Consecration ceremony of Eternal Peace Pagoda held in Nay Pyi Taw

WITH sacred religious objects enshrined into its upper reliquary and a golden umbrella hosted atop it, the Eternal Peace pagoda was consecrated yesterday in Dekkhinathiri Township of Nay Pyi Taw.

President U Win Myint, First Lady Daw Cho Cho and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi attended the ceremony in the compound of the pagoda near Gangaw Roundabout on Yazathingaha Road.

It was also attended by the members of the Sangha led by Chairman of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, Patron of Bhamo Monastery in Mandalay, Abhidhaja MahaRatthaguru AggaMaha Saddammat Jotika Dr Bhaddanta Kumara Bhivamsa, Vice President U Myint Swe and wife Daw Khin Thet Htay, Chief Justice of the Union U Htun Htun Oo, Constitutional Tribunal Chairman U Myo Nyunt, Union Election Commission Chairman U Hla Thein and wife Daw Aye Thida, Deputy Commander of Chief of Defence Services Vice Senior General Soe Win and wife Daw Than Than Nwe, Pyithu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Tun Tun Hein and wife Dr Sein Sein Thein, Deputy Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw U Aye Tha Aung.

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Consecration ceremony of Eternal Peace Pagoda held in Nay Pyi Taw

Before the ceremony, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi offered alms-food in the emerald bowl, fruits, flowers and water to the Buddha Image in the compound of pagoda.

Then, the President and First Lady, together with the State Counsellor, paid homage to the sacred objects to be enshrined in the pagoda.

Next, the President and the First Lady, the State Counsellor and the congregation took the nine precepts from the Bhamo Sayadaw after which the members of Sangha recited the Parittas.

The President and the First Lady, the State Counsellor; the Vice President and wife, the Chief Justice of the Union; the Chairman of Constitutional Tribunal, the Chairman of Union Election Commission and wife, the Deputy Commander in Chief of Defence Services and Commander in Chief (Army) and wife, Union Ministers and donors donated holy relics of diamond buds with jewelries, pennant-shaped vane, Buddha images and other sacred items to the members of Sangha.

Then, Shwe Parami Forest Monastery Patron Sayadaw Ashin Candadhika gave a brief speech to express his sympathetic joy in connection with the construction of the Eternal Peace Pagoda.

SEE PAGE-3
Next, State Ovadacaria and Patron of MahaVisutarama Zaygone Monastery Abhidhaja Maha Rattthaguru Dr Bhaddanta Kavisara gave a sermon extolling the virtues of the good deeds and the congregation led by the President, the First Lady, and the State Counsellor shared merits for the donations thus made.

Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko, as chairman of the Eternal Peace Pagoda Construction Steering Committee, presented certificates of appreciation to Tet Lann Companies Group Chairman U Shein Win, Say Paing Company Chairman U Maung-Weik, Architect Dr Toe Toe Win, MORE C.N.C Company Chairman U Moe Oo and San Hteik Than Company’s floral motifs specialist U Kyi Soe, who contributed their works in the construction of the pagoda.

At the enshrining ceremony, the President and First Lady; the State Counsellor; the Vice President and wife and the congregation carried the sacred objects in ceremonial clockwise procession including a small contingent representing devas and another contingent representing royalty. After this lay devotees conveyed these holy objects to the upper reliquary.

Then, Shwe Parami Forest Monastery Sayadaw, the President, the Vice President, the Chairman of Nay Pyi Taw Council and the donors enshrined the relic objects into the reliquary and sprinkled it with scented water.

To hoist the holy umbrella, the First Lady; the State Counsellor; the wife of Vice President and the congregation participated in conveying the jewel studded diamond bud, pennant-shaped vane, layers of golden umbrella and other religious objects to the top of the pagoda by a ceremonial flying carriage that used ropes and pulleys.

SEE PAGE-4
Shwe Parami Forest Monastery Sayadaw, the President, and the Vice President attached the sacred objects atop the pagoda after which the Union Ministers, officials and devotees donated other holy items to the surrounding pagodas.

After the consecration ceremony, President U Win Myint, First Lady Daw Cho Cho, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the congregation donated soon (day meal) to members of the Sangha.

The Shwe Parami Forest Monastery Sayadaw, the President, the Vice President and the Chairman of Nay Pyi Taw Council attached the golden holy umbrella to the top of the ornamented Victory Column or Tagundaing, and sprayed with scented water on it. The State Counsellor also sprayed scented water over the monument of the Victory Column. Then, the President and wife, and the State Counsellor struck the golden bell, and the Vice President and wife struck the golden gong nine times respectively before spraying the scented water on these ceremonial objects.

Finally, President U Win Myint and wife, and the State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi scattered ceremonial gold and silver to mark the successful completion of the ceremony.—MNA (Translated by Aung Khin)
Mandalay celebrates Tazaungdine Festival

YESTERDAY was Fullmoon of Tazaungmone also known as Samanaphala Sutta Day and according to tradition townships in pagodas and congregations halls in townships of Mandalay Region were thronged with people lighting up pagodas and Buddha images with oil lamps and electric lights while Matho Robe Weaving Contests and offering of Matho Robes were conducted in some pagodas. People grouped together as shop sellers, school teachers and students, personnel of public and private offices were also sending off their Kathina Robe offerings to respective monasteries with cars, trucks and tricycles. Free food offerings to the general public were also conducted in some wards and streets of Mandalay.

At 5 am, Mahamuni Pagoda Trustee Board conducted 30th Matho Robe Weaving and Offering event that was attended by Mandalay Region Hluttaw Speaker U Aung Kyaw Oo, Region ministers, pagoda trustee board chairman U Soe Lin and wife, officials and devotees. After the Matho Robe was woven, Yaydaw Sayadaw Bhaddanta Okkahta led Region officials to place the robe onto the Mahamuni Buddha image.

Next, Region Hluttaw Speaker, Region ministers and pagoda trustee board chairman presented the robe weaving groups with cash awards and documents of honors. In the same way, Matho Robe weaving and offering event and lotus flower throwing event were held in Mar Le Pagoda in the Mahamuni Pagoda compound. As the day dawns, invited monks were offered meals and offerings while a donor family that make donation every year on this day offered foods and drinks to their friends and relatives as well as devotees paying homage to the pagoda.

In the afternoon, Mandalay Region government’s 4th Kathina Robe donation and merit sharing ceremony was held at Maha Atula Wayan Atumashi Kyaungdawgyi. On the evening of Fullmoon of Tazaungmone, pagodas in Mandalay region were flock with devotees offering golden robes, flower, water, fruits while religious groups conducted recitation of Pa Htan (Pattthana). Locals and visitors from afar paying homage to the pagodas were also offered with meals, soft drinks and snacks by donors at the pagodas itself as well as in the wards and streets.

— Tin Maung (Mann sub printing house)
(Translated by Zaw Min)

Irrawaddy Literary Festival successfully concludes

THE third and last day of the 5th Irrawaddy Literary Festival took place at Hotel Mercure, Mandalay, yesterday. The festival had paper reading sessions on arts and humanities, roundtable discussions, cartoon drawings and poem recitals as well as a panelist from Australia, Mr Christopher Lamb. He said he participated in the discussions on education reforms and Myanmar’s peace talks. He said he loved the fact that writers from all across Myanmar could gather to exchange thoughts and ideas on the varied topics of the nation in one place.

The festival was graced by the Union Minister for Information while State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi send a video with well-wishes.

Ma Aye Pyae Sone, a monastic education student, came to listen to lectures from authors at the festival. She said the festival focused on what literature young people should read. She said young people are not reading less, but rather the way they read has changed. They are more likely to read digitally than from a hardcover.— Min Htet Aung (Mahn Sub-printing House)
(Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

The last day of the 5th Irrawaddy Literary Festival takes place in Mandalay, yesterday. PHOTO: AUNG PHYO KYAW

A book shop attracts students at the Irrawaddy Literary Festival in Mandalay. PHOTO: AUNG PHYO KYAW
Samannaphala Day celebrated at pagodas in Yangon

DEVOTEES and merit makers thronged to Nay Pyi Taw pagodas on Fullmoon Day

US-based institute to initiate Bagan conservation project in January

The Getty Conservation Institute announced its 19-years conservation project which is scheduled to begin in January next year in Bagan, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Myanmar.

The project announces ceremony yesterday morning was held at Myin-Pya-Gu Temple, with the opening remarks of Deputy Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture U Kyi Min and Mandalay Region government’s Minister for Planning and Finance U Myint Tha. Mr. Tim Whalen, the Director of Getty Conservation Institute, also explained action plans under the Getty Conservation Project for Bagan. After the project announcement ceremony invited guests observed the inside of Myin-Pya-Gu Temple.

The Getty Conservation Institute based in Los Angeles of California will begin a long-term commitment in Bagan to conserve and protect ancient cultural heritages in coordination with the Department of Archaeology and National Museum under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture. The project will include a number of case studies in collecting information about future conservation efforts in Bagan and elsewhere, while it will start at Myin-Pya-Gu, an expensive and picturesque temple, which was closed to the public for many years due to conservation concerns. Under this project, the Getty Conservation Institute will provide training for international best practices to support the Department of Archaeology and National Museum and capacity building for its staff. — MNA

Samannaphala Sutta was preached by Lord Buddha on Fullmoon of Tazaungmon and the day was celebrated as Samannaphala Sutta Day.

Samannaphala means the benefit of becoming a Sangha.

As Lord Buddha preached the benefits of becoming a Sangha on this day, Fullmoon of Tazaungmon is also Sangha Day. In Yangon, the day’s celebration starts early in the morning at Shwedagon Pagoda.

Shwedagon Pagoda trustee held the 35th Shwedagon Pagoda Matho Robe offering ceremony at 4 am on the platform of the pagoda. Lotus Matho Robes woven overnight were carried around the pagoda starting from Victory Land at Bahu Corner and then offered to Buddha images in the pagoda by the pagoda trustee members.

Afterswards meals, oil lamp, flower, water and fruits were offered to Shwedagon Pagoda and morning meals were also offered to Sayadaws and Sanghas. The pagoda trustee members and audiences then took Nine Precepts from Shwedagon Pagoda Ovadacariy Sayadaws and shared merits for the good deeds performed.

Similarly, 22nd Thiriminagaulary Kaba Aye Pagoda Matho Robe weaving contest was held on the evening of 10 November and the pagoda trustee members presented prizes to the winning contestants. Yester-day morning, the Matho Robes woven the evening before were carried around the pagoda once and celebration of Fullmoon of Tazaungmon or Samannaphala Sutta Day was continued by pagoda trustee members and religious organizations.

Botataung Pagoda also held its 37th Matho Robe offering ceremony and presented documents of honors to donors at 4:30 am and later in the evening paid homage to the pagoda by lighting up 27,000 oil lamps.

The day also saw donors carrying offerings by cars and tricycles to monasteries while in many wards and streets, free offering of foods and merit making market events were held. Later in the evening, the pagodas, offices, residences, streets and roads were lighted up with oil and electric lamps fully displaying Myanmar’s tradition that was held on every Fullmoon of Tazaungmon. — Yi Yi Myint

(Translated by Zaw Min)
Over 20,000 buyers show interest in Yangon government-owned land

By Nyein Nyein

The Yangon Region government recently announced the sale of land plots for setting up industrial businesses and public housing, and more than 20,000 application forms were sold from 7 October to 8 November, said U Than, Joint Secretary of the Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC).

The plots of land owned by the Yangon Region government will be sold in three phases.

In Phase 1, land-use applications for 2,000 land plots in Hlinethaya, Swayeephy, and four Dagon townships were sold on 7 October at the office complex of the General Administrative Department (Eastern District), and interested buyers purchased 20,000 forms as of 8 November, when the deadline ended, said U Than.

However, of the 20,000 applications purchased, only 2,500 have been submitted, he said.

Meanwhile, more than 180 plots from the Myanmaraglar Industrial Zone will be sold in Phase 2, and more than 9,000 acres, previously marked as agricultural land, in East Dagon and Dagon Seikkan townships, will be sold in Phase 3, he added.

As the land is being sold by the regional government, it will have full guarantee, said Yangon Mayor U Maung Maung Soe. The plots that are slated to be sold were previously seized by the government, and compensation had not been awarded to their original owners. Therefore, to compensate the original farmers, the lands are being sold again, according to officials.

At present, there are over 3,000 cases with the Yangon Region government’s Committee for Scrutinizing Confiscated Farm-lands and Other Lands. Compensation of K31 billion would be given to farmers on 28 September. In the 2019-2020 fiscal year, compensation of K11 billion would be provided to the original farmland owners.

External trade touches $3.19 bln in one month

By Nyein Nyein

Myanmar’s external trade as of 1 November in the current fiscal year reached US$3.19 billion, an increase of $417 million compared to the corresponding period of the 2018-2019 fiscal year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

In the previous FY, trade stood at US$2.78 billion.

Between 1 October and 1 November, 2019, both maritime and border trade showed a rise of around US$400 million compared with the year-ago period. Myanmar’s exports were estimated at US$1.57 billion, and imports were valued at US$1.6 billion.

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

The country’s export sector relies more on the agricultural and manufacturing sectors. Export earnings from the CMP (cutting, making, and packaging) garment businesses are rising, while reliance on natural resources, such as natural gas and jade, is lessening.

The government is trying to reduce the trade deficit by screening luxury import items and boosting exports, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Honey production season on, but demand low in Kani Township

By La Wonn

This year, beekeeping businesses in Kani Township have registered low demand during the plum honey production season, from September to November, in spite of a higher yield. The price of honey has also declined compared to last year, said beekeepers.

Although beekeepers could produce more honey in the season, they said they faced low demand from Kani and Yinnabin townships in Sagaing Region.

Though we could produce 60 buckets of plum honey from over 500 beehives this year, the prices have been on the decline. Earlier, more than 500 beehives produced only 50 buckets, but beekeepers were doing well,” said Ko Kyi Soe, a beekeeper. In the current season, plum honey is being harvested six times compared to five last year.

A viss (a viss equals 1.6 kg) of honey fetched K2,900 last year, which is higher than the current price of K2,800 per viss, according to beekeepers.

In 2019, 40,087 buckets of honey have been produced in Kani Township and 5,300 buckets in Yinnabin Township, according to Division of Apiculture’s data. “Though we could produce 60 buckets of plum honey from over 500 beehives this year, the prices have been on the decline. Earlier, more than 500 beehives produced only 50 buckets, but beekeepers were doing well,” said Ko Kyi Soe, a beekeeper. In the current season, plum honey is being harvested six times compared to five last year.

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In 2019, 40,087 buckets of honey have been produced in Kani Township and 5,300 buckets in Yinnabin Township, according to Division of Apiculture’s data. -Than Htay Aung (Kani)
The Emergence of Geotourism and Geoparks

Myanmar is a portion of the planet and we likewise carry a portion of the responsibility to preserve and protect it. This requires more than just saving our forests, we must protect every plant and tree in our environment.

Myanmar is a portion of the planet and we likewise carry a portion of the responsibility to preserve and protect it. This requires more than just saving our forests, we must protect every plant and tree in our environment.

The Earth sciences provide us with invaluable knowledge about the Earth, its systems, and its 4.6 billion year history. This knowledge is essential for responding to present-day challenges such as preserving our Earth’s resources for future generations, mitigating the impact of global warming and mitigating the risks of geological hazards.

In order to more closely reflect the societal challenges of Earth science today and provide an international status to a former network of sites of international geology, UNESCO’s General Conference on 17 November 2013, the creation of the International Geosciences and Geoparks Programme (IGGP). The IGGP comprises the International Geoscientific Programme (IGP), which for over 40 years has brought geoscientists together from all regions of the world to study the Earth and geological processes under themes which have significant societal relevance, and the UNESCO Global Geoparks, which promote sites of international geological value and are the basis of local sustainable development.

Geotourism

Geotourism is defined as “tourism that sustains and enhances the geographical characteristic places, their culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.” Geotourism goes beyond “drive through” travel. By focusing on the meaning of places, the community becomes a full partner in giving the visitor an authentic, enriching experience. The concept of Geotourism emphasizes local culture and in-situ and ex-situ artefacts, to promote tourism focus in on the conservation of geo-diversity and fosters tourism. Geotourism protects its most valuable asset - the destination itself. It’s not a difficult question to ponder if these changes were not made independently in many natural and urban areas where tourism focus.

The importance of safeguarding and managing it for future generations is now widely accepted as part of sustainable development. Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism, like the physician’s code of ethics, means “first, do no harm.” Sustainable tourism protects its most valuable asset - the destination itself. It seeks to avoid the “tread on death” syndrome by anticipating development pressures and implementing limits and management techniques that preserve natural habitats and views, heritage sites, and community traditions. It conserves resources.

Environmentally conscious travel patronizes businesses that reduce pollution and waste, energy consumption, water usage, and excessive lighting. It respects local customs and history. Foreign visitors learn local etiquette, including common phrases in the local language. Residents learn how to accommodate foreign expectations and thereby differ from their own. It aims for quality not merely to build a destination’s geographical character, its “sense of place” in challenging the special quality of Es locales, visitor and resident alike benefit.

Geotourism is synergistic: the complex elements of geographical character work together to create a tourism experience richer than the sum of its parts, appealing to visitors with diverse interests. It involves the community more deeply. Local businesses and civic groups cooperate in the interest of a distinctive, authentic visitor experience.

Geotourism adds to geo-tourism’s principal focus on well-timed, local, and natural landscapes and animal (fauna) by adding a third dimension to enhance both community development and tourism growth. Therefore, it is crucial for the world’s future. The complex elements of geotourism make it possible for the key players to face the many challenges of tourism.

The provision of interpretative and service facilities for geo-activities and patronage of geotourism can be managed through their encompassing topside, together with their associated assets. Myanmar was chosen as an example for the complexity of tourist experience, tourism development, and the relationship between them. Geotourism includes tourism focusing, learning from, appreciating, and engaging in geosites. Geotourism is an integral part of Myanmar’s tourism, and Geo-tourism is a vital component of Myanmar’s tourism development.
Pagodas in Dawei crowded with pilgrims

ON the fullmoon of Tazaungmon, the significant pagodas in Dawei town were crowded with pilgrims.

On 11 November, prominent pagodas in Dawei Town, including the Shwe Taung Sar pagoda, welcomed large crowds of local residents and visitors from other states and regions. The visitors offered flowers, water, and candles to Lord Buddha.

“Today is the Tazaungdaing full-moon day, and more pilgrims thronged the pagodas today than on normal days. Some visited the pagodas with their whole family because both schools and offices are closed. There were also a few tourists visiting the pagodas,” said U Kyaw Win, chairman of the Shin Pin Khayu pagoda board of trustees.

Moreover, some historical and significant pagodas and resorts were also crowded with visitors. The public holiday is from 9 to 12 November. So, civil staff from Dawei and their families and visitors from other states and regions visited significant spots.—Dawei (IPRD)  

(Translated by Hay Mar)

Cave pagodas in Hpa-an attract holidaymakers

THE significant cave pagodas in Hpa-an town, Kayin State are crowded with pilgrims and visitors during the Tazaungdaing holidays, which is being observed from 9 to 12 November.

“With the government designating long holidays for the Thadingyut and Tazaungdaing festivals, the civil staff and Factory workers who are appointed in other regions can get a chance to meet their families,” said U Maung Ko, chairman of the KOG civil society organization.

The prominent pagodas, caves, hot springs, waterfalls, and ponds are crowded with local residents as well as local visitors in the public holidays.

“We are visiting Hpa-an for the first time by car with our neighbors and relatives. We are visiting the area as our children have the Tazaungdaing holidays. We have visited many significant pagodas such as Bayint Nyi cave, Yathayyan cave, and Kawgun cave. We will continue our trip after eating fine food along the way. We will go back in the evening,” said U Ohn Maung, a local visitor from Bago Region.—Nay Myo Lwin (IPRD)  

(Translated by Hay Mar)

Hotel rates in Chaungtha rise during Tazaungdaing holidays

DUE to an increase in local and foreign visitors coming to Chaungtha beach in Ayeyawady Region during the Tazaungdaing holidays, hotel room rates are rising in the area these days, according to local visitors.

“Our team visited Chaungtha beach from Nay Pyi Taw. All of the team members are civil staff. We work hard throughout the year and so recreation in Chaungtha beach is a welcome change from desk-bound heavy work. But, the hotel rates in Chaungtha have given us a headache. We are staying in a normal room, but it is costing us K110,000 per night. There are seven members in our team,” said a visitor from the Nay Pyi Taw civil staff team.

“On normal days, most of the guest houses on Chaungtha beach charge only K30,000 per night for an ordinary, not well-furnished room, which can accommodate five persons. During regular holidays, most of the rooms are closed because there are no visitors coming to Chaungtha beach. Some hotels and motels charge K50,000 per night on normal days. Most guesthouses operate with municipal licenses, while some do not have licenses. Chaungtha beach is crowded with visitors during public holidays, such as the water festival, Thadingyut festival, and Tazaungdaing festival. On such holidays, the hotels are fully booked and room rates are a bit high,” said owners of local hotels, motels, and guesthouses on Chaungtha beach.

On 10 November, local and foreign visitors had to shell out anywhere between K50,000 and over K100,000 to stay at Chaungtha beach, depending on the size and condition of the room. According to local residents, the concerned authorities need to conduct an inspection to ensure the safety of visitors at Chaungtha beach.—Kyaw Kyaw (Mahlaiing)  

(Translated by Hay Mar)
Anti-Ebola radio in DR Congo closes down after killing

Nearly 2,200 people have died since the notorious haemor- rhagic disease erupted in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in August 2018, according to the latest official figures. The fight against the outbreak has been hampered by local fears and superstitions, exploited by militia groups that are rampant in the remote region.

Several health workers have been killed and media that have supported the campaign have received threats. Several radio stations in the Mambasa area say they have stopped broadcasting anti-Ebola messages because of intimidation.

On November 2, Lwemba broadcaster Papy Mahamba was killed at his home by unidentified men. His wife was injured and their house set ablaze. — AFP

Israeli students develop treatment for resistant bacteria, based on engineered proteins

JERUSALEM — Israeli students have developed alternative antibiotics, based on engineered proteins, to overcome resistant bacteria, Tel Aviv University in central Israel reported on Sunday.

According to the World Health Organization, at least 700,000 people die each year due to drug-resistant diseases, and the number could jump to 10 million each year by 2050.

To overcome resistant bacteria, the students developed an alternative system based on pyocins — protein complexes naturally produced by bacteria to attack other threatening bacteria.

When released, each pyocin can bind to an enemy bacteria cell, puncture its membrane and destroy the bacteria single-handedly. This solution also includes novel algorithm-based software for both designing the relevant tail fibers to target specific bacteria, and for optimizing the distribution of the pyocins in a specific medium for cost-effective use.

— Xinhua

Vivaldi reworked to ‘make climate change audible’

BERLIN (Germany)—A classical orchestra in Germany aims to “make climate change audible” with a rework of Antonio Vivaldi’s famous violin concertos “The Four Seasons” using algorithms based on climate data.

The project reimagining one of the most widely recognised classical works is entitled “For Seasons” and will be performed in Hamburg on Saturday.

A collaboration between musicians, artists and software developers, the composition has been described by its creators as “disharmonic” and “uncomfortable”. “The piece makes the facts of climate change obvious: the climate and our seasons have grown unbalanced,” the organisers said on the project website.

Using data relating to species extinctions, rises in global temperatures and extreme weather events, the composers claim to have developed algorithms which can “influence the notes on the original sheet”. Changes to Vivaldi’s original score from 1725 will recognise the original, but then quickly think: ‘Hang on, this sounds different, somehow disturbing,’” said Yuri Christiansen, the orchestra’s solo cellist.

Tickets for the performance at Hamburg’s modern, waterside concert hall will be free of charge, and the event will also be streamed by regional public broadcaster NDR. — AFP

SYDNEY (Australia) — Sydney residents were warned of “catastrophic” danger and a state of emergency was declared Monday as Australia’s girded for a fresh wave of devastating bushfires.

For the first time, Australia’s largest city and the surrounding area faced the top level of fire warning — with authorities warning “lives and homes will be at risk”.

“There is nothing built or designed to withstand... catastrophic” conditions, said Shane Fitzsimmons, commissioner of the rural fire service for New South Wales state, which encompasses Sydney.

High temperatures and strong winds were expected to create tinderbox conditions Tuesday, prompting state premier Gladys Berejiklian to declare the seven-day state of emergency.

More than 350 schools will be closed, a broad fire ban has been put in place and the military is providing logistic support for firefighters.

Three people have died, thousands have been displaced and more than 150 homes destroyed by dozens of out-of-control blazes in the state’s north.

In the last few months, roughly 11,000 square kilometre (4,200 square miles) — an area larger than Jamaica or Kosovo — has been scorched, according to the New South Wales fire service.

Conditions eased on Monday and some residents were able to return home, although a heavy haze lingered over many fire-hit regions.

The Blue Mountains to Sydney’s west, the wine-producing Hunter Valley to the north as well as the Illawarra region to the city’s south are expected to be the hardest hit. — AFP
October economy watcher sentiment drops to 8-year low after tax hike

TOKYO — Business sentiment among workers with jobs sensitive to economic trends dropped to its lowest level in eight years in October due to sluggish sales after a consumption tax hike at the start of the month, government data showed Monday.

The diffusion index of confidence among “economy watchers” such as taxi drivers and restaurant staff decreased 10.0 points from September to 36.7, the lowest since May 2011 when consumption remained depressed after massive earthquake and tsunami hit northeastern Japan in March that year.

The size of the decline was the steepest since April 2014, when the index dropped a seasonally adjusted 15.7 points after the consumption tax was lifted to 8 per cent from 5 per cent. The tax rate was further increased to 10 per cent in October this year.

Business sentiment, which declined for the first time in three months, was also weakened by the effect of a series of natural disasters hitting Japan in October, including Typhoon Hagibis, a government official said.

A reading below 50 indicates worsening rather than improving conditions over the past three months.

Despite the sharp drop in the index, the Cabinet Office maintained its assessment that “The economy has shown weak movement in its recovery,” with the official describing the impact of the tax hike and disasters as “temporary factors.”

In the survey, a clerk at a home appliance store in the Koshinetsu region, central Japan, said the number of customers had declined following a period of increased demand ahead of the tax hike.

Meanwhile, the diffusion index gauging the economic outlook in the coming months rose 6.8 points to 43.7 as many respondents expect the negative impact of the higher tax rate is likely to wane in the near future.

A worker at a department store in the southern Kanto region in eastern Japan said an economic recovery is likely to come earlier than it did after the previous tax hike as the year-end shopping season is looming.

The survey covered 2,050 people from 25 to 31 October, of whom 1,830, or 89.3 per cent, responded. —Kyodo News

SBI Holdings, Fukushima Bank to form capital tie-up

TOKYO — Major Japanese online financial firm SBI Holdings Inc. will form a capital tie-up with Fukushima Bank, becoming the regional lender’s biggest shareholder with a 12.5 per cent stake, to help turn around its business, the two said Monday.

SBI will invest 1.11 billion yen ($10 million) in the bank by the end of January to acquire the stake and will provide expertise on financial product sales and information technology to improve the lender’s profitability and efficiency, they said.

“There is a limit to how much a business model can be changed by a tie-up between two banks. We must be reborn,” Takahiro Kato, president of the bank that has been struggling for profitability under the Bank of Japan’s ultraeasy monetary policy, told a press conference.

The first joint-branch bank is planned to be opened by January in Kortyama in the northeastern Japan prefecture, they said, adding the regional lender will have an outside board director from SBI from June next year.

SBI has been expanding alliances with local banks as it aims to become Japan’s “fourth megabank,” joining Mizuho Financial Group Inc., Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group Inc. and Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group Inc.

In September, SBI concluded a capital tie-up with Shimane Bank in western Japan, injecting 2.5 billion yen. An alliance with Fukushima Bank is SBI’s second tie-up with a regional financial institution.

On future partnerships with other regional banks, Shunpei Morita, senior managing director of SBI, who joined the press conference, said, “We will consider it depending on the other party.”

“We would like the tie-up with Fukushima Bank to provide an example of success,” Morita said at the lender’s headquarters. Fukushima Bank, established in 1922, posted a group net loss of 3.12 billion yen in the business year ended March last year, falling into the red for the first time in seven years.

The Financial Services Agency ordered it to improve its business operations and the bank logged a 521 million yen net profit in the year through March this year.

Many small banks in Japan have been affected by population declines in regional areas and rising costs for developing fintech, the delivery of financial services via information technology, as well as implementing anti-money laundering measures.

Of the 105 regional banks in Japan, 45 recorded losses in their core businesses for at least two straight years through March this year. Of those, 27 have logged red ink for more than five years in a row, according to the agency.

Against such a backdrop, local banks have accelerated moves to share up their business by aligning with peers. The Bank of Yokohama and Chiba Bank, both based near Tokyo, said in July they had reached a deal to share customer information.—Kyodo News

Lebanon central bank says to protect pound stability

BEIRUT (Lebanon) — Lebanon’s central bank on Monday said it would strive to maintain the local currency’s peg to the US dollar and ease access to the greenback after weeks of mass protests sparked fears of devaluation sparking fears of devaluation.

“Protecting the Lebanese pound’s stability,” central bank chief Riad Salameh told journalists at a press conference in the capital Beirut. We have taken measures “to protect deposits, protect deposits,” he said.

Salameh added that he had asked local banks to lift restrictions imposed after mass protests broke out nationwide against the government’s policy on 17 October.

He said the central bank had asked banks to maintain the same ceilings on credit cards and allow customers to repay US dollar loans in the local currency.—AFP

UK economy avoids recession with 0.3% quarterly growth

LONDON (United Kingdom) — Britain’s economy avoided recession in the third quarter, official data showed Monday, but there were signs of slowing activity before the country’s general election next month and looming departure from the European Union.

Gross domestic product rebounded by 0.3 per cent in the July-September period after a 0.2-percentage point contraction in the second quarter, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in an initial estimate.

The technical definition of a recession is two straight quarters of negative growth. Britain faces a general election on December 12, called by Prime Minister Boris Johnson to try and finally force through Brexit by a new deadline of January 31.

“GDP grew steadily in the third quarter, mainly thanks to a strong July,” an ONS spokesman said in a statement Monday.

“Services again led the way with construction also performing well.

“Manufacturing failed to grow as falls in most industries were offset by car production bouncing back,” he added.

However, the third-quarter performance fell short of market expectations and the Bank of England’s BoE growth forecast — which had both stood at 0.4 per cent.—AFP
Romania president on top in first-round vote

BUCAREST (Romania) — Romania’s pro-European President Klaus Iohannis has taken a big lead in the first round of the country’s presidential election on Sunday, according to partial official results.

With votes from 90 per cent of polling stations counted, Iohannis stands on just over 36 per cent, with his nearest rival, former Social Democrat (PSD) prime minister Viorica Dancila, on 24 per cent.

Iohannis claimed victory on Sunday evening in front of cheering supporters at his campaign headquarters.

“We have beaten the Social Democrats,” the 60-year-old leader said.

“Premier Minister Pedro Sanchez triggered the repeat polls — Spain’s fourth in four years — after his Socialists failed to reach an agreement with other parties to forge a parliamentary majority in April.

But his gamble resulted in the party winning just 120 parliamentary seats — three fewer than in April — while far-left Podemos party slumped to 35 seats from 42 the last time around.

Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias urged the left to unite this time and said he was willing to start negotiating with Sanchez. However their two parties together would still need the support of several smaller parties to build a working majority of 176 seats in parliament.

The main opposition conservative Popular Party (PP) recovered from its worst ever showing in April, finishing second with 48 seats, up from 66, while Vox was the biggest winner.

It won 52 seats — more than doubling the 24 it took during its April parliamentary debut in the most significant showing by a far-right faction since Spain’s return to democracy following dictator Francisco Franco’s death in 1975.

‘Practically impossible’

The deepening Catalan separatist crisis played squarely into the hands of the far right, which has vowed to clamp down aggressively on Catalonia’s independence drive.

Catalonia was rocked by days of mass, sometimes violent, pro-independence rallies after Spain’s Supreme Court on October 14 sentenced nine politicians and activists to jail for up to 13 years for their role in a failed secession bid in 2017.

Spain’s repeat election fails to break deadlock

Santiago (Spain) — Spain’s Socialists faced tough talks to form a government on Monday after the party emerged on top but weakened from a repeat election which produced an even more divided parliament and propelled far-right Vox into third place.

Neither the left nor the right bloc are anywhere near an absolute majority in the 350-seat assembly following Sunday’s polls, prolonging a political deadlock in the eurozone’s fourth largest economy after a similar result in the previous general election in April.

“The elections did not solve the difficulties in achieving a governing majority. On the contrary, (they) worsened them,” top-selling daily newspaper El País wrote in an editorial.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez triggered the repeat polls — Spain’s fourth in four years — after his Socialists failed to reach an agreement with other parties to forge a parliamentary majority in April.

Calls for abuse probe as Russian historian in court for grisly murder

SAINT PETERSBURG (Russia) — A Russian historian who confessed to murdering and dismembering his ex-student lover was due in court on Monday as calls grew for an investigation into his alleged abuse of women students.

The case of prominent Russian historian Alexander Sokolov, who lived in Saint Petersburg, who taught history at Saint Petersburg State University, is drawing fresh attention to violence against women in Russia, including in academic circles, which critics said authorities were not taking seriously.

Sokolov, a 63-year-old who taught history at Saint Petersburg University, confessed to murdering his 24-year-old lover and former student and dismembering her body.

He was detained after being hauled out of the icy Moika River on Saturday as he tried to dispose of the woman’s arms.

A Russian historian court was to decide Monday whether to formally arrest Sokolov, who lived with Anastasia Yeschenskaya for the past few years and allegedly killed her last week.

News of the case — and allegations that Sokolov had abused at least one other female student — prompted widespread outrage and demands for action.

“This case highlighted the impunity of abusers in society,” Alyona Sadikova, the head of the Moscow-based Kitezh women’s crisis centre, told AFP.

More than 5,000 people signed an online petition urging authorities to probe the management of Saint Petersburg State University, President Vladimir Putin’s alma mater.

The petition said Sokolov had treated students “in a monstrous way” and cited another female student who said the historian had beaten her and threatened to burn her with a hot iron and kill her in 2008. “For unknown reasons, the abuser managed to escape any punishment,” the petition said, adding that police who had ignored the woman’s complaint should also be probed.

Russia has no specific legislation on domestic violence or sexual harassment in the workplace and feminist movements like #MeToo have had little impact in the country.

Many in Russia see no problem in romantic relations between superiors and subordinates, including professors and students, if they are consensual. —AFP
Malaysian court orders ex-PM Najib’s corruption trial to proceed

KUALA LUMPUR — A Malaysian court on Monday ordered a corruption case against former Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to proceed, saying the prosecution has provided sufficient evidence so far in his first trial linked to a scandal-plagued state investment fund.

Judge Mohamad Nazlan-MohamadGhazali of the Kuala Lumpur High Court said the prosecution has successfully proven each element of abuse of power, criminal breach of trust and money laundering charges leveled against the former leader, and ordered him to enter his defense.

Najib reacted to the ruling with “shock,” his lead defense counsel Muhammad Shafee Abdullah told reporters, adding that his client had been convinced he would be acquitted of all the charges at this stage.

Monday’s ruling is a boost to Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who has vowed to bring the ex-PM to justice over his alleged role in the global financial scandal involving the state fund, 1Malaysia Development Berhad.

The trial will resume Dec. 3 and continue for 10 days, with Najib slated to take the stand first, his lawyer said.

Najib faces seven charges — three counts of money laundering, three counts of criminal breach of trust and one count of abuse of power. He has pleaded not guilty to all of them.

The charges are related to three deposits totaling 42 million ringgit (about $10 million) into his private bank accounts between December 2014 and February 2015. Each time, the money allegedly came from SRC International Sdn. Bhd., a former unit of 1MDB.

The trial concerning SRC International is the first of five trials Najib is facing involving a total of 42 charges that are linked to 1MDB, which was created after he assumed power a decade ago.

The prosecution contends that Najib abused his power for self-gratification when as prime minister he took part in government decisions between August 2011 and February 2012 to approve a government guarantee on a $4.3 billion ringgit loan to SRC International from the civil servants pension fund known as Kumpulan Wang Persaraan, and received the 42 million ringgit in return.

The 42 million ringgit was on top of $681 million, allegedly originating from 1MDB, that also found its way into his accounts in 2013, most of which was later returned.—Kyodo News

Cheering crowds greet Japan’s new emperor in rare parade

TOKYO (Japan)—Tens of thousands of flag-waving spectators cheered Japan’s new Emperor Naruhito on Sunday during a rare open-top car imperial parade that was rescheduled after a deadly typhoon.

Some in the crowd camped overnight to nab a prime stop by the palace for the 30-minute parade featuring the emperor and his wife Empress Masako.

The event was one of the final events marking Naruhito’s ascension to the throne after his father Akihito earlier this year became the first Japanese emperor in two centuries to abdicate.

The royal couple emerged from the palace moments before 3:00 pm (0600 GMT), with the Emperor wearing formal Western clothing and the Empress dressed in a long cream gown and jacket, wearing a tiara passed down by her predecessor.

Security was high for the event, with long lines forming hours ahead of the parade and thousands of police deployed to search bags and move spectators through metal detectors.

Security forces lined the entire length of the route in double rows, keeping close watch as the slow-moving parade passed, flanked by police on motorbikes.

In the minutes before the parade began, police at one checkpoint warned would-be attendees that the area was full. “We’re at Disneyland levels of crowding. The security check won’t finish in time for you to see the parade,” one policeman with a loudspeaker warned those still in line.

‘Once in a lifetime’

Yoko Mori, 64, lined up from 10:00 am to secure a spot, traveling from Saitama outside Tokyo.

“We came here because it’s a once in a lifetime opportunity and we wanted to celebrate this event,” she told AFP flanked by her friend Chiyoie Ito, 70.

“But it’s regrettable that we just had a glimpse of the car. I concentrated so much on taking a photo, I barely looked with my own eyes,” Yoko Yokota, 84, was in tears with excitement at the chance to spot the emperor up close. “I am so happy to see him,” she said. Hours before the parade, Yukari Oshita told AFP she felt a closeness to Naruhito, the first emperor born in post-war Japan.

“The Emperor is a few years younger than me but belongs to the same generation, and I feel connected with him,” she said.

“And Empress Masako is someone who can be a role model for modern women with full-time jobs.” After the national anthem was played, the royal couple boarded a specially made car featuring the chrysanthemum imperial logo on the sides and the royal flag on its bonnet.—AFP

Cambodia’s freed opposition leader Kem Sokha meets US ambassador

PHNOM PENH — Kem Sokha, who shares the party’s leadership with self-exiled politician Sam Rainsy.

“However, it’s important to see more and my advice, as a friend of the Kingdom of Cambodia, is that the authorities to find the way to restore Mr. Kem Sokha’s entire freedom, liberty and to drop all charges against him,” Murphy said, while also urging the government to release other dissidents.

“We believe this would be really helpful for Cambodia, for governance, for the economy, that all voices to be heard and participate to make a stronger democracy and to see an inclusive, complete dialogue, and broad reconciliation so that once again Cambodia can be on the path to a full multiparty democracy,” he added.

KemSokha declined to brief reporters on his talks with the US ambassador, saying, “I’m sorry that since I’m still banned from engaging in politics, I cannot say anything related to politics at this stage.”—Kyodo News

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Turkey begins deporting foreign jihadists

ISTANBUL (Turkey) — Turkey said Monday it had begun sending back foreign jihadists to their countries of origin, with an American already expelled and more than 20 Europeans including French and Germans in the process of being deported.

A “foreign terrorist fighter” from the US was deported early on Monday, with two more — from Germany and Denmark — due to be expelled later in the day, interior ministry spokesman Ismail Catakli told state news agency Anadolu.

Seven more Germans were due for deportation on Thursday, he added, while 11 French citizens, two Irish and at least two additional Germans were also being processed.

Turkey has criticised Western countries for refusing to repatriate their citizens who left to join the Islamic State group (IS) in Syria and Iraq, and stripping some of them of their citizenship.

Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said last week that Turkey had nearly 1,200 foreign members of IS in custody, and had captured 287 during its recent operation in northern Syria.

It was not clear if all those being deported this week were captured in Syria, or if some were in Turkish territory.

“There is no need to try to escape from it, we will send them back to you. Deal with them how you want,” Soylu said on Friday.

Turkey not hotel for IS

A French official told AFP that the French nationals being expelled were mostly women.

Some had been in Turkey for a long time, while others arrived recently, the official added, without giving further details.

“11 will be tried,” the official said, adding that discussions were under way to determine whether their arrival will be handled by civil or military airport authorities.

A French foreign ministry source told AFP at the weekend that a number of jihadist suspects had been quietly repatriated under a 2014 agreement with Turkey, and that the current deportations were nothing new.

“I was in and the families are regularly sent back to France and arrested as they leave the airplane. Most of the time it is done secretly. The news is not published, or released much later,” the source said.

A German foreign ministry official confirmed the legal proceedings involving the 10 German nationals, saying they included three men, five women (at least two who lived in Syria) and two children. —AFP

UN, top Iraq cleric urge ‘serious’ reforms after protests

NAJAF (Iraq) — The United Nations’ top official in Iraq and the country’s most senior cleric urged authorities on Monday to get “serious” about reforms after anti-government demonstrations that have left hundreds dead.

Mass rallies calling for an overhaul of the ruling system have rocked the capital Baghdad and the Shi’ite-majority south since 1 October — the largest and deadliest popular movement in Iraq in decades.

The bloody unrest has sparked serious concern from the UN, human rights groups and the White House, which on Sunday called on Baghdad “to halt the violence against protesters” and pass electoral reform.

After weeks of paralysis, Iraq’s top leaders seem to have agreed to keep the system intact, but the UN in Iraq (UNAMI) urged them to enact a host of changes. These include electoral reforms within two weeks, the prosecution of those responsible for the recent violence as well as of corrupt officials, and the passing of anti-graft laws.

On Monday, UNAMI chief Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert met the country’s highest Shi’ite authority, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, in the holy city of Najaf.

She said she is “faced with Shi’ite religious power in Iraq, known as the marjaiyah, who had stressed that the current deportations are not able or willing to conduct these reforms decisively.

There must be a way to think of a different approach,” she warned without elaborating.

There was no statement attributable directly to Sistani, who is 89 and never appears in public.

It was not clear if all those being deported this week were captured in Syria, or if some were in Iraqi territory.

“The marjaiyah expressed its concerns that the political forces are not serious enough to carry out such reforms,” said Hennis-Plasschaert.

“If the three authorities — executive, judiciary and legislative — are not able or willing to conduct these reforms decisively, there must be a way to think of a different approach,” she warned without elaborating.

Bolivia’s Morales resigns after losing backing of security forces

LA PAZ (Bolivia) — Bolivian President Evo Morales has resigned, caving in after three weeks of sometimes violent protests over his disputed re-election, as his allies denounce an alleged coup.

“I resign my post as president,” the leftist Morales said Sunday in a televised address, capping a day of fast-moving events in which many ministers and senior officials quit as support for Latin America’s longest-serving president crumbled and created a temporary leadership vacuum in the country.

The streets of La Paz immediately exploded in celebration, with jubilant Bolivians waving the country’s flag, but violence and vandalism later erupted overnight and in the neighboring city of El Alto. In the confusion, a group of 20 lawmakers and government officials took refuge at the Mexican ambassador’s residence, and Mexico announced it was offering asylum to Morales as well.

Morales later tweeted that there was a warrant for his arrest, but police commander Vladimir Yuri Calderon told AFP that police were not going to arrest him.

Morales, a member of the Aymara indigenous community, is a former coca farmer who became Bolivia’s first indigenous president in 2006.

He defended his legacy Sunday, which includes landmark gains against hunger and poverty and tripling the country’s economy during his nearly 14 years in office. —AFP

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Advance tickets for Myanmar, Tajikistan match on sale in Mandalay

Myanmar U-22 to test Thailand, Viet Nam teams

The Myanmar U-22 national footballers arrive in Bangkok yesterday for a friendly match against the Thailand U-22 team. PHOTO: MFF

Myanmar will seek to put their qualification ambitions back on track this month with home matches in Mandalay against Tajikistan and Mongolia.

Team Myanmar underwent training at the Mandalay Thiri Stadium yesterday ahead of the qualifier.

The pre-match press conference for the match will be held at 2 p.m. on 13 November at the Jasmine Hall of the Pullman Mandalay Mingal Hotel, and the MFF has invited journalists and media persons for the briefing.

The Myanmar vs Tajikistan match will start at 5 p.m. (Myanmar Standard Time) on 14 November.—Lynn Thit (Tgi)

Xhaka says he is ready to battle for Arsenal place

LONDON (United Kingdom)—Granit Xhaka may have been stripped of the Arsenal captaincy due to his public run-in with the club’s fans but he says he will be staying and fighting for his place in the team.

The volatile 27-year-old Swiss international midfielder has not played since he mouthed an obscenity at a section of Gunners fans jeering him when he was substituted in the Premier League match with Crystal Palace a fortnight ago.

However, despite manager Unai Emery deciding he could not carry on as skipper — a role he was given after a secret ballot of the players — he told Swiss newspaper Blick he would not be leaving. Xhaka has had a fractious relationship with Arsenal supporters since his arrival from Bundesliga outfit Borussia Moenchengladbach in 2016, costing the Premier League side a fee of £38 million ($49 million). “You can be sure that I’ll keep fighting and putting myself out there in every training session,” Xhaka said.

“I feel last week has been dealt with and I’m ready. “My time at Arsenal has been very positive for a long time. “After a difficult start, I played a lot and overall I’ve had a great time at Arsenal. “My family and I also feel very well in the city of London.”

Xhaka, who has been linked to a move to struggling Newastle United, said the boos and jeers have not altered his views of the city or the club.—AFP

Three talking points in European football this weekend

PARIS (France)—A record home crowd saw Marseille beat Lyon in a fiery encounter and Freiburg’s coach was barged over by the opposing team’s captain in a weekend of European football when passion spilled over into anger. AFP Sport looks at three of the main talking points: Record crowd and bus attack in Marseille, Freiburg’s coach sent off and Lyon was sent off in a brawl against Newcastle.

The Myanmar national team footballers undergo special training at the Mandalay Thiri Stadium in Mandalay ahead of the match against Tajikistan. PHOTO: MFF

Myanmar national team train ahead of friendly match against Thailand.

Myanmar U-22 men’s national football team will play friendly matches with U-22 teams of Thailand and Viet Nam in Bangkok, Thailand this month, according to the Myanmar Football Federation.

The Myanmar U-22 team arrived in Bangkok yesterday to play their first friendly match against the Thailand team.

Myanmar will play a friendly match against Thailand on 13 November and against Viet Nam on 17 November.

The friendly matches are aimed at preparing team Myanmar for the men’s football competition at the South East Asian Games.

Myanmar has been placed in Group A for the tournament, with host Philippines, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Timor-Leste.

Myanmar will play the opening match at SEA Games against Malaysia on 25 November and host the Philippines on 27 November at the Rizal Memorial Stadium in Manila. They will take on Cambodia on 2 December at the Bintan Football Stadium in Bintan.

In the meantime, defending champions Thailand face tough competition in Group B, where they have been placed alongside with Viet Nam, Indonesia, Laos, Singapore, and Brunei.—Lynn Thit (Tgi)

Granit Xhaka may have lost the Arsenal captaincy but he has no intention of leaving the club despite his fractious relationship with the supporters. PHOTO: AFP

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