per cent of people in Latin America and the Caribbean have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, thanks to the efforts of countries and the support of donors," she said.

Dr Etienne warned that vaccine inequity continues to divide the region, saying "if we don't



Médicins Sans Frontières (MSF) provides care to vulnerable people during COVID-19 response in Brazil. PHOTO: MSF

address glaring gaps, we'll fail to bring this virus under control."

Learn from the pandemic

With no "magic bullet" against COVID-19, the health official underscored the need to both embrace new tools and use them wisely.

Several promising new drugs are in late-stage development, and countries must be ready to leverage them once approved, she said.

Dr Etienne also urged countries to build on lessons learned over the pandemic. This includes heeding advice from WHO, experts, scientists, and regulators "whose jobs it is to carefully review the safety and efficacy of drugs and recommend when, where and how to deploy them".

Countries must also work together to ensure people everywhere can benefit from any new therapeutics, once available,

through timely access and affordable prices.

Solidarity and sharing

Stressing that "we cannot and must not let history repeat itself", Dr Etienne called for nations to collaborate now to expand production capacity, including in the Americas region, "so countries don't remain completely dependent on pharmaceutical imports."

SOURCE : UN

Study finds SARS-CoV-2 protein interacts with Parkinson's protein, promotes amyloid formation



Representative image: Living with Parkinson's does not put you at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19, but it does make it harder for you to recover if you contract it. PHOTO: ANI

It's unknown whether these interactions also occurred within neurons of the human brain, but if so, they could help explain the possible link between COVID-19 infection and Parkinson's disease, the researchers said.

neurological problems, such as loss of smell, headaches and "brain fog." However, whether these symptoms are caused by the virus entering the brain, or whether the symptoms are instead caused by chemical signals released in the brain by the immune system in response to the virus, is still controversial. In Parkinson's disease, a protein called a-synuclein forms abnormal amyloid fibrils, leading to the death of dopamine-producing neurons in the brain. Interestingly, loss of smell is a common premotor symptom in Parkinson's disease. This fact, as well as case reports of Parkinson's

in COVID-19 patients, made Christian Blum, Mireille Claessens and colleagues wonder whether protein components of SARS-CoV-2 could trigger the aggregation of a-synuclein into amyloid. They chose to study the two most abundant proteins of the virus: the spike (S-) protein that helps SARS-CoV-2 enter cells, and the nucleocapsid (N-) protein that encapsulates the RNA genome inside the virus.

In test-tube experiments, the researchers used a fluorescent probe that binds amyloid fibrils to show that, in the absence of the coronavirus proteins, a-synuclein required more than 240 hours to

aggregate into fibrils. Adding the S-protein had no effect, but the N-protein decreased the aggregation time to less than 24 hours.

In other experiments, the team showed that the N- and a-synuclein proteins interacted directly, in part through their opposite electrostatic charges, with at least 3-4 copies of a-synuclein bound to each N-protein. Next, the researchers injected N-protein and fluorescently labelled a-synuclein into a cell model of Parkinson's disease, using a similar concentration of N-protein as would be expected inside a SARS-CoV-2-infected cell.

Compared to control cells with only a-synuclein injected, about twice as many cells died upon injection of both proteins. Also, the distribution of a-synuclein was altered in cells co-injected with both proteins, and elongated structures were observed, although the researchers could not confirm that they were amyloid. It's unknown whether these interactions also occurred within neurons of the human brain, but if so, they could help explain the possible link between COVID-19 infection and Parkinson's disease, the researchers said.

SOURCE : ANI



Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Monday 20 December 2021)

BAY INFERENCE: According to the observations at (13:30) hrs M.S.T today, the low pressure area over South Andaman Sea off north Sumatra coast still persists. Weather is partly cloudy to cloudy over Andaman Sea and Southeast Bay and a few cloud elsewhere over the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL NOON OF THE 21 December, 2021: Light rain are likely to be isolated in Mandalay and Tainthayi Regions. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Upper Sagaing, Yangon, Ayeyawady Regions and Kachin, Shan, Chin, Rakhine, Kayah States and generally fair in the remaining Regions and States.

STATE OF THE SEA: Sea will be moderate in Myanmar waters. Wave height will be about (5-8) feet off and along Myanmar Coasts.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of slight decrease of night temperatures in Nay Pyi Taw, Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway Regions and Kachin, Shan, Chin States.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 21 December, 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 21 December, 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 21 December, 2021: Generally fair weather.

Low Pressure Area Condition

Issued at (19:00) hours M.S.T on 20-12-2021

ACCORDING to the observations at (17:30) hrs M.S.T today, the lowpressure area over South Andaman Sea off North Sumatra Coast still persists.

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More than 50,000 forced from homes in Malaysian floods



Cars are seen in flood water caused by heavy rain in Kuala Lumpur early on 19 December 2021. **PHOTO: ARIF KARTONO / AFP**

MORE than 50,000 people have been forced from their homes in Malaysia and at least seven are dead after the country faced some of its worst floods for years, officials said Monday.

A weekend of torrential rain caused rivers to overflow, flooding towns and villages and cutting off major roads, with many motorists left trapped in their vehicles for hours.

The number of evacuees across the country rose to about 51,000 on Monday, according to official data, with the worst-hit area being the eastern state of Pahang, where some 32,000 were forced from their homes.

The country's wealthiest and most populous state Selangor, surrounding the capital Kuala Lumpur, has been badly affected — which is unusual as it typically avoids the worst of the monsoon floods.

Seven people have been

confirmed dead in Selangor, according to fire and rescue officials cited in *The Star* newspaper. With reports of others missing, the toll is expected to climb.

Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said that a month's rainfall came down in one day in Selangor, adding that tens of thousands of emergency service and military personnel were deployed to aid rescue efforts.

Student Eyilavarasi Mage-suaran recalled the moment her house was flooded in the hard-hit city of Shah Alam in Selangor early Sunday.

"Water rushed into our house from the rear and back, trapping us inside," the 21-year-old told AFP, adding she was alerted to

the flood by her barking dog.

"I really feared we would drown. We have lived here since 1995, and never experienced flooding." A relative with a truck rescued her family.

The rains had largely stopped by Monday, leaving residents to return to damaged properties and pick up the pieces.

The Southeast Asian nation is hit by floods annually during the monsoon season, but those on the weekend were the worst in years.

Global warming has been linked to worsening floods. Because a warmer atmosphere holds more water, climate change increases the risk and intensity of flooding from extreme rainfall. — AFP ■

Japanese entrepreneur Maezawa safely returns from 12-day ISS trip

JAPANESE billionaire entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa safely returned to Earth on Monday following a 12-day trip to the International Space Station that "flew by".

Maezawa, the 46-year-old founder of major online fashion retailer Zozo Inc., landed in Kazakhstan at around 12:13 pm. Japan time aboard a Russian Soyuz spacecraft with his manager and a Russian cosmonaut.

The three who returned from the ISS showed no signs of health issues, according to a person working for Maezawa, who said his company received a call that they were "feeling good".

In an image released by Ros-

cosmos, Russia's state corporation for space activities, Maezawa also looked fine and waved cheerfully after the touchdown.

Shortly before he departed from the ISS, Maezawa tweeted, "The 12 days in space flew by. I will put on my space suit and board the Soyuz spacecraft." The spacecraft was undocked from the ISS at around 8:50 am Japan time, circled Earth and entered the atmosphere before making a parachute-assisted touchdown.

During his trip, Maezawa, who was the 10th civilian to visit the ISS, uploaded videos on YouTube capturing his activities, and the number of subscribers for his account has now

exceeded 1 million.

Some of his videos posted on YouTube included one on how to use the toilet on the ISS and another showed him drinking tea as he viewed Earth. He also appeared in an interview with a Japanese television station and played badminton with an astronaut, something he had said he wanted to do in space before his liftoff on 8 December.

Maezawa's trip to the ISS is believed to have cost around 10 billion yen (\$88 million). While some people have criticized it as an "indulgence by a wealthy person," the trip likely expanded the public's interest in space. — Kyodo ■



Screenshot image from Roscosmos Twitter account shows Japanese entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa (C) upon returning to Earth aboard a Russian Soyuz spacecraft following his 12-day trip to the International Space Station. **PHOTO: KYODO**

Over 700,000 flock to Saudi Arabia's top music festival

RECORD crowds of over 700,000 revellers flocked to Saudi Arabia's MDLBeast Soundstorm music festival, authorities said Monday, at the end of the four-day event in the oil-rich desert kingdom.

The electronic music festival comes as Saudi's leaders are pushing efforts to change its conservative image and diversify its economy, only a few years after the country lifted a ban on music and dancing.

International entertainers and musicians — including superstar French DJ David Guetta — performed at the event despite boycott calls over Saudi Arabia's human rights record.



People attend the Soundstorm music festival, organized by MDLBEAST, in Banban on the outskirts of the Saudi capital Riyadh on 16 December 2021. **PHOTO: FAYEZ NURELDINE / AFP**

The festival, which ended on a Sunday, comes as Saudi Arabia sees a spike in coronavirus cases amid increased fears over the spread of the new omicron variant. — AFP ■

Lira plunges again after Erdogan rules out higher rates

TURKEY'S troubled lira shed a further five per cent against the dollar Monday, after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan cited Muslim teachings to justify not raising interest rates to stabilize the currency.

Erdogan has pushed the central bank to sharply lower borrowing costs despite the annual rate of inflation soaring to more than 20 per cent.

Economists believe the policy could see consumer price increases reach 30 per cent or higher in the coming months.

But Erdogan said in remarks aired by state television late Sunday that his

Muslim faith prevented him from supporting rate hikes.

"They complain we keep decreasing the interest rate. Don't expect anything else from me," he said in the televised comments.

"As a Muslim, I will continue doing what our religion tells us. This is the command."

Islamic teaching forbids Muslims from receiving or charging interest on loaned or borrowed money.

Erdogan has previously cited his Muslim faith in explaining why he believes interest rates cause inflation instead of tamping it down. — AFP ■



Photo taken on 20 December 2021, shows a smartphone screen displaying the Japanese government's COVID-19 vaccination certificate app. **PHOTO: KYODO**

Japan launches COVID-19 vaccine certificate app

THE Japanese government launched on Monday a smartphone app that allows people to display proof of vaccination that can be used for multiple purposes, including immigration procedures.

The app, called the COVID-19 Vaccination Certificate Application and available for both iPhone and Android smartphones, displays information such as the number of doses a user has received, the dates of inoculation and the vaccine manufacturer, according to the Digital Agency.

Municipal governments have

been issuing vaccine certificates in paper form since the summer, but the app makes it easier for people to obtain certification through the "My Number" national identification system so long as they have been issued a My Number card, an agency official said. While all citizens and residents of Japan are issued 12-digit ID numbers, cards need to be applied for separately.

By scanning their My Number cards with a smartphone, people can pull up information on the app regarding their inoculation status from the Vaccination

Record System, a cloud system created by the government and used by municipalities to manage data on residents' inoculation status. For use in international travel, users need to additionally input passport data. Instructions on the app are provided only in Japanese language.

In addition to using the digital certificates for quarantine inspections in destination countries, the agency is also considering domestic use in a programme designed to loosen COVID-related restrictions on the vaccinated. — Kyodo ■

Dubai airport fully operational for first time since pandemic

DUBAI airport, one of the world's busiest travel hubs, is fully operational for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic erupted in March 2020, officials said Monday.

The opening of sections closed as the Covid-19 crisis took hold comes as the United Arab Emirates records a rise of infections amid fears of the new Omicron variant.

"Following the opening of the final phase... (the) airport is 100 per cent operational with all terminals, concourses, lounges, restaurants, and retail outlets

now open," said a statement carried by the UAE's official WAM news agency.

Travel via Dubai increases at the end the year, with foreigners — who make up the majority of the emirate's population — heading home for the holidays, while visitors come to celebrate the New Year.

Last year, Dubai International Airport reported a 70 per cent drop in traffic, from more than 86 million travellers in 2019 to 25.9 million in 2020.

In the first half of this year, 10.6 million people passed

through the airport, a 41 per cent drop from pre-pandemic figures.

Tourism is an economic mainstay of Dubai, which welcomed 16.7 million visitors in 2019.

The UAE — made up of seven emirates including Dubai — has pushed a comprehensive vaccination campaign for its nearly 10 million population.

But coronavirus infection numbers are again on the rise, with the UAE recording 285 cases on Sunday, compared to just 92 last week. — AFP ■



A picture shows a view of the Dubai International Airport on 1 February 2021. **PHOTO: KARIM SAHIB / AFP**

S Africa battles 'second pandemic' of rape, abuse

DONNING orange bibs, a group of women fan across a Johannesburg township notorious for crime, knocking on doors and stopping anyone they come across on the streets, including teenagers returning from school.

They are called gender-based violence brigades and their mission is herculean: to confront South Africa's plague of femicide and violence against women and children.

The cases are gruesome, and the numbers are dizzying.

A law student was murdered, her body chopped into pieces and stuffed into a suitcase. Another university student was raped, bludgeoned to death with an industrial weighing scale inside a post office. An eight-month pregnant woman was hanged from a tree.

"We can't just ignore what we (see) until justice takes its course," said Juliet Ngonyama, 52, her orange bib hanging from her shoulders.

Orange is a symbol of revolution in South Africa. In this case it symbolizes the activists' determination to curb the violence that has worsened since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic.

As the women speak with residents, they unearth cases that would have otherwise gone unreported.

Walking in pairs, they engage whoever they come across — male or female.

"Gender-based violence is abusing women, children and men emotionally physically, financially and psychologically," is their opening refrain.

South Africa has the unenviable reputation having some of the world's highest levels of violence against women.

100 daily rapes

More than 100 rapes are reported daily, while on average a woman is murdered every three hours, according to official data.

The latest quarterly crime statistics showed a 7.1-per-cent increase in rapes, with 9,556 women raped between July and September.

"These statistics are shameful," an exasperated President Cyril Ramaphosa said in November. He has characterized violence against women as a "second pandemic" after Covid-19. — AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Africa's COVID-19 cases exceed 9.15 mln: Africa CDC

THE number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Africa has reached 9,155,691 cases as of late Sunday evening, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) said.

The specialized healthcare agency of the African Union (AU) said the death toll across the continent stands at 225,967 and some 8,329,481 patients have recovered from the disease so far. South Africa, Morocco, Tunisia and Ethiopia are among the countries with the most cases on the continent, said Africa CDC. South Africa has recorded the most COVID-19 cases in Africa with 3,292,609 cases, followed by the northern African country Morocco with 952,628 cases as of late Sunday evening, it said. — Xinhua ■

Hong Kong's health authority confirms 5 more Omicron variant cases

HONG Kong's Centre for Health Protection (CHP) confirmed five additional cases of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 on Monday.

The cases, which were included in the daily cases recorded on Saturday and Sunday, involved four females and one male aged between 26 and 77. So far, Hong Kong has identified 19 cases with the Omicron variant. The CHP reported seven more imported cases of COVID-19 on Monday, taking the total tally of confirmed infections to 12,533. — Xinhua ■

Chinese FM calls for exploring way of peaceful coexistence between China, US

CHINESE State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi Monday called on the United States to work with China to find out the way of peaceful coexistence between the two major countries.

Wang made the remarks at the opening ceremony of a symposium on the international situation and China's diplomacy in 2021.

The setbacks and confrontations over the past year once again show that the fundamental cause of the serious difficulties and multiple challenges in the

China-US relations lies in the strategic misjudgment made by the US side on China and bilateral relations, Wang said.

He noted some people in the United States are unwilling to admit that other countries also have the right to development, unwilling to accept the fact that China is growing stronger and making progress, unwilling to agree that China and the United States can achieve mutual benefit and win-win results, and try to form a camp to contain and suppress China. "The wrong words

and deeds of the US side not only seriously damage the interests of the two peoples, but also seriously impact world peace and stability," Wang said.

"China's position is consistent and clear. Dialogue can be held, but it should be equal; cooperation is welcome, but it should be mutually beneficial; it is fine to compete, but it should be healthy; we are not afraid of confrontation, and will fight to the end," Wang said.

Noting both stand to gain from cooperation and lose from

confrontation, Wang said it is the most important lesson learned from the exchanges between China and the United States for more than half a century and history will surely continue to prove this truth.

"It is hoped that the US side will earnestly implement the consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, fulfill its commitments to win trust and work with China to explore the way of peaceful coexistence between the two major countries," Wang added. — Xinhua ■

'Spider-Man' rakes in stunning \$253 million in N American opening

COVID-SCHMOVID: Sony and Marvel's new "Spider-Man: No Way Home" scored the third-biggest domestic opening of all time, taking in an estimated \$253 million in its massive North American weekend opening.

Box office watchers are spinning hopeful predictions, with analysts eyeing it as the pandemic era's first potential billion-dollar-grossing film.

Its box office sales trail only 2019's "Avengers: Endgame" (\$357 million) and the previous year's "Avengers: Infinity War" (\$258 million), according to the BoxOffice-Mojo website. "Spider-Man" easily surpassed early estimates of \$130-150 million.

The new superhero blockbuster is well on its way to earning \$600 million overseas, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. And this comes as theatres continue to battle their way back from months-long Covid-induced closures.

"This is an incredible opening," David A. Gross, who runs Franchise Entertainment Research, told AFP. While most big series struggle to keep their momentum, he added, "Spider-Man" is exploding." — AFP ■

Iraqi museum restores treasures destroyed by jihadists

LEFT in ruins by jihadists, Iraq's once-celebrated Mosul museum and its 2,500-year-old treasures are being given a second life thanks to restoration efforts backed by French experts.

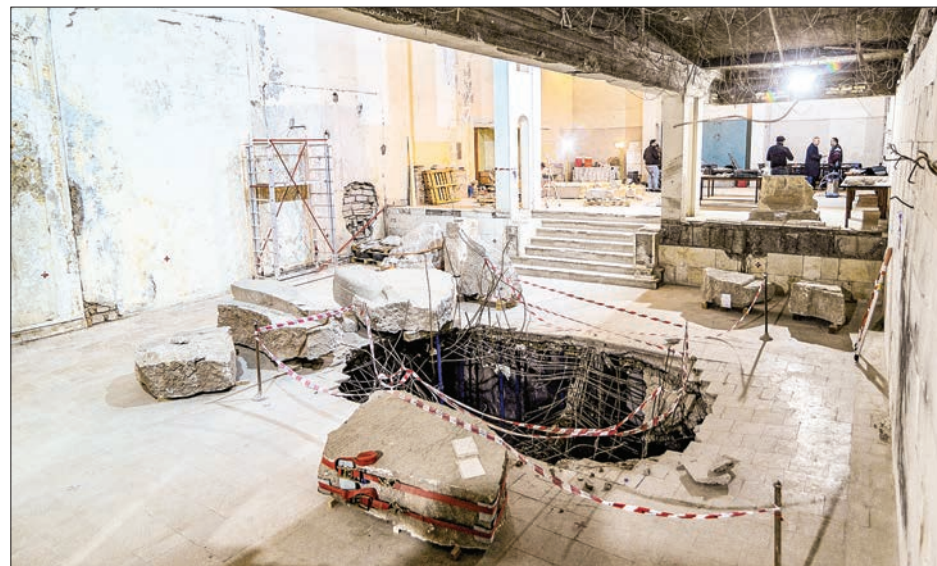
Ancient artefacts in the museum were smashed into little pieces when Islamic State group fighters seized the northern city of Mosul in 2014 and made it their seat of power for three years.

"We must separate all the fragments... It's like a puzzle, you try to retrieve the pieces that tell the same story," said restoration worker Daniel Ibled, commissioned by France's famous Louvre museum, which is supporting Iraqi museum employees.

"Little by little, you manage to recreate the full set."

When the IS jihadists were in control, they filmed themselves taking hammers to pre-Islamic treasures they deemed heretical, proudly advertising their rampage in a video published in February 2015.

The largest and heaviest artefacts were destroyed for the sake of their propaganda, but smaller pieces were sold on black markets the



This picture taken on 14 December 2021 shows a view of a larger fragment of a statue of the ancient Mesopotamian "lamassu" human-headed winged bull being reassembled at the Mosul Museum in Iraq's northern city. PHOTO: ZAID AL-OBEIDI / AFP

world over.

The scars of their destruction remain today.

On the ground floor of the museum, the twisted iron bars of the foundation

poke through a gaping hole.

In other rooms, stones of various sizes are scattered, some bearing etchings of animal paws or wings. Others show inscriptions in cuneiform script. — AFP ■

Giant rubber whale helps Kiwi rescuers battle beachings



This photo taken on 11 December 2021 shows a group of volunteers from New Zealand whale rescue charity Project Jonah being taught how to save a stranded whale by a group instructor, at Scorching Bay in Wellington. Real strandings are all-too common in New Zealand, which has one of the highest rates in the world, with about 300 animals beaching themselves annually. PHOTO: MARTY MELVILLE / AFP

A two-tonne rubber whale can take on a life of its own in the frigid shallows of a windswept New Zealand beach, particularly when a bedraggled group of would-be rescuers is trying to wrestle it into a harness.

"Keep the blowhole clear... you're too close to the tail, one swipe can do a serious injury to yourself and the whale," an instructor yells as the Wellington rain lashes his pupils.

Despite the discomfort, enthusiasm levels remain high as the group successfully manoeuvre the five-metre long pilot whale replica onto a mat between two inflatable pontoons.

The giant black dummy,

and a smaller 200 kilogramme version representing a dolphin, are eventually guided to deeper waters by volunteers trained by the New Zealand whale rescue charity Project Jonah.

Filled with water the latex marine mammals help teams prepare for real emergencies — New Zealand has one of the highest whale stranding rates in the world. Around 300 animals beach themselves annually, according to official figures and it is not unusual for groups of between 20 and 50 pilot whales to run aground.

But numbers can run into the hundreds when a "super pod" is involved — in 2017, there was a mass stranding of almost 700

pilot whales.

"There are always going to be strandings — there was one on Monday, there'll probably be one next week," Project Jonah's communications manager Louisa Hawkes told about 30 trainee whale medics during a course in Wellington. The wait turns out to be considerably shorter, with a baby pilot whale found stranded Christchurch that same morning.

As the course continues in a community hall, a Project Jonah coordinator paces outside giving advice via mobile phone to wildlife rangers at the opposite end of the country desperately trying to save the animal. — AFP ■

Japan household assets hit record as savings, stock prices rise

ASSETS held by Japanese households hit a record at nearly 2,000 trillion yen (\$18 trillion) at the end of September as people continued to refrain from spending due to the coronavirus pandemic and stock prices rose, Bank of Japan data showed Monday.

The total figure of 1,999.8 trillion yen was the highest since comparable data became available in 2005 and up 5.7 per cent from a year earlier. Cash and deposits increased 3.7 per cent to 1,072 trillion yen, accounting for 53.6 per cent of the overall balance, according to the data.

The holding of cash

and deposits increased as people were asked to stay home when the COVID-19 situation was severe, making them spend less money.

Many areas in Japan including Tokyo and Osaka were under a month-long coronavirus state of emergency until the end of September that urged people to avoid nonessential outings and restaurants and bars to close earlier.

Assets held in equities rose 28.6 per cent to 218 trillion yen as stock prices rose on hopes for a gradual recovery in major economies.

Cash and deposits held by nonfinancial firms

rose 4.4 per cent to 321 trillion yen, accounting for 25.6 per cent of the total assets, worth 1,250 trillion yen, up 8.3 per cent.

Loans extended by financial institutions to nonfinancial firms fell 0.1 per cent to 351 trillion yen.

The quarterly report said the BOJ's holding of Japanese government bonds inched down 0.7 per cent to 538 trillion yen, as some of them were redeemed at maturity.

The central bank, which has implemented a massive asset-buying programme to keep borrowing costs low for companies and consumers, owned 44.1 per cent of the outstanding debt



Evening diners wait for vacant seats at a restaurant in Tokyo on 24 September 2021. PHOTO: AFP

issued by the state.

Overseas investors owned 13.4 per cent of

Japanese government debt after they increased their holdings by 8.1 per

cent to 164 trillion yen, according to the data. — Kyodo ■

Asian markets drop on Omicron spike, Biden spending bill blow

ASIAN stocks fell on Monday on fears about a fresh global surge in coronavirus infections and as the future of US President Joe Biden's massive social spending bill was thrown into doubt after it lost the crucial vote of a moderate Democrat.

With traders beginning to wind down ahead of the festive season, analysts said trade was thinner and markets more susceptible to swings, but the mood has become increasingly glum as central banks start paring their huge financial support to fight inflation.

At the same time, economies are taking a hit as the fast-spreading Omicron coronavirus variant forces governments to reimpose containment measures while consumers are staying at home.

"Omicron remains a concern and cases are on the rise," said Robert Schein of Blanke Schein Wealth Management. "Investors should be prepared for Covid to continue to be a main factor in market performance heading into 2022."

"After the bull run we've seen over the past 21

months, investors aren't as used to prolonged periods of volatility."

Investors got another negative lead from Wall Street where all three main indexes ended sharply lower on Friday after the Federal Reserve said it would speed up the taper of its bond-buying programme and indicated three interest rate hikes before the end of 2022.

While the announcement was initially welcomed as clearing up some policy uncertainty, it signalled the beginning of the end of the era of cheap cash that has helped propel global markets to record or multi-year highs for much of the past two years.

Tokyo, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Seoul, Singapore, Sydney, Taipei, Manila and Jakarta were all well down, though Wellington eked out small gains.

Biden setback

The virus spread has also hit the oil market on concerns about the impact on demand as countries revert back to containment measures, with both main contracts down more than two per cent to extend Friday's big losses. — AFP ■

European stocks sink at open on Omicron crackdown

EUROPEAN equities dived in opening deals on Monday, mirroring heavy losses elsewhere as governments raced to curb the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant.

In initial trade, London's benchmark FTSE 100 index sank 1.9 per cent to 7,133.15 points compared with the closing level on

Friday.

In the eurozone, the Paris CAC 40 index lost 2.1 per cent to 6,782.16 points and Frankfurt's DAX shed 2.4 per cent to 15,154.44.

Economies are taking a hit as the fast-spreading Omicron Covid-19 strain forces governments to reimpose containment measures and consumers stay

at home. "Governments around the world are raising restrictions in order to curb the spread of the Omicron variant," said AvaTrade analyst Naeem Aslam. "Until the macroeconomic landscape stabilizes, investors are acting cautiously and withdrawing... from risky investments that are more positively linked to

economic growth."

Asian stocks and oil prices also sank Monday on fears about a fresh global surge in coronavirus infections and as the future of US President Joe Biden's massive social spending bill was thrown into doubt after it lost the crucial vote of a moderate Democrat. — AFP ■

BNP Paribas sells US unit Bank of the West for \$16.3 bn

FRENCH lending giant BNP Paribas said Monday it had sold its US retail and commercial banking arm Bank of the West for \$16.3 billion in cash.

BNP Paribas said in a statement that the sale to

Canada's Bank of Montreal (BMO), at a price equivalent to 14.5 billion euros, "is expected to formally close during the course of 2022" — subject to clearing regulatory approval and other hurdles.

"This is a value-accrative transaction for all sides, which emphasises the quality of Bank of the West franchise," BNP chief executive Jean-Louis Bonnafe said.

Media reports in re-

cent weeks had suggested BNP was looking for a buyer for Bank of the West, which it has owned since 1979 and operates 555 branches in 20 US states, with over 9,000 staff. — AFP ■

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE M.V CTP MAKASSAR VOY.NO. (240N)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V CTP MAKASSAR VOY.NO. (240N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **21-12-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **AWPT** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA SHIPPING

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE M.V CTP FORTUNE VOY.NO. (234N)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V CTP FORTUNE VOY.NO. (234N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **21-12-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **HPT** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA SHIPPING

Japan, US block advancement in UN talks on autonomous weapons



Delegates attend a meeting of the review conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, (CCW) focussing on lethal autonomous weapons systems (killer robots) at the United Nations in Geneva on 17 December 2021. **PHOTO: FABRICE COFFRINI / AFP**

JAPAN, the United States and other countries have blocked any advancement in UN talks toward legally binding measures to ban and regulate the development and use of lethal

autonomous weapon systems.

The Sixth Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons ended Friday in Geneva without progress, failing to reflect eight

years of work and leaving countries and nongovernmental organizations that have called for legally binding rules expressing disappointment.

Also referred to as “killer robots”, autonomous weapons are artificial intelligence-powered weapons using facial recognition and algorithms.

Once activated, the weapons can select and attack targets without the assistance of a human operator. They pose ethical, legal and security risks.

Japan is opposed to any start of negotiations on a legally binding instrument, as are the United States, Australia, South Korea, India, Russia and Israel, given that autonomous weapons are thought to provide military advantages such as swifter reactions and reduction of troops’

direct exposure on the battlefields.

“Japan has the position that discussions must continue, but they are against any attempt to start negotiations on a legally binding instrument,” a diplomatic source said.

Autonomous weapons are known to be in development, but are not yet in use. A UN document published in March reported on the alleged first autonomous drone attack in Libya.

According to the NGO Stop Killer Robots, countries such as the United States, China, Israel, South Korea, Russia, Australia and Britain are already developing autonomous weapons.

While diplomatic talks toward concrete measures are in a stalemate, technology required to produce these weap-

ons is being developed very quickly.

China, which made few interventions during the five-day talks in the Swiss city, said it is not against legally binding measures “based on an agreement to be reached on definitions”. Discussions showed common definitions of the complex weapon systems relying on ever evolving technologies will be difficult to reach.

China said it has submitted a position paper on regulating the military application of AI.

A Chinese representative said it was the first time Beijing has put forward a comprehensive and systematic proposal on the security governance of AI within the framework of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. — Kyodo ■

US cities remain locked in a grim spiral of record homicides

SEVERAL American cities, both large and small, have seen a record number of homicides this year, a deadly spiral born at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic last year and which the authorities are still struggling to control.

A convergence of factors is to blame, according to experts interviewed by AFP: the painful reverberations of the coronavirus and of the varied traumas it triggered; an economic recovery that has left minority groups lagging far behind; and a record profusion of guns in the country.

Philadelphia has broken a gruesome record set in 1990 with at least 535 homicides this year in a population of 1.5 million. The “City of Brotherly Love” thus surpassed both New York and Los Angeles, the two

largest US cities.

“In Philadelphia, like a lot of major cities, we are poor,” said Dorothy Johnson-Speight, who heads the nonprofit group Mothers in Charge.

“We’re talking about a poor educational system, housing issues, resources for families that need support... We have a very high rate of food insecurity.”

After the death of her son — killed at 24 in a pointless argument over a parking space — she created the group in 2003 to fight against violence in this eastern city known as the cradle of American democracy.

Mothers in Charge, which organizes anger-management sessions and supports families of homicide victims, had to limit its activities for months due to the pandemic.— AFP ■

Dutch prosecutors to demand sentences for MH17 suspects



Trial judges and lawyers are seen inside as they view the reconstructed wreckage of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, at the Gilze-Rijen military airbase, southern Netherlands, on 26 May 2021. **PHOTO: PETER DEJONG / POOL / AFP**

DUTCH prosecutors will this week set out their sentencing demands for four men on trial in absentia over the downing of

Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in war-torn Ukraine in 2014.

Prosecutors will also formally present the indictment during

three days of hearings from Monday, charging the men with the murders of all 298 people on the Boeing 777.

The four suspects — Russian nationals Igor Girkin, Sergei Dubinsky and Oleg Pulatov, and Ukrainian citizen Leonid Kharchenko — have all refused to attend the trial in the Netherlands.

A verdict at the high-security court, near Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport where MH17 took off on its doomed flight to Kuala Lumpur, is not expected until late 2022 at the earliest. “The maximum penalty is life imprisonment,” a court spokesperson told AFP.

The hearings come as fresh tensions soar over Ukraine, with the West accusing Moscow of planning an invasion. — AFP ■

One in four Somalis face acute hunger due to drought: UN

NEARLY one in four people in Somalia are facing acute hunger as drought ravages the conflict-wracked country, following three seasons of poor rains and a fourth on the way, the United Nations warned Monday.

The crisis is expected to worsen, leaving 4.6 million people in desperate need of food aid by May 2022, the UN said, adding that the country had not seen a third consecutive failed rainy season in over 30 years.

Shortages of food, water and land for grazing have already forced 169,000 people to flee their homes, with that number projected to hit 1.4 million within six months, the UN said in a statement. In recent years, natural disasters — not conflict — have been the main driver of displacement in Somalia, a war-torn nation that ranks among the world’s most vulnerable to climate change.

“It is a perfect storm that is

gathering,” Adam Abdelmoula, the UN humanitarian coordinator for Somalia, told AFP in an interview, warning that 300,000 children aged five and under were at risk of severe malnutrition in the coming months. “They will perish if we don’t help them in a timely manner,” he said, as the UN called for nearly \$1.5 billion (1.3 billion euros) in funding to help tackle the crisis.

Some 7.7 million, nearly half the country’s population of 15.9

million, will require humanitarian aid and protection in 2022, an increase of 30 per cent in a year, the UN said.

At least seven in 10 Somalis live below the poverty line, and the drought has destroyed already precarious livelihoods, with families losing their livestock and grappling with high inflation as crop production falls. “There is a high risk that without immediate humanitarian assistance, children, women and men will

start dying of starvation in Somalia,” the country’s minister of humanitarian affairs and disaster management Khadija Diriye said. Somalia’s government declared the drought a humanitarian emergency last month.

Failed rains and flooding have also wreaked havoc in Kenya and South Sudan, where farming and livestock-dependent communities are struggling to cope with climate disasters. — AFP ■

Death toll passes 200 after Philippines typhoon



Fallen electric pylons block a road while a sign asking for food (L) is displayed along a road in Surigao City, Surigao del norte province, on 19 December 2021, days after super Typhoon Rai devastated the city. **PHOTO: FERDINANDH CABRERA / AFP**

THE death toll from the strongest typhoon to hit the Philippines this year surpassed 200 on Monday, as desperate survivors pleaded for urgent supplies of drinking water and food. The Philippine Red Cross reported “complete carnage” in coastal areas after Typhoon Rai left homes, hospitals and schools “ripped to shreds”.

The storm tore off roofs, uprooted trees, toppled concrete power poles, smashed wooden houses to pieces, wiped out crops and flooded villages — sparking comparisons with Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013.

At least 208 people were killed and 52 were missing in

the latest disaster to hit the archipelago, with hundreds more injured after the storm ravaged southern and central regions, the national police said.

More than 300,000 people fled their homes and beachfront resorts as Rai slammed into the country on Thursday as a super typhoon.

“Our situation is so desperate,” said Ferry Asuncion, a street vendor in the hard-hit seaside city of Surigao, which was devastated by the storm. Residents urgently needed “drinking water and food”, he said.

One of the hardest-hit islands was Bohol — known for

its beaches, rolling “Chocolate Hills”, and tiny tarsier primates — where at least 80 people have died, provincial Governor Arthur Yap said on his official Facebook page. Many wooden houses in the coastal town of Ubay were flattened and small fishing boats destroyed on the island, where a state of calamity has been declared.

Victims plea SOS

There has also been widespread destruction on Siargao, Dinagat and Mindanao islands, which bore the brunt of the storm when it slammed into the country packing wind speeds of 195 kilometres (120 miles) per hour. — AFP ■

Laos opens scenic railway built on a mountain of Chinese debt

LAOS opened a new \$6 billion rail link with China to much fanfare this month, but analysts warn the party could be short-lived as the government grapples with a potential debt crisis.

The line will connect the capital Vientiane with the southern Chinese city of Kunming, and there are grand plans for a high-speed rail network running to Singapore through Thailand and Malaysia.

Laos President Thongloun Sisoulith at the opening heralded a “new era of modern infrastructure development” for the impoverished country, adding that “the dreams of Lao people have come true”.

The government is hopeful the railway will turn a profit by 2027, but analysts are con-

cerned about the unsustainable Chinese loans to pay for this and other projects.

With a tiny domestic market, there is “limited commercial logic for an expensive railway” to connect the country of seven million to Kunming, said Jonathan Andrew Lane in an Asian Development Bank Institute report. His analysis found that potential benefits to Laos do not appear to outweigh the risks. “That debt service will put further strain on the limited tax-raising abilities of the government,” Lane wrote.

Laos faces having to stump up vast sums of cash to pay for the rail line, which was set up as a Laos-China joint venture under Beijing’s vast, trillion-dollar Belt and Road infrastructure initiative (BRI). — AFP ■



(FILES) This file frame grab from Lao National TV video footage taken on 16 October 2021 via AFPTV shows the Lane Xang bullet train at the Vientiane Railway Station in Vientiane. **PHOTO: STR / LAO NATIONAL TV / AFPTV / AFP**

Hong Kong leader hails ‘patriots only’ vote despite record low turnout

HONG Kong’s leader on Monday hailed the outcome of a “patriots only” legislature election that saw a record low voter turnout and government loyalists sweep every seat. The financial hub selected new lawmakers on Sunday under fresh rules imposed by Beijing that dramatically cut directly elected seats and controlled who could stand for office after huge democracy protests convulsed the city two years ago.

Figures showed just 30 per cent of the electorate cast ballots, the lowest rate both of the period since the city’s 1997 handover to China and the British colonial era.

Hong Kong’s chief executive Carrie Lam defended the new system and played down the turnout. “Hong Kong is now back on



Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam speaks during a press conference at the government headquarters in Hong Kong on 20 December 2021. **PHOTO: PETER PARKS / AFP**

the right track of One Country, Two Systems,” she told reporters, naming the model China uses

to give the city some autonomy from the authoritarian mainland. — AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

S Korea registers 119,098 breakthrough COVID-19 infections

SOUTH Korea registered a total of 119,098 breakthrough COVID-19 infections, which refer to the fully vaccinated people who were infected with the virus, the health authorities said Monday.

The number of those who tested positive for COVID-19 two weeks after the full vaccination stood at 119,098 as of 12 December, up from 92,075 a week earlier, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA). It accounted for 0.292 per cent of the fully inoculated people that reached 40,788,694 on 12 December.

It is known that people can be protected from the virus two weeks after the full vaccination. Among the total breakthrough cases, the number of critically ill patients was 1,679. The death toll stood at 764. The number of those who were infected with COVID-19 after receiving booster shots reached 1,232 on 12 December, taking up 0.043 per cent of the total 2,838,643 who got the booster jabs.

In the latest tally, the country reported 5,318 more cases of COVID-19 for the past 24 hours, lifting the total number of infections to 570,414. The daily caseload was down from 6,313 in the prior day due to fewer virus tests over the weekend. — Xinhua ■



Myanmar women's national football team is currently at the third standing in ASEAN. PHOTO: MFF

Myanmar women's football team stands third in ASEAN

MYANMAR women's national football team is currently standing third in the ASEAN region with 47th in FIFA ranking and 1,522 points earned, according to a recent statement with the ASEAN Football Federation.

Myanmar has taken 45th position in the world ranking last year and now has decreased two ranking to 47th.

Viet Nam Women's Team is still leading the ASEAN Zone with 32nd in FIFA ranking and 1,659 points garnered and Thailand is in the second place with 39th of FIFA rank and 1603 points collected.

The Philippines team is in fourth place in ASEAN with 64th FIFA rank plus 1,386 points earned.

Next, Laos is the fifth with 84th of FIFA rank and team Indonesia is sixth with 88th ranking of FIFA. Singapore team is in the seventh with 134 of FIFA ranks.

The Myanmar women's national football team has been known or nicknamed the "Asian Lionesses" and the team is made up of many ASEAN star players. — GNLM

Singapore's first badminton world champion hails 'dream come true'

Singapore's Loh Kean Yew hits a shot to India's Srikanth Kidambi during the men's singles final badminton match of the BWF World Championships in Huelva, on 19 December 2021. PHOTO: JOSE JORDAN / AFP



LOH Kean Yew was celebrating a "dream come true" Monday after becoming the first Singaporean to win a badminton world championship, despite carrying an ankle injury. The 22nd-ranked Loh stunned India's world number 14 Srikanth Kidambi 21-15, 22-20 in the men's singles final to clinch the BWF World Championship in Huelva on Sunday night.

It capped a stunning run at

the tournament in Spain, which saw the 24-year-old Loh beat Olympic champion and world number one Viktor Axelsen of Denmark as well as world number three and fellow Dane Anders Antonsen. He won despite spraining his right ankle in the quarter-final. He was in such pain after his semi-final match Saturday that he needed to use a wheelchair.

But he told Singapore's Straits Times newspaper that he decided to "push through the pain and go all out in the final, and coped with ice and some treatment, and it paid off". "This feels like a dream, and now it's a dream come true. I grew up watching Lin Dan and Lee Chong Wei playing such big finals and now I'm here as the world champion.— AFP ■

Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Nine Objectives

1. Political affairs

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

2. Economic affairs

- To enhance production based on agriculture and livestock through modern techniques and strengthen all-round development in other sectors of the economy.
- To develop a stable market economy and promote international investment in order to enhance the economic development of the entire National people.
- To promote and support local businesses to create employment opportunities and increase domestic production.

3. Social affairs

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

Napoli squeeze past Milan to reignite title push

NAPOLI got their title challenge back on track on Sunday with a dramatic 1-0 win at rivals AC Milan which moved them up to second in Serie A but was decided by the controversial ruling out of a late equalizer.

Eljif Elmas headed home the decisive goal from Piotr Zielinski's fifth-minute corner at a freezing San Siro to end a mini-crisis for Luciano Spalletti's injury-ravaged side and put them four points behind champions Inter Milan, who are now guaranteed to be top at Christmas with one midweek round of fixtures left before the winter break.

Former league leaders Napoli largely looked assured despite missing a host of starters including star striker Victor Osimhen, defensive lynchpin Kalidou Koulibaly and Italy forward Lorenzo Insigne and are back on track after two home defeats at the hands of Atalanta and Empoli.

"We had the game in hand

pretty well for most of the match, apart from a few moments when Milan's physical play didn't allow us to settle," said Spalletti to DAZN. However Milan thought they had snatched a point in the final minute after a wave of late pressure when Franck Kessie lashed home from close range, only for the strike to be disallowed for offside following a pitchside video check by referee Davide Massa.

Olivier Giroud challenged for the ball with Juan Jesus before the pair fell in a heap, and Giroud was then ruled to have been in an active offside position, underneath Jesus, as the Napoli defender attempted to clear while on his back.

The decision to rule out Kessie's strike sparked fury from Milan fans in the stands, whose team were also missing a number of first team players, among them starting centre-back Simon Kjaer who is out for the season.— AFP ■