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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.

The emergence of a larger number of educated persons in the nation is a must in the tasks of State-building and Nation-building, says Senior General

EFFORTS must be made for increasing the pass rate of matriculation examination for sufficiency of human resources in Cocokyun region, said Chairman of the State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, in inspecting the Township People's Hospital and the Basic Education High School in Cocokyun of Yangon Region yesterday morning.

The Senior General heard reports on regional development, weekly and monthly free transport for local people and commodities by Tatmadaw vessel and aircraft, production of coconut and coconut products, and regional development by the local naval base commander.

At Cocokyun Township People's Hospital, Union Minister for Health Dr Thet Khaing Win reported on a brief history of the hospital, year-wise healthcare services, and health improvement of locals based on regional development and needs of the hospital.

In his response to the reports, the Senior General explained that the Cocokyun region was much difficult in transport and food.

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State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing presents foodstuffs to one of the patients at the Cocokyun Township People's Hospital on 28 December 2021.

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Schools bombed; Schoolbooks set on fire by terrorists in Sagaing, Ayeyawady regions

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Information Release on detection of SARS-CoV-2 Variant Omicron virus

1. The Ministry of Health is continuously conducting "COVID-19 Molecular Disease Surveillance".
2. Among those returning on Relief Flight, laboratory samples of the COVID-19 virus were sent to laboratories from the Department of Medical Research, National Health Laboratory, Tatmadaw Medical Research Unit as well as to regional laboratories under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO) for Omicron Real-Time PCR Testing and Genomic Sequencing Testing.
3. Initiation of genetic testing of COVID-19 was carried out on (14-12-2021) on 30 laboratory samples found for the virus. According to the results obtained on (28-12-2021), the SARS-CoV-2 Variant Omicron was found in the laboratory samples of four Myanmar nationals returning by Relief Flight from Dubai of UAE, and the SARS-CoV-2 Variant Delta virus was found in the other 26 laboratory samples.
4. Only one in four persons diagnosed with the Omicron virus has normal symptoms and the other three have no symptom. All four were monitored at the treatment centres and discharged from the treatment centre due to good health. It is reported that the four persons are in good health at present.
5. Therefore, the Ministry of Health is stepping up the COVID-19 disease monitoring and control activities plus disease prevention, control and treatment activities.

Ministry of Health

Four national objectives of 74th Anniversary of Independence Day 2022

1. All ethnic nationals to safeguard non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national unity, and perpetuation of sovereignty;
2. To ensure the emergence of a good and clean government and administrative system by implementing a genuine disciplined democracy;
3. All ethnic nationals to amicably and unitedly cooperate in the country development based on the genuine Union spirit;
4. To strive for restoring perpetual peace the entire people aspire.

Announcement of 2022 Matriculation Exam Schedule

THE Matriculation Exam to be held in March and April 2022 is scheduled as follows: —

2022 Matriculation Exam Schedule

Date	Time	Subject
1	2	3
31-3-2022 Thursday	9:00 am to 12:00 am	Myanmar
1-4-2022 Friday	9:00 am to 12:00 am	English
2-4-2022 Saturday	9:00 am to 12:00 am	Mathematics
4-4-2022 Monday	9:00 am to 12:00 am	Chemistry
5-4-2022 Tuesday	9:00 am to 12:00 am	Physics
6-4-2022 Wednesday	9:00 am to 12:00 am	Biology/ Economics
7-4-2022 Thursday	9:00 am to 12:00 am	Geography
8-4-2022 Friday	9:00 am to 12:00 am	History
9-4-2022 Saturday	9:00 am to 12:00 am	Myanmar Language (Elective)

—MNA.

Republic of the Union of Myanmar Ministry of Education Department of Higher Education Announcement Opening of University Day Classes

ALL the universities, degree colleges and colleges under the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, will open the following bachelor and master day classes for the Academic Year 2019-2020 and the Academic Year 2021-2022 on 6 January 2022.

- (a) Fourth Year (Law) Semester II
- (b) Fourth Year (Education) Semester II
- (c) Master (Qualifying) Semester I
- (d) Master (1st Year) Semester I
- (e) Master (2nd Year) Semester I

Department of Higher Education
Ministry of Education

187 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 28 December, total figure rises to 530,000

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 530,000 after 187 new cases were reported on 28 December 2021 according to the Ministry of Health. Among these confirmed cases, 507,586 have been discharged from hospitals. Death toll reached 19,260 after 3 died.—MNA

MoC facilitates daily imports of COVID-19 equipment

THE Ministry of Commerce is making efforts to ensure people have access to the essential medical supplies that are critical to the COVID-19 prevention, control and treatment activities, including liquid oxygen and oxygen cylinders, by arranging continuous importation through border trading posts, interna-

tional airports and seaports.

The four companies imported one oxygen plant, 500 PPE suits and 93 tonnes of masks using 15 vehicles via the 105th mile Muse trading zone and Chinshwehaw trading camp. The oxygen plant was transported to Mandalay from the 105th Mile Muse trading zone.

Officials from the relevant departments are cooperating to facilitate and expedite the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), including online registration for the import process.

It is reported that the Ministry of Commerce is coordinating with relevant departments, treatment of COVID-19, as well



as contact persons for inquiries Ministry's Website – www.commerce.gov.mm. — MNA can be reached through the

United and Disciplined

All nationals should be united – united I say – and disciplined in unison. Whoever attacks us, incites us and intimidates us, we all should march together towards our common goal without losing sight and without deviation from the right path.

(Excerpt from the radio broadcast speech made by Bogyoke Aung San on 1 January 1947)



The emergence of a larger number of educated persons in the nation is a must in the tasks of State-building and Nation-building, ...



State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets the departmental personnel at the Basic Education High School in Cocokyun yesterday.

FROM PAGE-1

Since his duty assumption of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, the Senior General said

he has been fulfilling the needs of the township for regional development. Although much development can be seen more

than in the past, the township will face many requirements. Hence, it is necessary to continue fulfilment for regional development, smooth transportation and healthcare services. As Cocokyun, different from other islands, face hindrance to a far distance from the mainland and climatic conditions, the Tatmadaw is providing necessary assistance for its development. Hence, local military units, departments concerned and local people need to strive for the development of the region.

The Senior General expressed his delightedness for physical and mental development due to the improvement of transport, accommodation and food as well as healthcare services. Health staff must not be assigned duty in rotation but they must be deployed in limited



The Senior General presents foodstuffs to the health staff.

As Cocokyun, different from other islands, face hindrance to a far distance from the mainland and climatic conditions, the Tatmadaw is providing necessary assistance for its development. Hence, local military units, departments concerned and local people need to strive for the development of the region.

terms. If so, the staff will know the in-depth conditions of health care service and requirements of the local people. Hence, they can serve their duties with em-

phasis. The departmental staff members need to join hands with the Tatmadaw for health and socio-economic development.

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The emergence of a larger number of educated persons in the nation is a must in the tasks of State-building and Nation-building, ...



While serving the State duty, the Senior General said they arrange learning of all school-age children to complete the KG+9 (middle school education) at the least level. As all people need to have a school education, it is necessary to teach all students from the primary level to the university education as much as possible.

FROM PAGE-3

At the BEHS of Cocokyun, Union Minister for Education Dr Nyunt Pe reported to the Senior General on educational measures, needs of teachers and more appointments.

After hearing the reports, the Senior General stressed that efforts must be made for increasing the pass rate of matriculation examination for sufficiency of human resources in the Cocokyun region. Adequate number of teachers for relevant subjects will be employed for the students. Requirements must be fulfilled for the teachers who serve their duties in remote areas. Concerning the education sector, the government follows the 30-year national education plan of the State. The topics from the past curriculum were edited for the difference from the current social system



State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing inspects the island circular road in Cocokyun of Yangon Region on 28 December 2021 (topmost picture).



The Senior General looks into the cultivation of vegetables in the green house.

of the country. The emergence of a larger number of educated persons in the nation is a must in the tasks of State-building and Nation-building.

In teaching the students, those students need to have the skills in learning school education and they have to be urged for reading. While serving the State duty, the Senior General said they arrange learning of all school-age children to complete the KG+9 (middle school education) at the least level. As all people need to have a school education, it is necessary to teach all students from the primary level to the university education as much as possible.

In the evening, the Senior General inspected the island circular road of Cocokyun and local military units and project to build

a connection road in Jerry Island and the main island by car.

At the coconut and coconut products factory in Cocokyun, officials reported on the coconut oil purifier plant, the production of decoration products and household utensils, and the coconut fibre rope factory. Hearing the reports of officials, the Senior General stressed the need to produce the coconut products on a commercial scale in cooperation with the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development and small-scale industries and sales of products at fair prices.

The Senior General and party viewed the raising of layers, and cultivation of vegetables in the greenhouse at the local naval base and attended to the needs of officials. — MNA

Directly different from democracy

THE violent attack on the people is vulgar, posing the threat on the people. Posing the threat to the people to be feared is directly different from democracy. The entire people and all the administrative bodies need to join hands in combatting terrorism.

(Excerpt from the speech delivered by Chairman of the State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at the meeting 18/2021 of the State Administration Council on 13-12-2021)

SAC Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets Cocokyun Township departmental staff, town elders

CHAIRMAN of the State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, accompanied by the SAC members, Joint-Secretary, Union Ministers, Yangon Region Chief Minister, Yangon Command Commander, Yangon Region Development Affairs Minister and other officials met the departmental officials and town elders of Cocokyun Township yesterday.

First, the Cocokyun township administrator and town elders expressed words of thanks to the Prime Minister for making efforts on regional development programmes, transportation, the creation of job opportunities for local young people, the need of health workers and Tatmadaw medics for the health sector; upgrade of the jetty for vessels, preventive measures of COVID-19 and recreational services for the residents, the strength of Coco Dam for drinking water, water security and other matters.

Then, the Union Ministers, Yangon Region Chief Minister and Development Affairs Minister reported on their respective sectors regarding the needs for



State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets departmental personnel and town elders in Cocokyun yesterday.

dentists in the township, health status, education, appointment of local graduated youths at departments concerned according to procedures, upgrading the transport sector; construction of bleachers in the stadium, supports for other sports and cooperation work with ministries concerned in implementing the Pankhinn project.

The SAC Chairman Prime Minister provided food aids and

sports materials for Cocokyun, while other SAC members and officials handed over the SIM cards and top-ups, ECG and anti-COVID-19 equipment to the township officials.

Then, the SAC Chairman Prime Minister said the Union ministers of respective sectors directly dissolved the motions proposed by the township administrators and town elders. Regarding job opportunities, the



The Senior General gives foodstuffs to the elderlies in Cocokyun.



The Senior General warmly greets town elders in Cocokyun of Yangon Region yesterday.

better ability of a government is achieved for having qualified staff. Therefore, the staff should be skilful and if they meet the fixed qualifications, recruitment processes will be conducted. The new generation should emphasize their education for social development. According to the survey, there were 1.5 million who attended schools in the Academic Year 2007-2008 and there were only more than 270,000 who reached the matriculation level and so of these numbers, 90 per cent are under the level of matriculation. Therefore, all

should make efforts to improve the education of the country and encourage the children since they are young and it also needs to have actual skill and knowledge.

During the third wave of COVID-19 in Myanmar, we tried our best to provide healthcare services despite the difficulties in healthcare professionals, medicines, oxygen shortage and various other problems. As healthcare workers, Tatmadaw, and the people worked together, the COVID-19 outbreak was under control, he said.

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SAC Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets ...

FROM PAGE-5

He also said he had heard that there is a shortage of dentists in Cocokyun due to their involvement in the CDM campaign under the incitement or threats of those who wanted to overthrow the State administration mechanism and he will try to meet the needs of civil servants in all possible ways.

He noted that he will do his best to meet the actual needs of the region included in the submissions of the locals. As it is necessary to stay healthy and have

a good education, local people must take care of themselves and promote education and create a good environment, he added.

For a good environment, fences, road development, replacement of the galvanized roof, cleaning and beautification have been provided since his last visit, he continued. The life expectancy of Myanmar is 67 years and it was 65.5 years in 2016 and 67.4 years in 2017, which makes Myanmar the country with the lowest life expectancy among ASEAN countries. He highlighted the need to

have a good economy and a good education, and only education can develop knowledge.

Regarding a good economy, he said it is necessary to make the basic business related to coconut more successful. He urged to improve the living standards of the region by setting an example, as these products were firstly produced in Cocokyun. As Cocokyun has to import rice and cooking oil from other areas, the local people must earn income, and therefore they should make the production of coconut products successful.

He urged them to pay attention to the systematic use of water and electricity and to carry out individually for a clean environment. Although the Pankhinn project, the national registration project, has been 100 per cent completed, it is important to have accurate data and for administration officials to actively participate in the systematic governance of the township. He said it is important to prevent statistical inaccuracies and to build a modern and orderly city by systematically compiling his-

torical records.

He said Union ministers were brought together to directly provide requirements for the development of the region, and local people, Tatmadaw, and departmental organizations must work together for the development of the region, and Tatmadaw will also provide as necessary.

Afterwards, the Chairman of the State Administration Council the Prime Minister and party cordially greeted department staff and local elderlies who attended the meeting. — MNA

Statement to appreciate teachers' efforts

TEACHERS are honoured as part of the Five Infinite Venerables, and the manner of paying respect to the teachers can be only seen in Myanmar as a tradition. The teachers teach their pupils based on their goodwill like their own children and dutifully serve a teacher's duties. They must train their pupils and students in the best discipline. They see that they grasp their lessons well. They instruct them in the arts and sciences, they provide for their safety in every quarter, and they introduce them to their friends and associates.

As the COVID-19 infection rate is controlled to a certain extent, the basic education high, middle and primary schools under the Department of Basic Education have reopened across nation for the 2021-2022 academic year starting 1 June.

Those who want to seek good sake of one party, political extremist NLD members and supporters, NUG, CRPH and PDF committed arson attacks at the schools using mines, homemade bombs and grenades to fail the teaching processes, and threatened the teachers in addition to the incitements, social punishment and threats against education staff to join CDM while the officials made preparations for the reopening of schools and during the current teaching period. Their doings left some casualties, and the State Administration Council has expressed its deepest condolences and sympathy to the victims' families.

The SAC also appreciates the concerted efforts of teachers, who understand two virtues, Hiri — shame at doing evil —and Otappa—fear of the results of doing evil—for teaching the new generations of the country amid such difficulties and challenges.

The security forces will take extraordinary measures to ensure the safety of teachers who are making efforts in the academic sector for the next generations in order to promote the education qualification. The people should keep security awareness and cooperate with the security members in community peace and peaceful learning of children.

*Information Team
State Administration Council*

Census of crocodiles conducted in Mainmahla island wildlife sanctuary

MYANMAR has been paying attention to biodiversity conservation, including the establishment of nature reserves, sanctuaries, national parks, forest laws and regulations, wildlife protection and conservation laws.

To make conservation work more effective, patrols in the wilderness and animal and plant enumeration are being carried on a regular basis.

Four species of crocodiles have been found in Myanmar over the years, and for various reasons, three species are on the verge of extinction, and only one species, the saltwater crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*), are living naturally in mangroves in the Ayeyawady Region and some parts of Taninthayi Region.

Mainmahla Island Wildlife Sanctuary is home to a large



Mainmahla Island Wildlife Sanctuary is home to a large number of saltwater crocodiles and is protected as a breeding ground. **PHOTOS: PEINZALOKE THEIN NYUNT**

number of saltwater crocodiles and is protected as a breeding ground.

A census of crocodiles in rivers and streams in the Sanctuary was carried out in November by 10 staff led by U Thant Zin (Forest Ranger) under the

supervision of Sanctuary warden U Sai Wunna Kyi.

According to the census, 95 young crocodiles, 12 middle-aged ones, and eight adult crocodiles, altogether 115 crocodiles were recorded. Compared to the November 2020 census,

there were 84 fewer in the young, one less in the adult and one more in the middle-aged. It is reported that the situation of the declining crocodile population from year to year will continue to be monitored.— Peinzaloke Thein Nyunt/GNLM



Myanmar's foreign trade reaches over US\$6 bln in mini-budget of 2021-2022FY

FOREIGN trade value in Myanmar was over US\$6.004 billion till 17 December in the current mini-budget of the 2021-2022 financial year, declining by over \$504 million when compared to the same period of last FY, according to the ministry of commerce.

From 1 October to 17 December 2021, the foreign trade was \$6.004 billion, while the previous FY saw \$6.509 billion in the same period.

During this mini-budget year, the country's export amounted to over \$3.067 billion, down over \$231 million com-

pared with last's figure. The country's imports also hit over \$2.937 billion, declining over \$273 million.

Myanmar exports agricultural products, animal products, minerals, forest products, and finished industrial goods, while it imports capital goods, raw industrial materials, CMP raw materials and consumer goods.

According to the annual data released by the commerce ministry, the country's foreign trade value was \$18,045.929 million in 2012-2013FY, \$27,714.826 million in 2015-2016FY, \$29,209.607 mil-

lion 2016-2017FY, \$33,578.052 million in 2017-2018FY, \$18,728.815 million in 2018 mini-budget year and \$35,147.012 million in the 2018-2019FY.

Agro-based food production, textile and clothing, industry and electronics, fisheries production, forestry production, digital production and services, logistics services, quality management, trade information services and innovation and entrepreneurship sectors are the main priority areas of the National Export Strategy (NES) 2020-25. — ACM/GNLM



Myanmar exports agricultural products, animal products, minerals, forest products, and finished industrial goods, while it imports capital goods, raw industrial materials, CMP raw materials and consumer goods.

Over 2 mln acres of various beans planted in Sagaing Region



In the 2021-2022 growing season, Sagaing Region planned to cultivate 2.466 million acres of beans in the region and over 2 million acreages has been finished. The department and the growers are working together to boost the yield.

SAGAING Region Agriculture Department has completed more than 2 million acres of various beans cultivation in 11 districts of Sagaing Region, said Dr Tin Mar Mar Oo, in charge of market information division under Sagaing Region Agriculture Department.

"Seventeen types of beans including chickpeas, green grams and pigeon peas are cultivated in the region. The department has covered over 83 per cent of the projected acres so far. The department has been providing technical assistance (post-harvest technology), pedigree, and necessary input to the growers to produce quality beans and have a good yield," she added.

In the 2021-2022 growing season, Sagaing Region planned to cultivate 2.466 million acres of beans in the region and over 2 million acre-

ages has been finished. The department and the growers are working together to boost the yield.

India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry extended a free import policy on the black gram (urad called in India) and green gram.

India permits beans and pulses imported from Myanmar that have the bill of lading up to 31 March 2022, with relaxations of conditions regarding clearance consignment up to 30 June 2022.

Additionally, Myanmar can export 250,000 tonnes of black gram (urad) and 100,000 tonnes of pigeon peas under the G-to-G (government to government) pact during the April-March period between the 2021-2022 financial year and the 2025-2026FY, as per the Memorandum of Understanding between the Minis-

try of Commerce and India's counterpart signed on 18 June.

Beyond chickpea, green gram and pigeon peas, the department has been focusing on expansion in the cultivation of other beans which are commercially valued in both domestic and foreign markets, she continued.

Sagaing Region is the main producer of beans and pulses. Those growers who carry out multiple cropping also earn extra income.

In a bid to improve the quality and production of the beans, various beans expo was held in the fourth week of December 2021 at the office of the Sagaing Region Agriculture Department. At the event, all types of beans were displayed and the officials and the growers discussed some matters. — Lu Lay/GNLM

Efforts underway to convey kitchen crops from Sagaing region to other regions/states

EFFORTS are being made to convey kitchen crops from the Sagaing region to other regions and states, it is learnt.

"Growing vegetables and kitchen crops in the Sagaing region has been pushing hard this year. It would be not only sufficient for the Sagaing Region but also delivered to other states and regions. The staff from Sagaing Region Agriculture Department is providing technology to the farmers to grow all the vegetables under the GPA system," said U Win Hlaing Oo, head of the Regional Agriculture Department.

Sagaing Region started its winter crops cultivation in October 2021 and more than 100,000

acres of crops have been cultivated so far, according to the Sagaing Region Agriculture Department.

According to the official statistics of the Agriculture Department in Sagaing Region grows 6,326 acres of kitchen crops in Mawlaik district, 3,985 acres in Tamu district, 10,609 acres in Kalay district, 4,242 acres in Hkamti district, 1,766 acres in Naga Self-Administered Zone, 16,279 acres in Monywa district, 19,340 acres in Yinnabin district, 31,491 acres in Shwebo district, 7,898 acres in Kanbalu district, 16,063 acres in Sagaing district, 14,032 acres in Katha district and 5,577 acres in Kawlin district. — Lu Lay/GNLM



Sagaing Region started its winter crops cultivation in October 2021 and more than 100,000 acres of crops have been cultivated so far, according to the Sagaing Region Agriculture Department.

Daily newspapers available online

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News and Periodicals Enterprise

Culture morals on humanity basis for building a better society

HUMANITY is based on the emergence of a better society with morals, philanthropy and credibility and the humane behaviours of providing aid to other humans with goodwill for building a better society.

To raise the awareness of humanity, everybody needs to embrace sympathy, compassion and humanism forever. Four cardinal virtues such as loving-kindness, compassion, sympathy and equanimity are essential for the perpetual existence of society. Truly, humanity is an inborn duty of all global people to be able to lend a helping hand to those in the anxious world.

In this regard, humanity motivates the people with the spirit of social welfare to voluntarily participate in search and rescue works whenever natural disasters fall in specific areas. They do not count any impacts of the disaster which may harm them. So, they keenly make the sacrifice of life and limb for humanitarian measures without any expectation.

Based on humanity, all global people should set aside the discrimination in society and try hard to build mutual respect and credibility in society. As such, those wishing to improve the measures of humanity hold up a concept to associate with all the people regardless of religion, language, nationality and education.

Humanity stays away from colonization, violation of human rights, discrimination of colours, religions, lineages and natives as well as languages, education, occupation, income and family status.

In Myanmar society, most of the people share their property and wealth as part of making donations to each other or needy persons based on humanity under the teachings of the Lord Buddha. They do not delay making donations to others who need something. Generally, they do not set hopes for their donations. They avoid the acts of compromise in their donations with the hope to get some returns from donation receivers. According to the guidance of the Lord

Buddha, they avoid such kinds of malpractices with shamefulness. If some number of people faces impacts of natural disasters, most of the people across the nation are keenly to donate various kinds of aid to them without any encouragement. In this regard, humanity motivates the people with the spirit of social welfare to voluntarily participate in search and rescue works whenever natural disasters fall in specific areas. They do not count any impacts of the disaster which may harm them. So, they keenly make the sacrifice of life and limb for humanitarian measures without any expectation.

All religions which are the faiths of the global people lead the people all over the world to culture the good morals for upholding the rule of humanity which is the basic ethic for the morals of the society.



Infectious diseases present 'clear and present danger' everywhere

COVID-19 continues to demonstrate how quickly "an infectious disease can sweep across the world", pushing health systems to the brink and upending daily life for all of humanity, the UN chief said on Monday, marking the International Day of Epidemic Preparedness.

“IT also revealed our failure to learn the lessons of recent health emergencies like SARS, avian influenza, Zika, Ebola and others”, Secretary-General António Guterres said in his message.

“And it reminded us that the world remains woefully unprepared to stop localized outbreaks from spilling across borders, and spiralling into a global pandemic”.

Halting infectious diseases

Noting that infectious diseases remain “a clear and present danger to every country”, Mr Guterres maintained COVID-19 would not be the last pandemic for humanity.

Even as the world responds to this health crisis, he spelled out the need to prepare for the next one.

“This means scaling-up in-



A healthcare worker at Bamrasnaradura Infectious Disease Institute in Thailand PHOTO: UN WOMEN/ PATHUMPORN THONGKING

vestments in better monitoring, early detection and rapid response plans in every country — especially the most vulnerable”, he said.

“It means strengthening primary health care at the local level

to prevent collapse... ensuring equitable access to lifesaving interventions, like vaccines for all people and... achieving Universal Health Coverage.”

The Secretary-General upheld that by building global soli-

arity, every country would have a fighting chance “to stop infectious diseases in their tracks”.

Battling as one

Earlier in the month, the head of the World Health Organization

(WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, welcomed the decision of a special session of the World Health Assembly (WHA) — the UN agency’s top decision-making body — to develop a new global accord on pandemic prevention and response.

While acknowledging a long road ahead, he described the decision as “cause for celebration, and cause for hope”.

“There are still differences of opinion about what a new accord could or should contain”, he said, but the consensus has proven that “differences can be overcome, and common ground can be found”, the WHO chief said.

Spreading like wildfire

Meanwhile, as cases of the new Omicron variant continue to spread like wildfire, 70 per cent of COVID vaccines have been dis-

tributed to the world’s ten largest economies, and the poorest countries have received just 0.8 per cent, according to the UN, calling it “not only unjust” but also a threat to the entire planet.

To end this cycle, the Organization underscored that at least 70 per cent of the population in every country must be inoculated, which the UN vaccine strategy aims to achieve by mid-2022.

Although this will require at least 11 billion vaccine doses, it is doable so long as sufficient resources are put into distribution. “An outbreak anywhere is a potential pandemic everywhere”, said the Secretary-General.”

“On this International Day of Epidemic Preparedness, let’s give this issue the focus, attention and investment it deserves”.

SOURCE: UN

US halves asymptomatic Covid isolation period as cases surge worldwide

THE United States Monday halved the isolation period for asymptomatic Covid cases in a bid to blunt mass Omicron-induced disruption, as infections hit new highs in multiple US states and Europe, wreaking havoc on global air travel.

Some 11,500 flights have been scrapped worldwide since Friday and tens of thousands more delayed, during one of the year’s busiest travel periods — with multiple airlines saying spikes in cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant have caused staffing shortages.

Effects rippled worldwide, with about 3,000 flights already cancelled Monday and 1,100 more on Tuesday, according to flight tracker FlightAware.

Opening the way for more people to return to work sooner and minimizing the prospect of mass labour shortages, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention on Monday cut isolation for asymptomatic Covid-19 cases from 10 to five days.

The guidelines, which are non-binding but closely followed by US businesses and policymakers, further suggest that the five-day isolation period be “followed by five days of wearing a mask when around others”.

Cases in the United States are already on track to reach record highs in January, fuelled by large pockets of unvaccinated residents as well as lack of access to quick and easy testing.

President Joe Biden said Monday some US hospitals could be “overrun” but that the country is generally well prepared to meet the latest surge and Americans need not “panic”.

In a virtual meeting with state governors and top health advisors, Biden stressed that the rapid spread of Omicron would not have the same impact as the initial outbreak of Covid-19 or the Delta variant surge this year.

“Omicron is a source of concern, but it should not be a source of panic,” he said.

Nationwide, the United States is closing in on the daily high of 250,000 cases recorded last January in the world’s most affected nation, which has lost more than 816,000 people to the pandemic.

New measures in Europe

Governments worldwide are scrambling to boost vaccinations, stressing that the overwhelming majority of hospitalizations and deaths are occurring among the unvaccinated.

As several countries revive unpopular lockdowns, France stopped short of a stay-at-home order.

Ministers did call for employers to make staff work from home three days a week where possible after nationwide infections hit record-high figures — in line with Denmark and Iceland, which also reported record daily cases.

Similarly to the United States, French Prime Minister Jean Castex said the government would announce by the end of the week



People line up for COVID-19 tests while a street performer waits for customer next to the mobile COVID-19 testing site on Times Square in New York, the United States, 20 December 2021. PHOTO: XINHUA/WANG YING

a reduction in the number of isolation and quarantine days required for those with Covid and their contacts.

England’s Premier League,

meanwhile, announced that a record 103 players and staff had tested positive in the past week.

And in Greece, authorities will require bars and restaurants

to close at midnight from 3 January, when establishments will also have to limit the number of diners per table to six.

SOURCE: AFP

Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Tuesday 28 December 2021)

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL MORNING OF THE 29 December 2021: Rain are likely to be isolated in Taninthayi Region and Kachin, Eastern Shan States. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Upper Sagaing Region and Kayin, Mon States and generally fair in the remaining Regions and States.

STATE OF THE SEA: Strong easterly winds with moderate to rough seas are likely at times Gulf of Mottama, off and along Mon-Taninthayi Coasts. Surface wind speed in strong easterly winds may reach (30-35) m.p.h. Sea will be moderate elsewhere in Myanmar waters. Wave height will be about (7-9) 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: Likelihood of isolated light rain in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin, Shan States.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 29 December 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 29 December 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 29 December 2021: Generally fair weather.

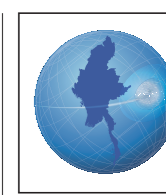
EARTHQUAKE NEWS

A slight earthquake of magnitude (4.6) Richter Scale with its epicenter inside Myanmar (about (20) miles southeast of Kale), latitude 22.95 °N, longitude 94.24 °E, depth (20) kilometers, about (46) miles northeast of Haka seismological observatory was recorded at (02) hr (43) min (17) sec M.S.T on 28 December, 2021.

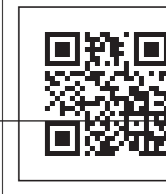
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09 454 237 515

Tatmadaw arrest CRPH, NUG, PDF terrorists, who commit terrorist attacks on Lay Kay Kaw, Htee Mae Wah Khee, Mae Htaw Tha Lay, repatriating displaced persons

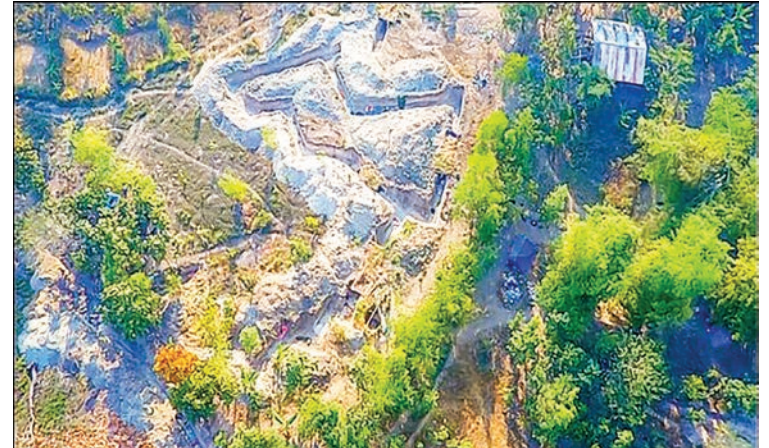
THE arms and ammunition seized in Myawady township of Kayin State and Yangon Region and along the Myawady-Yangon route were transported by the terrorists who were hiding in Lay Kay Kyaw of Kayin State under humanitarian grounds by using different ways, according to the confession of arrested suspects. Although the respective region heads were informed not to ac-

cept the NUG and PDF terrorist groups, the seizures of firearms occurred continuously, and as Lay Kay Kaw is also a sign of peace and so the region officials were informed in advance to arrest the NUG and PDF terrorists.

Starting 14 December 2021, the security forces conducted an investigation with giving information to arrest NUG and PDF terrorists. They raided the town

under the law and arrested 21 PDF members of NUG and CD-Mers. On 15 December, the NUG and PDF terrorists, including members of KNU/KNLA, who want to break NCA, started the attack and it resulted in some casualties of Tatmadaw officers and members, including security force members and some injured.

SEE PAGE - 11



An enemy camp is occupied at the Mae Wah Khee road junction.



The enemy's camp is seen being seized at the Mae Wah Khee road junction.



Seized weapons and ammunition in Htee Mae Wah Khee.



Combined PDF groups camp in Htee Mae Wah Khee.

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*

Schools bombed; Schoolbooks set on fire by terrorists in Sagaing, Ayeyawady regions

TERRORISTS who do not want to see that children are learning in peace committed vandalism and arson attacks on schools in Sagaing and Ayeyawady regions on 27 December.

At around 8 am on 27 December, terrorists spread gasoline on the two-storey school building (Basic Education High School Branch) in Taungphila ward, Kalay Township, Sagaing Region, however, it was intact-not destroyed by fire.

On the same day, terrorists set fire on the books stored in the Basic Educa-

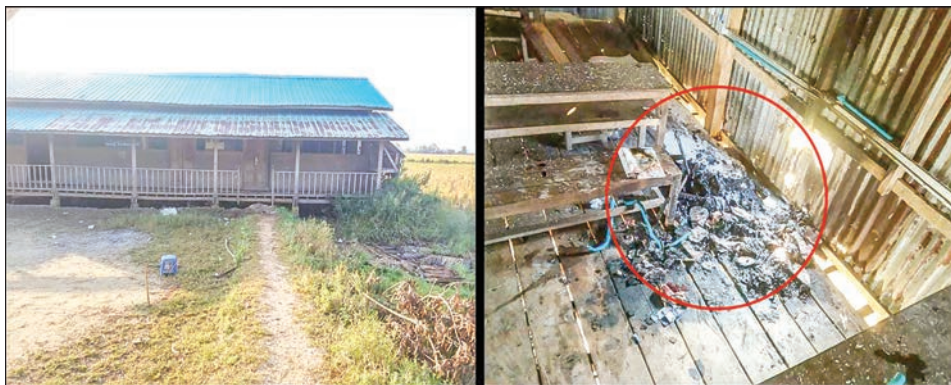
tion Middle School Branch in Thaephyu village in Mawlamyinekyun Township, Ayeyawady Region.

Similarly, terrorists threw bottles of gasoline at the Basic Education High School Branch in Myanandar ward in Bamauk, Sagaing Region, at around 7:20 pm but the school was intact-not damaged by fire.

At around 3:45 pm, PDF terrorist groups planted three homemade mines at the junction of the Pyidaungsu Road and GTC Road near the Nambawan (A)



Homemade mine attacks to schools.



Arson attacks on schools.

ward administration office in Loikaw, Kayah State, three homemade mines, at the junction of the Bobwa Yeiktha Road and GTC Road, to attack the students. Security forces found and deactivated

them.

It is reported that security forces are working to take effective action against the perpetrators under the law, according to MPF. — MNA

Tatmadaw arrest CRPH, NUG, PDF terrorists.....

FROM PAGE - 10

In order to defend itself, Tatmadaw launched a counterattack with limited force against some KNU leaders and outfits, NUG

and PDF terrorists starting 15 December. Meanwhile, these terrorist groups blocked the Tatmadaw columns with a large number of troops day and night

and so the fighting grew intense.

Therefore, Tatmadaw launched airstrikes following the Rule of Engagement, ROE against the targeted enemies and bases, and it happened to fight 25 times. Tatmadaw controlled Htee Mae Wah Khee, Mae Htaw Tha Lay, Ingyin Myaing, Min Let Pan and Phalu villages except for Lay Kay Kaw yesterday. During the clashes, Tatmadaw seized 19 assorted arms including .5 sniper machine gun of terrorists and dead bodies.

Due to the fighting, the innocent civilians fled to the other country. The respective security forces conducted the campaign



Officials welcome displaced persons in Mae Htaw Tha Lay.

to repatriate them using loudspeakers in Kayah and Myanmar languages. The Thai-Myanmar border committees negotiated to relocate the displaced per-

sons in their villages. The security forces will continue their security measures to eliminate the terrorists in the vicinity area of Lay Kay Kaw. — MNA



Incident sites.

N. Korea's ruling party convenes key meeting to review 2021 policies



North Korea's ruling party convenes a plenary meeting of the Central Committee on 27 Dec 2021. PHOTO: KCNA/KYODO

NORTH Korea's ruling party convened a plenary meeting of the Central Committee on Monday to review its policies for 2021, state-run media reported Tuesday, as the nation's economy is believed to remain stagnant amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un presided over the gathering of the Workers' Party of Korea, the official Korean Central News Agency said, while it did not elaborate on when the meeting will be wrapped up.

Kim is expected to make a speech to ruling party members at the year-end gathering and

may skip his annual New Year's address for the third straight year, North Korea watchers said.

The plenary meeting comes as Kim, who will mark 10 years in power on Thursday, was quoted by KCNA as saying at another party gathering that "positive changes" were achieved in overall state affairs including politics, the economy, culture and national defense. North Korea, however, has acknowledged facing a severe food crisis due in part to natural disasters and sluggish trade activities with China, its closest and most influential ally in economic terms, in the aftermath of the

emergence of the novel coronavirus. On the diplomatic front, direct talks between North Korea and the United States have been at a standstill for more than two years, with the administration of President Joe Biden unlikely to readily make concessions over denuclearization and sanctions relief.

North Korea has expressed unwillingness to hold bilateral negotiations with the United States unless Washington withdraws what Pyongyang considers to be its hostile stance towards it. The two countries have no diplomatic relations.—Kyodo ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Mexico president blasts business chiefs, except 'friend' Slim

"MAFIA of power" and "influence peddlers" are some of the labels used by President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador for Mexican business leaders, except for one – Carlos Slim, Latin America's richest man.

The leftist president, who took office in 2018 promising to break with "neoliberalism", on Monday described the 81-year-old magnate as a "friend" and "a good businessman who contributes to the development of the country."

Lopez Obrador had breakfast with Slim at the National Palace and underscored the fiscal contribution of America Movil, Latin America's largest telecommunications firm and the flagship of Slim's empire.

America Movil paid taxes of 28 billion pesos (\$1.35 billion) in Mexico on 16 December after selling a subsidiary in the United States, Lopez Obrador tweeted along with a photo of Slim.—AFP ■

China tightens rules on overseas listings in Didi fallout

BEIJING has tightened the rules on overseas listings by Chinese firms in a series of new regulations that increase scrutiny of companies seeking to raise funds on foreign stock markets. China has stepped up scrutiny of major overseas listings after a controversial New York IPO by ride-hailing giant Didi Chuxing went ahead this year, despite regulatory concerns at home. In the latest measure to increase oversight, authorities said Monday that companies in industries where foreign investment is banned -- due to a "negative list" -- will have to seek approval from authorities for an overseas debut.—AFP ■

Japan economy to expand in 2022, but pandemic, chip crunch to weigh

THE Japanese economy is expected to accelerate its expansion in fiscal 2022 following a sharp turnaround towards the end of 2021 as private consumption continues to recover thanks to subdued coronavirus infections.

Analysts predict the world's third-largest economy will see an annual real 2 to 4 per cent growth in fiscal 2022 starting April, even though concerns remain about a COVID-19 resurgence and the lingering global semiconductor shortage.

After the economy shrank a record 4.5 per cent in fiscal 2020 with the coronavirus outbreak, it began to pick up in the fall of 2021 as vaccinations progressed and economic restrictions were lifted.

The government predicts a 2.6 per cent growth in fiscal 2021, followed by a 3.2 per cent increase in fiscal 2022. Among other major economies, growth in calendar 2022 is forecast by



As a microchip shortage sends shock waves through the global car industry, one of Japan's main auto parts makers says it wants to swerve the risk of becoming a production "bottleneck" by revamping the way it manages its supply chains. PHOTO: KYODO

the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to reach 3.7 per cent in the United States and 5.1 per cent in China.

Economists say strong growth is expected especially in the first half of 2022 in Japan, thanks to restaurants and bars and other hospitality businesses returning to normal operations and the government's stimulus

initiatives, including the "Go To Travel" domestic tourism subsidy programme which it envisages resuming around February.

Taro Saito, executive research fellow at NLI Research Institute, said consumption, kept at subdued levels by the pandemic with increased savings, should lead to robust private spending going forward.—Kyodo ■

In euro waiting room, Bulgarians divided about joining



Some Bulgarians welcome the prospect of joining the euro. Others fear it will drive up prices. PHOTO: NIKOLAY DOYCHINOV/ AFP

BULGARIA could join the eurozone in 2024, but the EU's poorest nation is divided over the prospect of ditching its national currency and joining the single European currency club.

Krasimir Atanasov, a 37-year-old tennis instructor waiting in line at a currency exchange office in the Bulgarian capital Sofia, is keen on the change.

Like millions of his compatriots, he has emigrated abroad — in his case to Finland — and

wants Bulgaria to "be like other European countries" and use the euro. However, 58-year-old Valeria Petrova, who describes herself as a "nationalist", says she wants to "keep the lev", Bulgaria's national currency.

She worries the country could one day find itself in the shoes of Greece, which had to implement painful structural reforms in return for aid during a debt crisis that threatened its eurozone membership.

Another man next to her in the queue says he fears the euro would mean higher prices — a worry many Europeans had when 12 countries began to use the currency on 1 January, 2002.

Even one of the country's associations of tour operators, the ABTTA, says that while the single currency would ease doing business for the sector, it worries about a possible "reduction in purchasing power" by Bulgarians.—AFP ■

Japan's Nov. jobless rate rises to 2.8% as people seek better jobs

JAPAN'S unemployment rate in November edged up to 2.8 per cent from the previous month as an economic recovery from the coronavirus fallout prompted more people to leave their jobs in search of better ones, the government said Tuesday.

The seasonally adjusted jobless rate rose 0.1 percentage point from the previous month for the first increase in six months, after the COVID-19 state-of-emergency measure asking people to refrain from nonessential outings was lifted in October following a significant

drop in the number of infections.

Separate government data from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare showed the job availability ratio in November was unchanged from the previous month at 1.15, meaning that there were 115 job openings for every 100 job seekers.

The total number of unemployed people in November increased 100,000 from the previous month to 1.92 million, rising for the first time in three months, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications said.

Among them, 760,000 people voluntarily left their jobs, up 60,000, while 480,000 were laid off, unchanged from the previous month, and 500,000 were new job seekers, up 10,000.

"The increase in the number of unemployed indicates that more people are seeking jobs with better conditions and is considered to be a reflection of the recent lower number of coronavirus cases and (an economic) pickup," a government official told reporters.

Private-sector analysts also said daily COVID-19 cases dropping to around 250 or lower in the reporting month



The total number of unemployed people in November increased 100,000 from the previous month to 1.92 million, rising for the first time in three months. PHOTO: PIXABAY/KYODO

compared to a peak of over 25,000 in the summer helped give workers a more optimistic view of the outlook for the domestic economy.— Kyodo ■

Protest against increasing crime staged in US Chicago Chinatown

HUNDREDS of residents and business owners and employees in Chinatown on the South Side of Chicago staged a two-hour silence protest Monday afternoon to protest against increasing crime targeted at local residents and businesses.

Businesses in Chinatown closed for two hours as the protestors walked around the community in silence, holding banners "Crime is Crime" and "Stop Asian Hate".

A flyer circulated to bystanders read: "The community we once lived and worked in peace is now shrouded in fear and danger. In a country known



People take part in a protest in Chicago, the United States, on 27 December 2021. Hundreds of residents and business owners and employees Monday afternoon staged a two-hour silence protest against increasing crimes targeting local residents and businesses in Chicago. PHOTO: JOEL LERNER/XINHUA

for the American dream and freedom, our lives and property are under unprecedented threats. By keeping our heads down and hoping for the

best, our situation will not change."

The flyer called on people to display their frustration and get united. "When our voices are

ignored, we can express our protest in silence."

In the later half of this year, robbery, grabbing of cars, smashing of businesses' doors and windows for burglary have become normal and even an everyday event in Chinatown. On 9 December a 71-year-old man of Chinese origin was shot 22 times in broad daylight on the street in Chinatown, out of nothing.

The violence harassing Chinatown is just an epitome of Chicago struggling with rising crime rate. Crime in Chicago is not limited to certain districts today, it is a phenomenon in most areas of the city.— Xinhua ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Income Tax Dept raids two business groups in Rajasthan

INCOME Tax Department has conducted raids on various locations of two business groups based in Rajasthan. The search action has covered more than 50 premises of the two groups spread over various locations including Jaipur, Mumbai, and Haridwar, according to an official statement released by the Ministry of Finance on Tuesday.

The one group is engaged in the business of manufacturing electrical switches, wires, LEDs, real estate and hotel business in Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand whereas, the other group is engaged in money lending business in Jaipur and nearby cities, the Finance Ministry said without disclosing the names of the business groups. "A large number of incriminating documents and digital data have been found and seized during the search action," it alleged. The search and seizure operations were carried out on 22 December. A preliminary analysis of seized evidence reveals that several entities, engaged in the business of manufacturing switches, wires, LEDs, etc., have been selling such goods which are not recorded in the regular books of account. During the investigation, it was also noticed that they were claiming bogus expenses to reduce taxable income, it alleged.— ANI ■

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V BLPL BLESSING VOY.NO. (2119S/E)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V BLPL BLESSING VOY.NO. (2119S/E)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **29-12-2021** 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 BLPL SHIPPING LINE

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V MCP GRAZ VOY.NO. (21008N)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V MCP GRAZ VOY.NO. (21008N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **29-12-2021** 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.

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NEWS
IN BRIEFBlizzard in central
China suspends
school in several
cities

SEVERAL cities in central China's Hunan Province have ordered schools to suspend classes due to blizzard conditions.

The provincial weather station issued an orange alert for low temperatures and freezing rain and snow at 4 p.m. Sunday and a yellow alert for snowstorms at 6 a.m. Sunday. The first snow of this winter has hit many parts of the province since Saturday evening.

As of 2 p.m. Sunday, 17 counties, cities, or districts had seen the depth of the accumulated snow exceed 10 cm.

To ensure the safety of teachers and students, the cities of Loudi, Huaihua, and Shaoyang, and the Tujia-Miao Prefecture of Xiangxi, have issued a circular to suspend schools.

China has a four-tier, color-coded weather warning system, with red representing the most severe weather, followed by orange, yellow, and blue.—Xinhua ■

Israeli air strike
targets Syrian port
of Latakia: state
media

AN Israeli air strike hit the Syrian port of Latakia on Tuesday, the second such attack on the key facility this month, according to Syrian state media.

Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes on Syrian territory since civil war broke out there in 2011, targeting government positions as well as allied Iran-backed forces and Hezbollah fighters. "At around 03:21 am, the Israeli enemy carried out an aerial aggression with several missiles from the direction of the Mediterranean... targeting the container yard in Latakia port," Syrian state news agency SANA cited a military source as saying. The strike caused "significant material damage" and led to fires, the agency added.

On 7 December, Israel carried out strikes on an Iranian arms shipment at the port of Latakia, located in President Bashar al-Assad's western Syrian heartland, without causing any casualties.—AFP ■

India restricts foreign funding for
Mother Teresa charity

INDIA has moved to cut off foreign funding to a charity founded by Mother Teresa, a decision critics described as further evidence of harassment of Christians under the Hindu nationalist government.

The Missionaries of Charity was founded in 1950 by the late Mother Teresa, a Catholic nun who devoted most of her life to helping the poor in the eastern city of Kolkata. She won the Nobel Peace Prize and was later declared a saint.

Her organization runs shelter homes across India. According to the Hindu daily, it received around \$750 million from abroad in the 2020-21 financial year.

The Indian Home Ministry said that on 25 December — Christmas Day — the renewal of the charity's licence to receive funding from abroad had been "refused".



India has moved to cut off foreign funding to a charity founded by Mother Teresa. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

The statement issued on Monday said the reason was "not meeting the eligibility conditions" under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act after "adverse inputs were noticed", without giving further details.

Dominic Gomes, vicar-general of the Archdiocese of Cal-

cutta, said the announcement was "a cruel Christmas gift to the poorest of the poor".

The news came two weeks after police in Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state, began investigating the charity for alleged "forceful conversion" of Hindus to Chris-

tianity — a regular accusation by hardline members of India's majority religion.

Activists say that religious minorities in India have faced increased levels of discrimination and violence since Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014.

In 2020, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom listed India as a "country of particular concern" for the first time since 2004.

Modi's government rejects having a radical "Hindutva" (Hindu hegemony) agenda and insists people of all religions have equal rights.

India's government has also in recent years increased pressure on non-governmental organizations receiving foreign funding, including rights groups.—AFP ■



Iraqi judges attend a court session at the Supreme Judicial Council in Baghdad on 27 December 2021, as the court is set to announce the verdict in the bid filed by the Hashed al-Shaabi ex-paramilitary alliance. PHOTO: AFP

Iraq's top court rejects
fraud claims, ratifies
election results

IRAQ'S top court on Monday ratified the country's October parliamentary election results after rejecting a complaint of irregularities filed by the pro-Iran Hashed al-Shaabi former paramilitary alliance.

The long-awaited ruling will allow parliament to meet and pave the way for the election of a president who will then appoint a prime minister tasked with forming a new government.

Iraq is trying to recover from years of war and jihadist violence but remains hobbled by political divisions, corruption and poverty.

The ratification follows a delay of more than two months since the 10 October legislative polls won by Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr, a political maverick and former anti-US militia leader who opposes all foreign interference. Sadr's movement won more than a fifth of the seats — 73 out of the assembly's total 329, well ahead of the 17 seats of the Fatah (Conquest) Alliance, the political arm of the pro-Iran Hashed. That was sharply down from the Alliance's 48 seats in the outgoing assembly. Hashed leaders rejected the result as a "fraud".—AFP ■

130-year-old time capsule
found in base of statue of
Confederate general

WORKERS dismantling the pedestal of a statue of a Confederate general discovered a copper box on Monday believed to have been buried 130 years ago, the second apparent time capsule unearthed at the site.

"They found it!" tweeted Virginia Governor Ralph Northam along with pictures of the box. "This is likely the time capsule everyone was looking for."

According to an 1887 newspaper article, a time capsule hidden in the base of the statue of General Robert E. Lee, who

commanded the Army of Northern Virginia during the Civil War, contained relics such as buttons and bullets, Confederate currency, maps, a rare picture of assassinated president Abraham Lincoln in his coffin and other items.

The box will be opened on Tuesday at 1:00 pm (1800 GMT), Northam said in a later tweet, adding that it had been X-rayed.

"Experts believe there may be coins, books, buttons, and even ammunition from the Civil War," he said.—AFP ■



Workers dismantling the pedestal of a statue of a Confederate general discovered a copper box on Monday believed to have been buried 130 years ago, the second apparent time capsule unearthed at the site. PHOTO: AFP

US, Russia to hold arms control, Ukraine talks early January

THE United States and Russia will hold much-anticipated talks in January, a White House official told AFP Monday, with the rivals due to negotiate on nuclear arms control and mounting tensions over Ukraine.

“The United States looks forward to engaging with Russia,” a spokesperson for the National Security Council said, on condition of anonymity.

“When we sit down to talk, Russia can put its concerns on the table and we will put our concerns on the table with Russia’s activities as well.”

Bilateral talks are scheduled for 10 January, the spokesperson said. Moscow and NATO representatives are then expected to



Russian Yars RS-24 intercontinental ballistic missile systems roll through Red Square during the Victory Day military parade in Moscow on 9 May. PHOTO: KIRILL KUDRYAVTSEV/AFP

meet 12 January, while Russia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

(OSCE), which includes the United States, will meet 13 January, the spokesperson added.

The 10 January meeting will be held as part of the Strategic Security Dialogue initiative launched by US President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin at their summit in Geneva last June.

While that format is mostly consecrated to resuscitating post-Cold War nuclear arms control treaties, the talks will also cover the standoff over Ukraine, where Russia has deployed a large combat force on the border, a senior White House official said, also on condition of anonymity.

The NATO-Russia Council meeting and the talks between Moscow and the OSCE’s Permanent Council are slated to focus on Ukraine.—AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Lebanese president says government blockage must end

LEBANON’S president on Monday called for an end to a government boycott, implicitly criticizing his ally Hezbollah for blocking cabinet meetings since October over demands to fire a judge.

Lebanon’s fragile government, formed in September to stem the country’s worst financial crisis, has not met for more than two months, since 12 October.

The Iran-backed Shiite movement Hezbollah and its Amal movement ally headed by parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri are spearheading the boycott.

They are demanding the replacement of judge Tarek Bitar who is investigating a blast that ripped through the capital Beirut in August 2020.—AFP ■

Polish president vetoes media law slammed by US



Thousands of Poles protested against the law earlier this month outside the presidential palace in Warsaw. PHOTO: JANEK SKARZYNSKI / AFP

FOLLOWING pressure from the EU and US, Polish President Andrzej Duda on Monday vetoed a media ownership law that critics

said was aimed at silencing the US-owned news channel TVN24.

“I refuse to sign the radio and television law amendment and am sending it back to parliament to be re-examined. This means that I am vetoing it,” Duda said in a televised address.

The law, which was adopted by parliament this month, would have prevented companies from outside the European Economic Area from holding a controlling stake in Polish media companies.

That would have forced US group Discovery to sell a majority stake in TVN, one of Poland’s biggest private TV networks, and its news channel TVN24.

The government had argued the law would protect Poland’s

media landscape from potentially hostile actors such as Russia.

Duda said he agreed with this principle, but that it should not be made to apply to existing business arrangements and investment treaties.

“People I’ve been talking to are concerned about the situation. They had different arguments. They spoke about peace and quiet... How we don’t need another conflict, another problem. We have many problems already,” he said.

Duda is strongly supported by Poland’s ruling populist Law and Justice (PiS) party but has shown some differences with the party leadership in the past.—AFP ■

Ukraine trains civilians to defend against Russian invasion

In a forested area just outside Ukraine’s capital Kiev, mock Russian troops ambush camouflage-clad army reservists.

The would-be Ukrainian soldiers, who include architects and researchers in their ranks, return fire with replica Kalashnikovs as imitation smoke grenades explode around them.

“I believe that every person in this country should know what to do... if the enemy invades their country,” Daniil Larin, a 19-year-old university student, told AFP during a short break from the exercises.

Larin was one of about 50 Ukrainian civilians who drove from Kiev to an abandoned Soviet-era asphalt plant on a recent weekend afternoon to train for how to defend their country in the event of a Russian invasion.

Dozens of civilians have been joining Ukraine’s army reserves in recent months, as fears have mounted that Russia — which Kiev says has massed around 100,000 troops on its side of the border — is plotting to launch a large-scale attack.—AFP ■

‘Hamstrung’ Europe searches for a post-Merkel leader

ANGELA Merkel’s departure from the political stage after 16 years as chancellor has not only ushered in a new era in Germany but also shaken up the power balance in the EU.

Potential candidates to take over Merkel’s mantle as the leader of Europe include her successor at the helm of Europe’s biggest economy, Olaf Scholz, as well as France’s President Emmanuel Macron and Italy’s Prime Minister Mario Draghi.

But analysts warn that none may be immediately capable of assuming the task, given the



Angela Merkel has been lauded for her steady hand in steering the bloc through crisis after crisis. PHOTO: AFP

European Union’s unresolved challenges — ranging from an

internal dispute over the rule of law, to marginalization in global

geopolitics, to the aftershocks of Brexit.

Lauded for her steady hand in steering the bloc through crisis after crisis, Merkel left the stage while still immensely popular at home and abroad, although there were some vocal opponents among her European colleagues.

“Angela Merkel is perceived as one of the most significant politicians in a generation, as the de facto leader of the European Union and the ‘leader of a free world,’” wrote Sebastian Reiche of the IESE Business School in Spain.—AFP ■

Thailand to play Indonesia today in Suzuki Cup 1st Leg Final

ASEAN powerhouse Thailand national football team will take on the Indonesia team in their first leg final of the Suzuki Cup at Singapore Indoor Stadium tonight.

The match will begin at 7:00 pm Myanmar Standard Time.

Ticket sales for the first leg of the ASEAN Football Federation (AFF) Suzuki Cup 2020 final are purchasable online at www.fas.org.sg/tickets for all zones, the AFF officials stated.

The two-legged finals will

see Indonesia and Thailand battle it out to be crowned ASEAN's best on 29 December 2021 and 1 January 2022. Tickets will be priced at S\$25.00 for adults and S\$15.00 for children 12 years of age and under, officials added.

"In line with COVID-19 safe management measures, strict safe distancing measures will be maintained with seating in groups of two and one-metre safe distancing between each group. Food and drinks are not permitted in the stadiums and fans are

required to wear their masks at all times," ASEAN football authorities said.

Thailand booked their place in the AFF Suzuki Cup final after they held defending champions Viet Nam 0-0 on Sunday in their second leg semi-finals to complete a 2-0 aggregate victory.

On the contrary, Indonesia beat Singapore 4-2 at the National Stadium of Singapore on Saturday, as they reached the AFF Suzuki Cup final for the sixth time. —GNLM

Premier League hit by record 103 positive Covid tests

THE Premier League has revealed a record 103 players and staff tested positive for the coronavirus in the period from 20 to 26 December.

That surpassed the total a week earlier, when the English top-flight hit a new high since testing began in 2020 with 90 positive cases.

So far in December, 15 Premier League games have been called off, while the three divisions below the top tier have been decimated by postponements.

"The League can today confirm between Monday 20 December and Sunday 26 December, 15,186 COVID-19 tests were administered on players and club staff. Of these, there were 103 new positive cases," a Premier League statement said.

"The safety of everyone is a priority and the Premier



Wolves clash with Arsenal has been postponed due to a coronavirus outbreak. **PHOTO: POOL/AFF**

League is taking all precautionary steps in response to the impact of the Omicron variant."

Liverpool's game against Leeds, Watford's trip to Wolves and Burnley against Everton, all on Boxing Day, were cancelled.

Arsenal's home match

against Wolves on Tuesday was axed on Sunday after an increase in case numbers among the Wolves' squad.

Leeds' game with Aston Villa, scheduled for 28 December, was also postponed on Sunday due to Leeds' continued Covid and injury issues.—AFP ■

Cavani rescues Man Utd in Newcastle draw

RALF Rangnick accused his Manchester United stars of lacking aggression after Edinson Cavani rescued a 1-1 draw at struggling Newcastle on Monday.

Rangnick's side trailed to Allan Saint-Maximin's eye-catching early goal and were out-played for long periods at St James' Park.

Cavani came off the bench to bag his first goal since October in the second half, ensuring Rangnick avoided a first defeat

in four games as United's interim manager. But United remain in seventh place in the Premier League, seven points behind fourth placed Arsenal with two games in hand.

Rangnick had won his first two league games since taking over from the axed Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, but neither performance was especially convincing and this was another underwhelming effort.

"I didn't like the performance at all. We didn't control

the game apart from a few moments. It's all about energy, physicality and who wins the second balls. In all those areas we weren't at our best," Rangnick said.

"You have to be able to win those direct duels. Today was not a question of body language, it was a question of body physicality.

"If you want to be competitive you have to get physical and this was not the case in many parts of the game."—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.

Djokovic mystery deepens as stars arrive ahead of Australian Open

NOVAK Djokovic has not withdrawn from the ATP Cup despite claims he was almost sure to do so, Tennis Australia said Tuesday, as other top players led by Naomi Osaka began arriving ahead of the Australian Open.

There has been serious doubt as to whether men's world number one Djokovic would travel to Australia, having refused to confirm if he has been vaccinated against the coronavirus.

An unnamed member of

his team told Serbian newspaper Blic that they were "99 per cent" sure that he would not play in the ATP Cup, which comes ahead of the Australian Open, adding to the intrigue over whether Djokovic would be at the first Grand Slam of the year.

But Tennis Australia told AFP the Serbian had yet to pull out of the teams event, which is due to start on Saturday in Sydney with Djokovic drawn to play Norway's Casper Ruud on the opening day.—AFP ■



Tennis Australia insists Novak Djokovic has not yet withdrawn from the ATP Cup. **PHOTO: AFP**