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THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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Govt prepares for religious titles conferring, alms-giving ceremonies next month

VICE President U Myint Swe presided over a meeting yesterday for organizing ceremonies to confer religious titles and offer donation items to the Buddhist monks in March.

The preparatory meeting was attended by Union Ministers Lt-Gen Soe Htut, Thura U Aung Ko, Nay Pyi Taw Council Chairman Dr Myo Aung, Commander of Nay Pyi Taw Command Maj-Gen Myint Maw, Deputy Ministers, members of Nay Pyi Taw Council, steering committee, working committee and sub-committees, Permanent Secretaries, Directors-General, departmental heads and officials. The ceremony was opened by reciting 'Namo Tassa' three times.

The Vice President, in his capacity as the Chairman of Religious Titles Conferring and Donation Items Offering Steering Committee, made an opening remark with explanations of forming committees, working committee, and sub-committees to offer a day-meal to the monks on 6 March, and to confer religious titles and organize alms-giving ceremony on 8 March (Full Moon Day of Tabaung).

The ceremonies will be organized at the Sasana Maha Beikman in Uppatasanti Pagoda compound, Nay Pyi Taw. The Vice President also discussed preparations and coordination of committees and sub-committees for transportation of senior monks from Yangon to Nay Pyi Taw by air, accommodations, health services including medical checkups, readiness of medicines and other facilities, as well as preventive measures against the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Deputy Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture U Kyi Min, as the Vice Chairman of Committee, briefed on preparations and plans for the ceremonies, followed by explanations of the heads of relevant committees and sub-committees on their works.

Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko, Permanent Secretary U Tun Ohn and Director-General U Aung Soe Win from the Planning and Administrative Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained about the preparations made to invite senior monks who will receive the religious titles.

Vice President U Myint Swe gave comments and advice to ensure coordination based on the discussions before the meeting was concluded. The meeting came to a close by all the attendees reciting three times "Long live the Buddha Sasana".—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Vice President U Myint Swe delivers the speech at the meeting on holding the ceremony to award religious titles and alms-offering ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**

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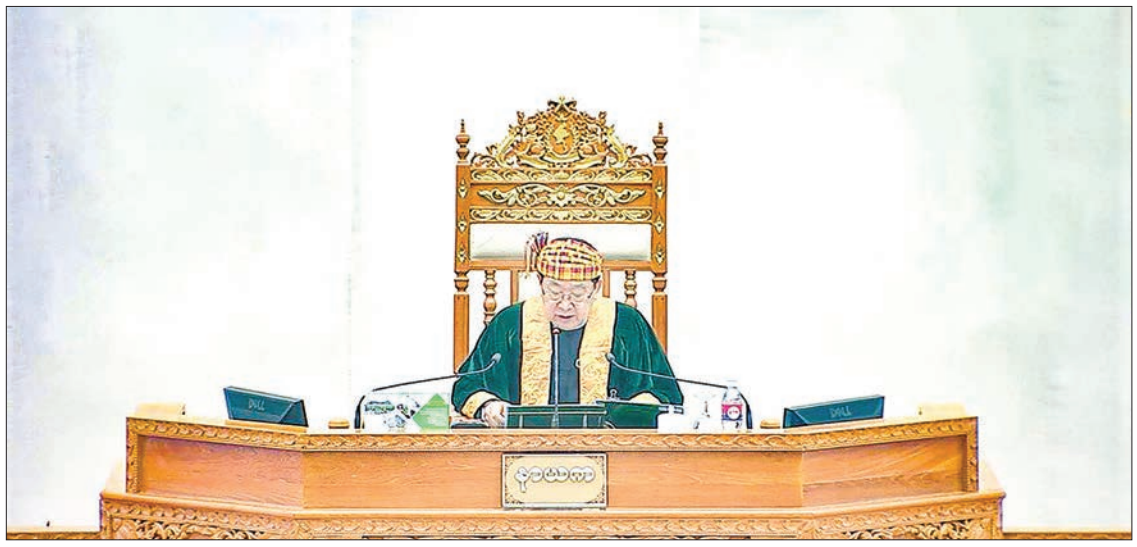
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw discusses JPAC report, EDCF loan

THE second Pyidaugsu Hluttaw held its 15th regular session of 9th day meeting yesterday, discussing the second part of report (1/2020) on findings and recommendations of Joint Public Accounts Committee and the US$ 113.036 million loans from the Economic Development Cooperation Fund of South Korea.

The JPAC's report for the six-month period from April to September 2018, sent by the Office of Auditor-General of the Union (OAG), was discussed by MP U Than Soe (a) Than Soe (Economy) from Yangon Region constituency 4. The MP discussed drawing a policy and implementing it to cut the losses in the joint-venture businesses between the government and the private sector. He also suggested the Hluttaw and relevant committees to find solutions within a time frame by forming commissions with authority for inspection, guarantee, accountability and responsibility to complete their tasks.



The 15th regular session of Second Pyidaugsu Hluttaw holds its 9th day meeting in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: SOE WIN TUN**

MP U Maung Maung Ohn. **PHOTO: MNA**

MP U Than Soe (a) Than Soe (Economy). **PHOTO: MNA**

MP U Tun Tun. **PHOTO: MNA**

MP Dr Daw Pyone. **PHOTO: MNA**

MP U Khin Cho. **PHOTO: MNA**

MP U Tun Tun from Pwintbyu constituency said that the OAG has found deceptive accounting in its inspections to prevent misuse of public revenue, however, legal actions were hardly found at the relevant departments. He also called for lawsuits against misappropriations for such cases, in addition to disciplinary proceedings of the department.

MP Dr Daw Pyone from Indaw constituency suggested that the government should review the reasons of farmers' bad debts mentioned in the paragraph 15 of JPAC's second session of report. And she advised to adjust loan policy for effective poverty alleviation of the country and preventing loss of state revenue.

The JPAC's report was also discussed by the other 7 Hluttaw representatives.

Economic Development Cooperation Fund of South Korea

Regarding the $ 113.036 million loans from the Economic Development Cooperation Fund of South Korea for upgrading natural gas pipeline of the Ministry of Electricity and Energy, MP U Khin Cho from Hlaingbwe constituency suggested to implement the original work plan in receiving foreign loans as pointed out in the annual reports of OAG, to follow policy of financing organization, to effectively use the loans and to avoid wastes by taking lessons from the loan schemes.

MP U Maung Maung Ohn from Ayeyawady Region constituency 5 advised to make well preparations for spending the loan, with using local budgets in removing old pipelines and foreign loan in purchasing new pipes and relevant equipment while adopting the 50-year plans as the pipeline will pass through forests, mountains, creeks, agricultural lands and residential areas.

The loan plan, proposed by the President, was also discussed by the other six Hluttaw representatives.

The 10th-day meeting of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw will convene on 19 February.— Aung Ye Thwin and Aye Aye Thant

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Certificate course in Enhanced Diplomatic Skills (EDS – 6/2020) inaugurates

THE Inauguration Ceremony of the Certificate Course in Enhanced Diplomatic Skills (6/2020) conducted by the Strategic Studies and Training Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was held at Wunzinminyarzar Hall of the Ministry (Yangon) at 10:00 am yesterday with an opening address delivered by U Kyaw Tin, Union Minister for International Cooperation.

Union Minister U Kyaw Tin and attendees pose for a group photo at the certificate awarding ceremony for Enhanced Diplomatic Skills training course (6/2020). **PHOTO: MNA**

Present on the occasion were retired Myanmar Ambassadors, Directors-General and responsible officials of the departments under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of International Cooperation, senior diplomats, instructors as well as trainees.

For human resource development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is conducting courses in diplomatic skills and sharing knowledge to the public and private sectors, throughout the several courses of diplomatic skills trainings. The Certificate Course in Enhanced Diplomatic Skills is conducted and targeted for those who completed the Basic Diplomatic Skills (BDS) Trainings and who wish to study further in diplomacy and international affairs.

50 participants will join the eight-week long course which covers the subjects relating to diplomacy, international relations, international law, contemporary international affairs, domestic affairs and general knowledge.—MNA

Govt, NCA-S EAOs hold coordination meeting to further peace process

Government officials and representatives of EAOs meet in Yangon yesterday for implementing decisions of 8th JICM. **PHOTO: PHOE HTAUNG**

THE working groups of the government and Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement-Signatories, ethnic armed organizations (NCA-S EAO) held a coordination meeting on implementing the decisions made at the 8th Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting (JICM) yesterday.

The meeting was held at the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) on Shwe Li Road, in Yangon.

NRPC Vice Chairman, Union Attorney-General U Tun Tun Oo first gave a speech. He said negotiators from both sides have met at the NRPC on 2 and 3 February to continue implementation of the decisions made at the 8th JICM.

He added that the current meeting aims to review the agreements made in implementing the NCA, proceeding levels of processes and implementation post-2020, and proposals to establish a republic based on democracy and a federal system.

U Tun Tun Oo said he hoped attendees would reassess the proposals made by both sides and make any necessary improvements. He said the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong sessions were being held to establish a democratic federal republic in line with results of political discourse.

In addition, discussions must decide on what kinds of agreements should be designated in implementation processes and NCA pledges, said U Tun Tun Oo. He said they must debate fundamental political values, strengthening ceasefire, security, reconciliation, and create trust and stability.

He said the topics for discussing chapters 3, 4 and 6 of the NCA were proposed by the government's side in the coordination meeting with NCA-S EAOs in addition to the nature of the group for discussion. He said it is important that Part III of the Union Accord is signed at the UPC - 21st Century Panglong. He said this is why it is important for everyone to work together to produce satisfactory results at the peace conference.

U Tun Tun Oo said the peace conference processes must be initiated as soon as possible for it to be held within the first four months of 2020, as agreed at the 8th JICM. He said both sides need to agree on the timeline for the coordination meetings leading up to the peace conference. He said JICM has agreed to hold the UPDJC and JMC meetings within 2 months after the JICM meeting.

U Tun Tun Oo said the meeting the other day proposed on the date for the JMC meeting and may possibly be verified. He said the UPDJC meetings will likely revise and approve the framework for political dialogue. He said this is why this meeting must discuss the timeline for the UPDJC meetings and other meetings ahead of the peace conference.

During the 8th JICM on 8 January 2020, a decision was reached to resume the UPDJC and JMC meetings within two months and the government's side proposed to resume the JMC meetings on 10, 11 and 12 March during the coordination meeting with NCA-S EAOs on 16 February.

Next, NCA Implementation Framework Coordination Group leader Sao Sai Ngern said in his opening speech that he heard there were good results produced at the coordination meeting between the negotiating teams of both sides on strengthening bilateral ceasefire the other day. He said these good results were the result of the efforts of the teams from both sides and the seriousness attributed to the peace process.

Sao Sai Ngern said this meeting needs to focus on the proposals brought back by the negotiating teams of both sides regarding the submissions and proposals made by both sides during the first official meeting with the government negotiating group.

He said that, just as the decisions made at the previous JICM meeting, both sides will discuss the timeline and meeting organization. He said since the UPDJC meeting, UPDJC secretariat meeting, working committee meeting, national-level political discussions and JICM meetings need to be held successively at various levels, they need to be properly prepared.

> ... the peace conference processes must be initiated as soon as possible for it to be held within the first four months of 2020, as agreed in the 8th JICM.

Sao Sai Ngern said when the meeting to prepare the political dialogue framework is held, they will discuss the inclusion of EAOs who have not signed the NCA yet in the 2-day meeting. He said this meeting will discuss any preparations necessary for organizing public consultations during the national-level political dialogues.

He added that this meeting is the second coordination meeting and aims to strengthen trust-building between both sides, and as such, it would be better to temporarily hold off on discussing topics both sides were not ready to discuss. He said none of them were working for the benefit of an individual or one organization and should remember they share the same goal of bringing inclusive benefit to the Union.

Sao Sai Ngern said that in the President's message on 73rd Union Day, he mentioned that the government has marked the peace process as their top priority and was working to make it a reality regardless of any obstacle. He said the State Counsellor's speech on Union Day also said collective strength is necessary to implement sustainable peace that is as important as life for the nation.

He also mentioned Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's message on 73rd Shan National Day where he said the doors to peace are open to ethnic nationals for finding the solution for them to openly express their voices at the political diaolgue.

He added if everyone participated with honesty, earnestness and desire to bring benefits to the entire nation, then it won't be long for sustainable peace and a federal republic to be realized.

Present on the government's side in yesterday's meeting were Lt-Gen Yar Pyae, Lt-Gen Min Naung and Lt-Gen Tin Maung Win from the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Army), Peace Commission Secretary Lt-Gen Khin Zaw Oo (Retired), Pyithu Hluttaw representative U Pyone Cho (a) U Htay Win Aung, Peace Commission advisory board members U Hla Maung Shwe, U Moe Zaw Oo and Director-General U Zaw Htay of the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor.

The NCA-S EAO representatives include NCA Implementation Framework Coordination Group leader Sao Sai Ngern, NAC Implementation Coordinator U Myo Win, members U Hla Htay, Saw Mra Yazar Lin, Dr Lian Hmone Sar Khaung, Salai Htalaw Hei, Saw Sein Win, Pado Saw Tardo Moo, Pado Saw L Kalusay, Saw Kyaw Nyunt, Nai Aung Ma Ngay, Khun Myint Tun, and Dr Sai Oo. —MNA

(Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

Women protection draft law introduced to Hluttaw representatives

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Tun Tun Hein, Union Minister Dr Win Myat Aye and Hluttaw representatives pose for a photograph at the ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

THE Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement introduced its draft law for Protection and Prevention of Violence Against Women to the Hluttaw representatives at Horizon Lake View Hotel in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday afternoon.

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Tun Tun Hein made an opening remark at the ceremony, saying that Myanmar, as a member of UN human rights committee, signed the Convention on the Elimination of the All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); although Myanmar has cultural, religious and social practices to protect gender discrimination, the domestic violence is scarcely seen as human right abuses. Due to the absence of relevant law , most of the Myanmar women are not under the legal protection from violence.

The CEDAW committee sent back 56 recommendations on the reports of Myanmar, with remarks to enact a law for protection and prevention of violence against women and to review laws and regulations that can cause gender discrimination.

Union Minister Dr Win Myat Aye explained that his ministry is taking the major role to draft the law in coordination with the national women committee, and the draft law was designed to align with the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW).

The Union Minister added that as member of UN member country, a joint communique was signed between the United Nations and Myanmar to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence.

He also asked for advises of Hluttaw representatives on the draft law which includes offences and penalties to protect the women as it is aimed for the whole women community.

After the presentation of Director-General of the Department of Social Welfare, the Hluttaw representatives made discussions on the draft law. — MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

1st Myanmar-Poland Foreign Office Consultations held

Union Minister U Kyaw Tin attends the 1st Myanmar-Poland Foreign Office Consultations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw on 17 February 2020. **PHOTO: MNA**

THE 1st Myanmar-Poland Foreign Office Consultations was held on 17 February 2020, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw. The meeting was co-chaired by U Soe Han, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mr Marcin Przydacz, Vice Minister (Undersecretary of State) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland.

During the meeting, the two sides cordially exchanged views on promotion of bilateral relations and to expand cooperation in various sectors including health, culture, tourism, trade and investment. The two sides also discussed on the possibility of the visa exemption for the holders of diplomatic and official passports between the two countries. The Permanent Secretary also appraised on the Myanmar Government's priorities and ongoing efforts for economic reforms, peace and national reconciliation and recent developments of Rakhine State. They also exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry, Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations and Ministry of Health and Sports.

Following the meeting, the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland was signed by U Soe Han, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mr Marcin Przydacz, Vice Minister (Undersecretary of State) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland.

According to the MoU, the consultations between the two foreign ministries will be held for the further advancement of bilateral relations and collaboration in the multilateral fora as well as for the enhancement of mutually beneficial cooperation in the areas of trade and investment, science and technology, culture, sports, education and tourism.

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a working lunch in honour of the visiting Polish delegation at the Thingaha Hotel, Nay Pyi Taw.—MNA

National Health Laboratory set to test for COVID-19 in Myanmar

SINCE 26 February 2008, the National Health Laboratory (NHL) has been recognized by the World Health Organization as a national flu center and conducts tests on flu and respiratory viruses and assist in surveillance and treatment of communicable respiratory viruses.

The NHL has been working hard to analyze the COVID-19 acute respiratory disease in Myanmar since it began spreading in China. While the NHL had the experts and machinery it needed, it continued to acquire other necessary lab equipment. NHL received the lab equipment from Thailand's Armed Forces Research Institute of Medical Science (AFRIMS) through WHO and from Japan's National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID), National Center for Global Health and Medicine (NCGM) and Juntendo University through the Japanese Embassy and JICA.

Currently, NHL runs lab tests on samples from patients for signs of COVID-19 together with WHO's designated laboratory and they both have produced consistent results. Thus, NHL will begin running independent lab tests on 20 February. —MNA

(Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

Agro exports cross $1.3 bln in current FY

MYANMAR'S exports of agricultural products between 1 October and 7 February in the 2019-2020 financial year rose to US$1.3 billion from $1.13 billion in the corresponding period of the 2018-2019FY, which reflects an increase of $179.57 million, according to trade figures released by the Ministry of Commerce.

In the export sector, the agriculture industry performed the best, along with the natural gas sector. The chief items of export by Myanmar in the agricultural sector are rice and broken rice, pulses, corn, and rubber. Myanmar also sends Fruits and vegetables, sesame, dried tea leaves, sugar, and other agro products to other countries. Myanmar agro products are primarily exported to China, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka.

However, the export market remains uncertain due to unstable global demand.

A corn plantation in a village near border with China. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

According to an official from the Agriculture Department, the country requires specific export plans for each agro product as they are currently being exported to external markets based upon supply and demand. Contract farming systems, involvement of regional and state agriculture departments, exporters, traders, and some grower groups are required to meet production targets, the official said.

The Commerce Ministry is working to help farmers deal with challenges, such as high input costs, procurement of pedigree seeds, high cultivation costs, and erratic weather conditions. —Ko Htet

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Indian demand drives mung bean price up K50,000 in one week

THE price of Myanmar mung beans has climbed up by K50,000 per ton within a week due to a spike in demand from India. Mung beans were priced around K950,000 per ton on 11 February, and are currently fetching more than K1 million.

The price of pigeon peas also rose from K670,000 to K710,000 per ton this week.

The Myanmar Pulses, Beans, and Sesame Seeds Merchants Association has sought an extension of the March-end deadline for exporting 250,000 tons of mung beans to India as it estimates it will need more time to ship the entire quota, said U Min Ko Oo, secretary of the association.

The association has also made a request to India through Myanmar's Ministry of Commerce to declare the quota limit for the 2020-2021 financial year.

India had earlier set the mung beans quota at 150,000 tons and increased the quota limit by a further 250,000 tons last year, according to a trade notice issued by India's Directorate General of Foreign Trade.

The increased quota of 250,000 tons will have to reach India by 31 March, 2020. India recorded low mung beans yield due to erratic weather last year. Under the provincial government's approval, more mung beans are being purchased beyond the previous quota limit, which has driven up mung beans prices to above K1.3 million per ton. In Myanmar, mung beans are mainly produced in Sagaing, Bago, Ayeyawady, Yangon, and Mandalay. The association estimates mung bean production will reach 400,000-500,000 this year.

Myanmar's mung beans, pigeon peas, and green grams are primarily exported to India. Although Myanmar pulses and beans have penetrated markets in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Malaysia, and Indonesia, the volume of exports to those countries is extremely low.

Myanmar shipped over 1.6 million tons of different varieties of pulses, worth an estimated US$1 billion, to other countries in the 2018-2019 financial year. —Mon Mon

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Plans under way to institute national policy for developing garment, textile sector

A national textile policy is being formulated for the development of the Myanmar textile and garment industry, with technical assistance from the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) and advice from concerned associations, according to the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry.

The policy will focus on the entire supply chain in the industry and help attract more foreign investments.

In the first four months of the current financial year, exports of clothes produced on a cut-make-pack (CMP) basis topped $1.6 billion, an increase of $170 million from the corresponding period in the 2018-2019FY, according to data from the Ministry of Commerce.

Exports of garments produced under the CMP system fetched over $1.4 billion in the year-ago period.

Myanmar's manufacturing sector is largely concentrated in CMP garments and textiles, which contribute to the country's GDP to some extent.

The garment sector is among the prioritized sectors driving up exports in the country. The CMP garment industry has emerged as a promising one, and enjoys preferential trade with Western nations.

The majority of Myanmar's garment factories operate under the CMP system, and those engaged in the industry are striving to transform CMP into a free-on-board (FOB) system, according to the Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association.

Myanmar expects income from CMP garment exports to cross $5 billion in the current fiscal and intends to reach the export target of $10 billion set for the garment industry, according to the Commerce Ministry.

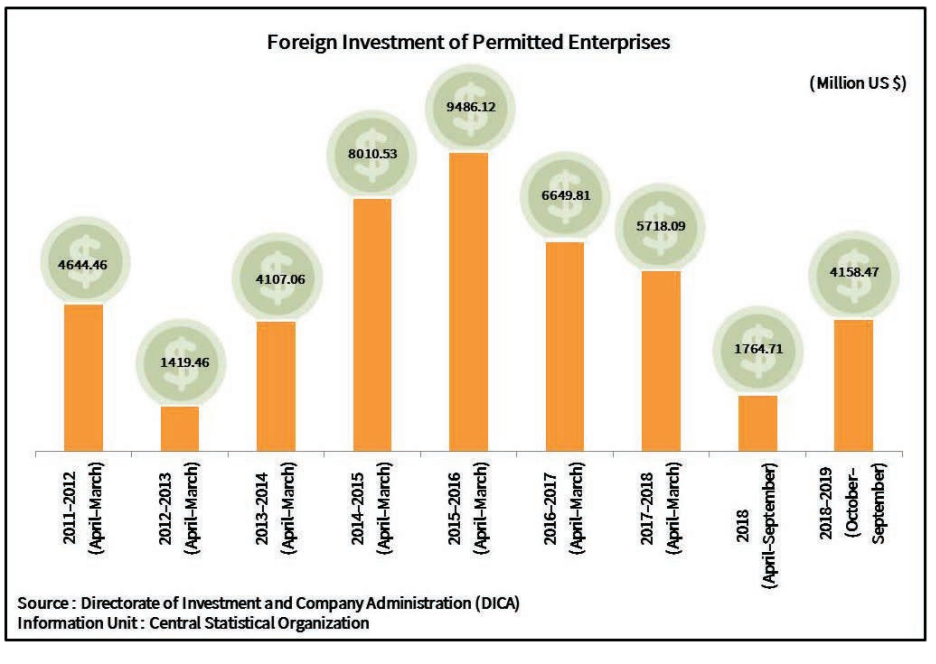
The value of CMP garment exports was just $850 million in the 2015-2016 FY, but tripled over the next two FYs. In the 2016-2017FY, exports of CMP garments were pegged at about $2 billion. The figure increased to an estimated $2.5 billion in the 2017-2018FY, and stood at $2.2 billion in the 2018 mini-budget period (from April to September), according to the ministry.

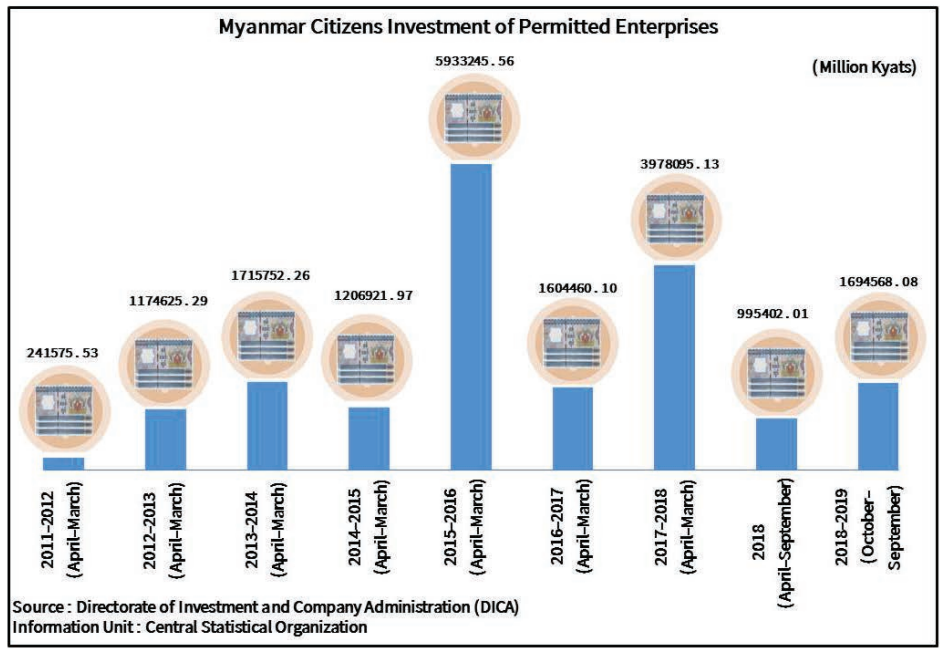
Myanmar mainly exports CMP garments to markets in Japan and Europe, along with the Republic of Korea, China, and the US. With demand from foreign trade partners growing, imports of CMP raw materials are rising year by year.

The Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association has more than 500 members.

Garment factories in Myanmar employ more than 500,000 workers. Investors prefer to invest in cheap-labor countries like Myanmar. — Ko Htet

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)





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Gas production and distribution inspected in Rakhine State

Union Minister U Win Khaing inspects the test drill Mahar (1) at the Block A-3 of Myanmar west offshore in Rakhine State. **PHOTO: MNA**

UNION Minister U Win Khaing of the Ministry of Electricity and Energy, together with Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu and state government's Electricity, Industries and Transportation Minister U Aung Kyaw Zan, inspected the test drill Mahar (1) that is located at the Block A-3 of Myanmar west offshore.

The Union Minister, the Rakhine State Chief Minister and party were briefed by the project officials on board the drill ship Maersk Viking on the production progress of test drill Mahar (1) and the Shwe Project's natural gas export and distribution within and without the country. Managing Director U Myo Myint Oo of Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise gave additional explanation. The Union Minister asked some questions and observed the test drilling and production of natural gas at Mahar (1).

Three test drills – Kisapanadi (1), Mahar (1), and Yanaungmyin (1) – of the Block A3 are under the production sharing contract (PSC) between the Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise (15 per cent) and a consortium of the POSCO Daewoo International (51 per cent), the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation ONGC (17 per cent), the Gas Authority of India GAIL (8.5 per cent) and the Korean Gas Corporation KOGAS (8.5 per cent). The Mahar (1) began top hole work on 29 November 2019 and has test drilled down to a depth of 2,598 meters (8,524 feet). It can test produce over 38 million cubic feet of natural gas daily. The drill ship Maersk Viking will continue its drilling work at Yanaungmyin (1) in Block 3.

The POSCO International started its work at Mya (1) test drill in Block A-3 in 2005. A combined daily production and distribution of natural gas from the Shwe Natural Gas Project in Block A-1 and the Mya (1) in Block A-3 now reaches about 500 million cubic feet.

Then, the Union Minister talked, with friendly encouragement, to the staff performing their duties on board the drill ship Maersk Viking and gave a fruits basket in honour of the staff, foreign technicians and responsible officials of the POSCO International. — MNA

(Translated by Aungthu Ya)

Third Story Project organizes storytelling workshop in YGN

Storytelling workshop organized by Third Story Project held in downtown Yangon, yesterday.
PHOTO: OMMAR THANT

THIRD STORY Project, in collaboration with the Asia Foundation, organized a storytelling workshop called 'Let's Read' at the News and Periodicals Enterprise building on Theinbyu Road, downtown Yangon, yesterday morning.

The workshop will continue till 19 February, 9 am to 5 pm, and aims to teach the art of storytelling, reading stories and creating some of your own.

Ma Chan Nyein Phyu, the workshop's organizer, said Myanmar Storytellers and Youth Volunteers (Yangon), both philanthropic organizations, have been collaborating for children's education since 2012.

She said Third Story Project was established in 2014 after some time in volunteering where it became apparent that Myanmar children's storybooks were becoming rarer. She said the project creates these storybooks and distribute them to impoverished areas.

Third Story Project not only helps children receive storybooks, they also aim to instill good manners in young minds.

The workshop was mainly attended by teachers from civil society organizations, philanthropic schools, and private and public schools, in addition to people from other vocations.

People interested in participating in 'Let's Read' storytelling workshop can inquire for more information at No.86, 52nd Street (middle block), Pazundaung Township. —Ommar Thant

(Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

Coronavirus could damage global growth in 2020: IMF

DUBAI (United Arab Emirates) — The coronavirus epidemic could damage global economic growth this year, the IMF head said Sunday, but a sharp and rapid economic rebound could follow.

"There may be a cut that we are still hoping would be in the 0.1-0.2 percentage space," the managing director of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva, told the Global Women's Forum in Dubai.

She said the full impact of the spreading disease that has already killed more than 1,600 people would depend on how quickly it was contained.

"I advise everybody not to jump to premature conclusions. There is still a great deal of uncertainty. We operate with scenarios, not yet with projections, ask me in 10 days," Georgieva said.

In its January update to the World Economic Outlook, the IMF lowered global economic growth forecast in 2020 by a 0.1 per centage point to 3.3 per cent, following a 2.9 perc ent growth the previous year, the lowest in a decade. Georgieva said it was "too early" to assess the full impact of the epidemic but acknowledged that it had already affected sectors such as tourism and transportation.

"It is too early to say because we don't yet quite know what is the nature of this virus. We don't know how quickly China will be able to contain it. We don't know whether it will spread to the rest of the world," she said.

International Monetary Fund managing director Kristalina Georgieva at the Global Women's Forum in Dubai. **PHOTO: AFP**

If the disease is "contained rapidly, there can be a sharp drop and a very rapid rebound", in what is known as the V-shaped impact, she said.

Compared to the impact of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002, she said China's economy then made up just 8.0 percent of global economy. Now, that figure is 19 percent. She welcomed the trade agreement signed last month by the United States and China, the world's first and second largest economies. "About China, it has been slowing down naturally, transiting from what we can call high speed to high quality growth," she said.

"And as a result of the reduction of trade tensions (after the agreement)... we actually have been predicting some improvement for 2020 in the projections for China." On the coronavirus, "they're working very hard to contain the epidemic, they have brought 115 billion dollars equivalent liquidity so they can perk up the economy." But the world should be concerned "about sluggish growth" impacted by uncertainty, said the IMF chief. — AFP ■

French MPs launch debate of controversial pensions overhaul

PARIS (France) — The battle over the French government's pension reform moved Monday from the streets to parliament, where opposition lawmakers have vowed to torpedo a plan that sparked weeks of strikes and protests.

Unions are up in arms over President Emmanuel Macron's bid to fuse France's 42 retirement schemes into a single system, which they say will force millions to work longer.

Public transport workers walked off the job for a month and a half in December and January in one of their biggest shows of strength in decades, causing travel misery for millions, particularly in the Paris area.

But a fresh strike and protests Monday caused only minor disruptions on the Paris metro, while regional trains ran as normal. Opposition lawmakers are taking up the fight with a legislative guerrilla campaign, introducing 41,000 amendments in a bid to keep the government from passing the reform in two to three weeks as planned.

"We're going to make life hard for them, that's for sure," Jean-Luc Melenchon of the hard left France Unbowed party told BFM television.

"Macron will never recover from this attempt to destroy pensions," he said.

The government argues that the changes are necessary to make the system fairer for all, while also ending the deep deficits that have accumulated in recent years as more people live longer.

On Tuesday, it will open talks with unions on how to finance the system, but officials have warned that if no deal is reached, the retirement age will effectively be pushed pack by a few years from 62 currently.

'Fix the problems'

The start of the debate comes as Macron's centrist party reels from a sex scandal that toppled its candidate for mayor of Paris in next month's municipal elections, Benjamin Griveaux.

Griveaux, a close Macron ally and former government spokesman, pulled out of the running over a leaked video showing a man presented as the 42-year-old politician masturbating.

To replace him, the government chose Health Minister Agnes Buzyn, one of the most prominent defenders of the pension reform, which will now be steered through parliament by her successor Olivier Veran.—AFP

Japan issues coronavirus medical guidance as infections rise

TOKYO — Japan's health ministry issued guidance Monday for when people with symptoms consistent with the new coronavirus should consult medical institutions, as the country steps up efforts to contain its spread with more cases, even among medical staff, confirmed.

The ministry is now encouraging people who have had a temperature of 37.5 C or higher for four days, are feeling lethargic or are experiencing shortness of breath to contact by phone nationwide health-care centers in charge of responding to the outbreak.

The centers will then recommend medical institutions they should visit. The period is shorter at two days for the elderly and those with underlying conditions such as diabetes, as they are viewed as more vulnerable to the pneumonia-causing virus, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare said.

The guidance is intended to give those worried about contracting the virus an idea of when and where to go to a doctor while a government panel of experts has said the country is at an early stage of infection.

The virus has spread from Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak in central China, to more than 20 countries. As of Monday night, Japan has confirmed 520 cases with most found on a quarantined cruise ship, the Diamond Princess, at Yokohama.

People who evacuated from the coronavirus-hit Diamond Princess cruise ship docked in Yokohama board a US government-chartered plane at Tokyo's Haneda Aiport. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

The number of cases continued to rise on the vessel as another 99, including 43 Japanese, were reported, bringing the total to 454 with a few days to go until the end of a two-week quarantine period on Wednesday.

The health ministry said its official in his 50s who worked as a liaison on the vessel has been hospitalized after testing positive for the virus, in the latest case of infection among medical and other staffers.

In a separate case in Sagamihara near Tokyo, a nurse was also found to have been diagnosed with the respiratory disease, now officially named COVID-19. She had taken care of a woman in her 80s who last week became the country's first confirmed fatality from the infection. —Kyodo News ■

Enforcing safety rules can help prevent accidents in heavy fog season

FOG IS a major travel hazard in the winter season in Myanmar on account of the resulting poor visibility.

Dense fog these days can cause traffic accidents on roads, especially on expressways and waterways. Hence, the authorities must enforce safety rules for ferries in this heavy-fog season.

Drivers must use headlights while traveling on highways when visibility is below 100 metres. Before setting off on a foggy journey, drivers must make sure their lights - especially the fog lights - are working properly.

> Overloading and overcrowding have been highlighted as common and potentially deadly problems for passenger ferries plying in the rivers, especially in bad weather, in Myanmar.

In extremely dense fog, when visibility is near zero, the best course of action is to first turn on hazard lights and then pull into a safe location, such as a parking lot of a local business, and stop. If there is no parking lot or driveway to pull into, vehicles can be parked off the side of the road.

For ferries plying on the rivers, especially the Yangon River, during rush hour, drivers must follow the safety rules and refrain from operating services in early mornings and evenings when visibility is limited due to fog.

The lives of passengers are in the hands of ferry drivers, and those who violate the safety rules deserve to be fined or suspended for the sake of passengers.

Overloading and overcrowding have been highlighted as common and potentially deadly problems for passenger ferries plying in the rivers, especially in bad weather, in Myanmar.

Passengers are advised to observe safety measures by wearing lifejackets. They can also report drunk drivers and instances of overloading to the authorities.

Domestic ferry operations play a crucial role in the movement of people and goods in the region, and sometimes, they serve as the only possible or reasonably affordable means of transport.

Across the Yangon River, more than 500 motorized boats ferry passengers to their offices, factories, and companies in the city. Most passengers are workers residing in townships around Yangon.

Currently, two ships are plying across the river between the Pansodan jetty and Dalla town.

To enforce safety rules, the authorities can fine owners and suspend crew licenses.

To prevent unnecessary accidents in the river, both local authorities and ferry operators should respect the legal machinery in dealing with violations of safety rules.

■■■

Yangon air quality within safe limit: Meteorology and Hydrology Department

Interviewer: Shin Min

Yangonites were worried about the air quality of the city they are living in. In this regard, Yangon (Kaba Aye) Station of Meteorology and Hydrology Department has been issuing the daily air quality of Yangon (PM2.5) it had measured since 6 this February on its Facebook pages. So, a media team of the News and Periodicals Enterprise interviewed Dr. Kyaw Moe Oo, Directior General of Meteorology and Hydrology Department as follows:

Q: Residents of Yangon are worried about the air quality of the city. Your answer please!

A: Our department is recording and releasing the air quality index of Yangon. Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) and some NGOs are also doing the same job. NGOs mostly measure the air quality at the most crowded times, and release the index. In early this month, an NGO measured the air quality of a place during a crowded period, and released a news report, saying that the air quality of Yangon reached the danger level. The public had noticed the announcement. The organization concerned even said as if the air quality was worse than that of Bangkok or Beijing. In reality the air quality of the said two mega cities is much worse than Yangon. So experts had already responded to the NGO's announcement.

In the past we sent the air quality report to East Asia Network Center of Acid Deposition (EANED) biannually and annually. The World Meteorological Organization compiled reports from different countries to create a country-wise air quality index. Myanmar was not included in the list of nations with a high degree of air pollution. We were only at the middle stage. We were also recording the air quality of the city in the past, but we never released the results. Now, we have been issuing the authentic index since 6 this month to alleviate public worries.

Mainly there are two air quality recording methods. The first one is the method of measuring in a specific period. But this method can only state the result of an air quality measurement done during a particular crowded period in the index. We will have to measure the air quality the whole 24 hours. The process goes on the whole day, the whole month and the whole year. As the people were worried about the air pollution, we have been issuing the index since 6 this month. The index proves that air pollution is not at the red level as it is between 50 and 100. If it exceeds 100, it may be hazardous to senior people, children and people with respiratory problems.

Q: Please elaborate on your department's air quality monitoring process in Yangon.

A: We haven't had the township-wise measuring process. The equipment at Kaba Aye Station is recording the air quality. We understand that we may have better result if we can install such equipment in every township. We are now recording the air quality of the area within the 50 kilometre radius.

Dr. Kyaw Moe Oo, Directior General of Hydrology and Meteorology Department. **PHOTO: HEIN MIN SOE**

We have programs to development our air quality detection system. The programs include the detection of air pollution with advanced mobile machines next year. In Mandalay, the Environmental Conservation Department (ECD) is recording the air quality with the Japanese-aided machine. First, it was donated for our department. But as the work concerns more with the ECD we transferred the machine to it. But they are sending the results to us. Next year, we will install a similar machine in Nay Pyi Taw. We will extend our work every financial year.

Q: Some are questioning whether the monitoring process should be done in every township, as the results vary according to the place where the monitoring takes place. Can you please explain this?

A: We have already advised our staff to inform the public about the air quality. We are issuing the results on our website and Facebook pages. We understand that monitoring should be conducted in every township. In the past a weather station in each 50-kilometre perimeter was enough, but climate change has made the matter more confusing. Developed countries are erecting a weather station in every three or five kilometer perimeter. The results can be varied from time to time as air quality normally drops during the rush hours.

A township where more of cars roll and more air-conditioners are switched on will have more carbon emissions in the air. As there is difference between towns in the volume of carbon footprint, township-wise recording is required.

But we cannot draw a conclusion from a result of a specific period. Excessive emission of carbon may cause climate change. So, we are trying to reduce the carbon footprint. Road Transport Administration Department is now even checking the carbon footprint of a car. The government has been prioritizing the issue of air quality. Myanmar is a signatory to the Paris Climate Agreement. So people should use public transport rather than private cars. Both the Individual participation and the use of renewable energy are important in alleviating the carbon footprint.

Q: Some of the border areas are facing air pollution. Are there any plans to address the problem?

A: We haven't had such plans yet.

> The World Meteorological Organization compiled reports from different countries to create a country-wise air quality index. Myanmar was not included in the list of nations with a high degree of air pollution.

But we are monitoring the acid rain fall in those areas. The ASEAN is implementing a program to look into the matter. During the previous year, Myanmar and Thailand exchanged information about the haze in the border area. In Tachilek, people had to pour water to halt the haze.

Q: Your department has any plans to announce the impacts of the climate change in time?

A: We now have an ongoing JICA-aided program. JICA or the Japan International Cooperation Agency has provided automatic weather forecasting equipment, radars and satellite-aided cloud detectors. Korean Meteorological Agency also presented automatic weather forecasting equipment for us. The government is also installing more automatic weather forecasting equipment under the Immediate Response Fund, and distributing weather information in real time.

In the past, we could issue the weather report only once a day. But now, we are releasing weather report five times –at 7 am, noon, 2 pm, 4 pm and 7pm -- a day, and issuing special weather reports as and when necessary.

As we are receiving public response for our weather reports, we are happy to know that public interest in weather is rising. Public interest in weather was low till before the occurrence of Nargis storm in 2008. When weather report program appeared on TV, most of the viewers switched to other channel. But now, more and more people are interested in it. In the developed countries, people usually watch the TV weather news as soon as they rise from the bed, and they dress in accord with the weather condition.

But, concerning the matter, we are still behind some neighbours which also had low public interest in the weather in the past. But public awareness of the weather has gradually risen since 2008 thanks to the government efforts and international aids.

Q: Any more information for the public?

A: Climate change is affecting the whole world. So, it's important to adapt to the changing weather conditions. We should slow down or even halt the climate change through conservation and alternation undertakings. For example, we should introduce crops strains that can withstand the severe weather conditions, and conduct broader awareness programs. We need broader knowledge of the natural disasters triggered by the climate change. But the most important thing is to adapt ourselves to the changes.

■■■

People doing physical exercise in early morning in Maha Bandoola Park in downtown Yangon. **PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR**

Republic of the Union of Myanmar Office of the President Order 7/2020

9th Waning of Tabodwe, 1381 ME
17th February, 2020

Kayah State Minister concurrently appointed

In accordance with the provisions stated in article 262 (f) of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and section 19 (c) of Union Government Law and Section 8 Sub-section (g) of Region or State Government Law, U Khin Maung Phyu, Kayah State Minister for Roads, Transport and Electricity, Kayah State Government, has been concurrently appointed as Kayah State Minister for Immigration and Human Resources.

Sd/ Win Myint
President
Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Union Supreme Court sits to pass judgment on, hear special civil appeal cases

The Union Supreme Court convened at Union Supreme Court room number 1 at 9:30 am yesterday with Chief Justice of the Union Supreme Court U Htun Htun Oo and Union Supreme Court judges passing judgments on four special civil appeal cases, along with hearing six special civil appeal cases. — MNA

President's Office continues announcement of illegal drug arrests, seizures acting on tip-offs

THE Office of the President issued Press Release No. 7/2020 yesterday, publicly announcing the Ministry of Home Affairs' arrests and seizures in the fight against illicit drug trafficking up till 15 February.

The ministry made the arrests, acting on information, sent to the Drug Activity Special Complaint Department of the Office of the President as of 15 February.

The full text of the press release will be reported in the 19 February issue of *The Global New Light of Myanmar*. — GNLM

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Ex-S African president retracts apartheid remarks after backlash

President Cyril Ramaphosa was forced to delay his annual State of the Union address after MPs of the far-left Economic Freedom Fighters staged a rowdy protest, demanding De Klerk be ejected from parliament. **PHOTO: AFP**

JOHANNESBURG (South Africa) — South Africa's last apartheid-era president, F.W. De Klerk, on Monday apologised and withdrew a controversial statement that apartheid was not a crime against humanity, following an outcry.

De Klerk, 83, shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Nelson Mandela in 1993 for dismantling white-minority rule and ushering in democracy.

But he sparked fury among many South Africans when he publicly denied that apartheid was a crime against humanity, despite the UN declaring it such.

"The idea that apartheid was a crime against humanity was and remains an agitprop project initiated by the Soviets and their ANC/SACP allies to stigmatise white South Africans by associating them with genuine crimes against humanity," he said.

The ANC is the African National Congress, which under Mandela fought an underground battle against apartheid before coming to power in South Africa's first democratic elections, in 1994.

The SACP is its erstwhile ally, the South African Communist Party. The remarks were made on February 2 in an interview with the national broadcaster SABC, and reiterated in a statement by De Klerk's foundation.

Anger reached a crescendo on Thursday when President Cyril Ramaphosa was forced to delay his annual State of the Union address after lawmakers from the far-left Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) staged a rowdy protest in parliament, demanding De Klerk be ejected from the legislature.

"It is an insult to those who died and (who were) tortured... under the instructions of De Klerk to have De Klerk sitting in a democratic parliament," it said.

Other critics were the SA Council of Churches, other opposition parties and civil society groups, while the ruling ANC slammed De Klerk's remarks as "blatant whitewash".

A foundation set up by the revered anti-apartheid fighter, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, said it was "irresponsible" to debate the "degree of awfulness of apartheid" and called for him to retract his statement. On Monday De Klerk retracted his statement and apologised for the "confusion, anger and hurt that it has caused". "I agree with the Desmond and Leah Tutu Foundation that this is not the time to quibble about the degrees of unacceptability of apartheid. It was totally unacceptable," he said in a statement issued by his foundation.

Despite the end of apartheid a generation ago, racial tensions in South Africa remain high and economic inequality and poverty run deep. An umbrella group called the Anti-Racism Network of South Africa this week launched an annual campaign to tackle racism at the grassroots level. —AFP ■

US Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell (c, pictured February 14, 2020) said President Donald Trump told him that allies who use Huawei "will jeopardize our ability to share intelligence and information". **PHOTO: AFP**

Trump threatens intelligence block over Huawei: US diplomat

WASHINGTON (United States) — The United States' ambassador to Germany said Sunday that President Donald Trump had threatened to cut off intelligence-sharing with countries that dealt with Chinese tech firm Huawei.

Washington has been pressing allies to ban Huawei, one of the world's largest tech firms, from next-generation 5G mobile data networks, saying it is a security risk.

Ambassador Richard Grenell said Trump "instructed me to make clear that any nation who chooses to use an untrustworthy 5G vendor will jeopardize our ability to share intelligence and information at the highest level." Grenell said on Twitter that the president had called him on Sunday from Air Force One, the presidential plane, to convey the message. Key US allies in Europe, notably Britain and France, have said they will not ban Huawei from building 5G networks but will impose restrictions.

Publicly, the US has been restrained in its response, but Trump was reportedly furious with London. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told the Munich Security Conference on Saturday that Huawei was a "Trojan horse for Chinese intelligence."

The tech company vehemently denies the US allegations, and Beijing has characterized its treatment as "economic bullying." A US indictment on Friday laid more criminal charges against Huawei related to theft of intellectual property, adding to earlier allegations that the company stole trade secrets from American carrier T-Mobile. —AFP ■

Cameroon army blames accident for village 'massacre'

YAOUNDÉ (Cameroon) — Cameroon's army on Monday denied opposition charges that it had massacred villagers in a restive anglophone region, blaming instead an "unfortunate accident" caused by an explosion of fuel during a firefight.

Up to 22 civilians, 14 of them children, died in the incident on Friday, according to the United Nations — deaths which opposition parties blamed on members of the armed forces.

But army spokesman Colonel Cyrille Atonfack Guemo described the allegations as "duplicitous".

An army investigation found that the deaths happened when fuel exploded in an exchange of gunfire with anglophone separatists and caused a fire, he said.

Five civilians —a woman and four children — died, and "seven terrorists" were "neutralised," Atonfack told AFP in Libreville by phone.

The deaths occurred in the village of Ntumbo in Cameroon's Northwest Region — one of two English-speaking regions that have been grappling with violence since October 2017.

Fighting between separatists campaigning for a separate anglophone state in French-speaking Cameroon has left around 3,000 people dead and caused more than 700,000 to flee their homes.

"It was quite simply an unfortunate accident, the collateral result of security operations in the region," Atonfack said in a statement.

He said four soldiers and two gendarmes had been carrying out nighttime reconnaissance on foot near a home that had been "transformed into a fortress" with a stockpile of weapons.

They came under heavy fire, and exchanges caused "several containers of fuel to explode, followed by a blaze which spread several neighbouring homes."

The army had previously denied any involvement in the deaths.

On Sunday, James Nunan, a local official with UN humanitarian coordination agency OCHA, told AFP that armed men had carried out the killings.

"Up to 22 civilians were killed, including a pregnant woman and several children," Nunan said, adding that 14 children -- including nine under age five -- were among the dead.

Eleven of the children were girls, said Nunan, head of OCHA's office for the Northwest and Southwest regions.

The Movement for the Rebirth of Cameroon (MRC), one of the country's two main opposition parties, issued a statement condemning the attacks.

"The dictatorial regime (and) the supreme head of the security and defence forces are chiefly responsible for these crimes," it said. A key figure in the separatist movement, lawyer Felix Agbor Mballa, in a Facebook post also accused "state defence forces" of carrying out the killings.—AFP ■

The Cameroon government has been battling armed separatists in English-speaking regions since October 2017. **PHOTO: AFP**

Work to begin on Jakarta's mass rapid transit extension next month

Indonesian President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo attends an inauguration ceremony in Jakarta on 24 March 2019, for the country's first mass rapid transit system. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

JAKARTA — An Indonesian-Japanese joint venture to extend the country's first mass rapid transit system in Jakarta will begin next month, nearly a year after the railway debuted in the capital with a promise of easing its notoriously congested traffic.

On Monday, PT MRT Jakarta, operator of the mass rapid transit, signed a contract with a joint venture of the state-owned construction company PT AdhiKarya and Japanese general contractor Shimizu Corp.

The contract, worth 4.04 trillion rupiah ($295 million), covers the design and construction of six stations along the 6-kilometer underground section of an 11.8-km northward extension on the North-South Line from Bundaran Hotel Indonesia Station in Central Jakarta.

The work is expected to be completed in December 2024.

PT MRT Jakarta said in a statement that construction of stations on the remaining 5.8-km elevated section of the line is expected to start in the middle of 2022.

The extension will be the second phase of Jakarta's mass rapid transit project. It stretches to downtown Kota in West Jakarta.

The first phase, a 15.7-km stretch of the North-South Line, was launched last March under a project partly financed by a 125 billion yen ($1.14 billion) soft loan from the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

More than 10 million people live in Jakarta proper, while the greater metropolitan area is home to three times that number.

It takes just 30 minutes to travel the entire 15.7-km stretch on the commuter train, a drastic reduction in time traveling by bus. The fully air-conditioned train also offers added comfort to passengers.

President JokoWidodo has pushed for an early launch of the 32-km East-West Line for which a feasibility study is now being conducted. — Kyodo News ■

Sharp releases details of 5G smartphone ahead of spring launch

OSAKA — Sharp Corp. on Monday released the specifications of its new smartphone that will operate on the 5G network that is set to launch in Japan this spring.

The Osaka-based company said its Aquos R5G handset will be capable of shooting 8K video and reproducing 1 billion colors on its 6.5-inch liquid crystal display.

The company did not release a price point or launch date for the product. Of Japan's major telecommunication carriers, KDDI Corp. and SoftBank Corp. plan to start 5G services around March. NTT Docomo Inc. has said it will introduce 5G in spring.

The 5G wireless network can send and receive data some 100 times faster than the current 4G standard, allowing users to download a movie in a few seconds.

Commercial 5G services have already started in the United States and South Korea. — Kyodo News ■

Sharp Corp.'s Aquos R5G smartphones that will operate on the 5G network. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

China's central bank injects liquidity into market

BEIJING — China's central bank pumped 100 billion yuan (about 14.33 billion U.S. dollars) into the financial system on Monday.

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) injected 100 billion yuan into the market through seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 2.4 percent.

Meanwhile, a total of 1 trillion yuan of reverse repos matured Monday, resulting in a net withdrawal of 900 billion yuan from the market.

The move aims to keep liquidity in the banking system at a reasonably sufficient level, according to a statement on the website of the central bank.

A reverse repo is a process in which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

In addition, the PBOC injected 200 billion yuan into the market via medium-term lending facility (MLF) Monday, a tool introduced in 2014 to allow commercial and policy banks to borrow from the central bank using securities as collateral. — Xinhua

Asian plane makers struggle to take off in crowded market

SINGAPORE (Singapore) — Asian plane makers have thrown huge sums at building jets but flagship projects have suffered repeated setbacks, and they face a tough time breaking into a market dominated by established players.

The Asia-Pacific region is the world's biggest aviation market for commercial aircraft and Japanese and Chinese firms have embarked on programmes to build their own planes.

Asia's two biggest economies are home to myriad companies making hi-tech goods, from cars to smartphones, which in many cases have succeeded in rivalling Western firms.

But when it comes to building planes — which requires mammoth investment, years of painstaking development, and rigorous safety standards — progress has been slow.

The companies at the forefront of the Asian drive, Japan's Mitsubishi and Chinese state-owned manufacturer COMAC, have both seen their flagship projects delayed for years. — AFP ■

Chinese automaker Great Wall to buy GM's Thailand plant

SHIJIAZHUANG — China's leading sport utility vehicles (SUV) and pickup maker Great Wall Motors on Monday said it will purchase General Motors' Rayong car production facility in Thailand.

According to a binding agreement inked by the two companies, the transaction and handover, which include a car plant and a power assembly plant in Rayong currently operated by the Detroit carmaker, are expected to be completed by the end of 2020.

As a regional manufacturing center, the Rayong plant has produced nearly 1.4 million cars since it went operational in 2000.

It will be the Great Wall's 11th full-process complete vehicle manufacturing base globally, the third outside China, following a plant in Russia's Tula region which was put into operation in June 2019 and another one in Talegaon, India, bought from General Motors earlier this year.

Liu Xiangshang, the Great Wall's global strategy vice president, said the purchase will boost the company's development in the Thailand and ASEAN markets and help export products to other ASEAN nations and countries like Australia.

"The ASEAN automotive market is developing with great prospects and potential," Liu said. "Our investment will create more jobs for the locals, improve their skills and stimulate supporting, R&D and related industries there."—Xinhua ■

US peach farmer wins $265 mln damages over Bayer, BASF herbicide

WASHINGTON (United States) — A US jury has awarded $265 million to a Missouri farmer who blamed herbicide from chemical giants Bayer AG and German rival BASF for destroying his peach orchards, in a case set to bolster 140 other lawsuits.

Jurors in federal court in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, made the ruling on Saturday after peach farmer Bill Bader claimed the companies encouraged farmers to use the dicambaweedkiller irresponsibly.

Bloomberg News reported that the case was the first US trial over dicamba herbicide, which is alleged to have wrecked crops across America's Midwest by drifting onto plants that were unable to resist it.

Much like Roundup, another much-criticised herbicide marketed by Monsanto, dicamba has been on the market many years.

Use of the chemical jumped after Monsanto -- which was bought by Germany's Bayer in 2018 -- introduced seeds that can resist the weed-killer.

But the product has been blamed for polluting around four percent of US soybean fields in 2017. A common complaint is that the herbicide spreads to nearby areas.

The fight over dicamba comes in the wake of a case in which Bayer was ordered by a California jury to pay $290 million for failing to warn a dying groundskeeper that Roundup might cause cancer.

In January, reports suggested Bayer could stump up $10 billion in a settlement with tens of thousands of US plaintiffs suffering from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

The cancer sufferers say they developed the disease after exposure to glyphosate, the key ingredient in Roundup.

Bayer, which has maintained that dicamba is safe for crops as long as farmers follow instructions, said in a statement it would "swiftly appeal the decision".

Meanwhile BASF said it was "surprised" by the ruling and would "use all available legal resources". — AFP ■

Japan environment minister takes 12 days of paternity leave

TOKYO — Japanese Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said Monday he had taken 12 days of paternity leave in one month after his first child was born.

Koizumi has said he planned to take about 14 days of parental leave in three months and that he is considering extending it.

The House of Representatives member garnered attention last month when he said he would take paternity leave after the birth of his first child, a rare move in a country where only 6.16 percent of men took leave in fiscal 2018, compared with 82.2 per cent of women, according to government data.

He first mentioned his plan last August after he announced his marriage to his wife, TV personality ChristelTakigawa.

"You become aware and learn about a range of things" by taking paternity leave, Koizumi told a gathering of ministry employees including those considering taking parental leave. — Kyodo News ■

Newly appointed Japanese Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi attends a press conference at the prime minister's office in Tokyo on 11 September 2019. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

Elton John is currently on his 'Farewell Yellow Brick Road' world tour, which is scheduled to end in 2020. **PHOTO: AFP**

Pneumonia forces Elton John to cut short Auckland gig

WELLINGTON (New Zealand) — Elton John has tearfully apologised to fans after cutting short a concert in New Zealand due to illness, with the British superstar saying he was suffering from "walking pneumonia".

The 72-year-old, who is in the midst of a gruelling world tour, struggled to sing while seated at a grand piano during a performance at Mount Smart Stadium on Sunday night.

After being checked by a medic with a stethoscope, he battled on through two more songs before calling a halt to proceedings barely halfway through his setlist.

"I can't sing, I've just completely lost my voice," he told concert-goers in a croaky rasp.

"I've got to go. I'm so sorry."

Elton John's illness comes as health authorities worldwide are on high alert for signs of the novel coronavirus, which has infected more than 70,000 and killed 1,770 in mainland China.

New Zealand has no reported cases of the virus.

Video footage showed Elton John, dressed in a powder-blue suit and wearing his trademark oversized glasses, standing at the piano and shrugging his shoulders at the crowd in a gesture of helplessness.

He then shuffled off the stage with his head bowed, helped by members of his road crew as the crowd cheered their support.

"I was diagnosed with walking pneumonia earlier today, but I was determined to give you the best show humanly possible," he later tweeted.

"I played and sang my heart out, until my voice could sing no more. I'm disappointed, deeply upset and sorry. I gave it all I had."— AFP ■

Tokyo Marathon to restrict entry to elite athletes due to coronavirus

TOKYO — Organizers of the Tokyo Marathon said Monday they will allow only elite athletes, including wheelchair racers, to take part in the upcoming pre-Olympic event, as Japan steps up efforts to contain the coronavirus outbreak.

Of the 38,000 who were scheduled to compete on March 1, those in the "general entry" category can no longer take part because of the virus outbreak in China and its spread to other countries, which has already affected a number of other sports events.

Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike expressed sympathy with runners in the general category, who gained entry to the race via lottery, saying the move was necessary for public safety.

"To all the general entry runners who felt joy at being selected, we apologize, but these restrictions are unavoidable," Koike said. The Tokyo Marathon doubles as a qualifier for the 2020 Games, and runners will be chasing the final spot on the men's Olympic marathon team. Japan men's marathon record holder SuguruOsako and past national record holder YutaShitara are among invitees to the race's elite category. The elite full marathon field includes 176 runners and 30 wheelchair athletes.

With the 2020 Summer Games less than six months away, Tokyo Olympic officials have voiced concerns about how the fast-spreading virus could disrupt the games, which are scheduled from July 24 through Aug. 9.

The chaos caused by the coronavirus outbreak has already resulted in a host of sporting events being canceled or rescheduled in China and Japan, but 2020 Games head Yoshiro Mori said last Thursday canceling the Olympics "has not been considered." The coronavirus emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December. The virus had killed more than 1,700 people in China and infected more than 70,000 people as of Monday. — Kyodo News ■

The annual Tokyo Marathon kicks off in front of the Tokyo metropolitan government building in Shinjuku ward on 3 March 2019. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

Thailand to decide on TPP participation around April: Japan minister

TOKYO — Thailand will likely decide whether to join a revised 11-member Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade pact around April, Japan's economy minister said Monday.

Yasutoshi Nishimura, state minister in charge of the TPP, told reporters after talks with Thai Deputy Prime Minister SomkidJatusripitak that he hopes current member countries will make a decision to start accession talks with Thailand at a ministerial meeting this summer.

Arrangements are being made for the TPP ministers' gathering in Mexico around August, according to Japanese officials.

The pact, formally known as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, entered into force in December 2018 with the 11 members after the United States withdrew from the original TPP in January 2017.

So far, seven members — Japan, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Mexico, Singapore and Vietnam -- have ratified the pact while Chile, Peru, Brunei and Malaysia have yet to do so.

"It's preferable that we can start negotiations with Thailand after (the TPP) is ratified by as many countries as possible," Nishimura said, noting that Chile and Peru may soon finish domestic procedures.

Japanese manufacturers such as auto parts makers have their production bases in Thailand, a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Britain, which left the European Union on Jan. 31, is also eyeing joining the CPTPP. The move is backed by Japan, which has signed a free trade agreement with the European Union and a bilateral pact with the United States. — Kyodo News ■

Japan suffers worst economic slump in five years

TOKYO (Japan) — Japan has suffered its worst quarterly GDP contraction in more than five years, with a tax hike and a deadly typhoon taking a toll on the world's third-largest economy.

The nation's gross domestic product in the three months to December shrank 1.6 per cent from the previous quarter, even before the novel coronavirus outbreak in China hit Japan, according to official data published on Monday.

Typhoon Hagibis killed more than 100 people and caused widespread flooding in October. **PHOTO: AFP**

The quarter was marked by a rise in consumption tax from eight percent to 10 per cent, as well as Typhoon Hagibis, which killed more than 100 people and caused widespread flooding.

Economists were braced for a contraction of around one per cent but had not expected such a poor figure, with Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute, saying it was "quite an undershooting".

"There was a hit from natural disasters but consumer sentiment was particularly weak after the tax hike despite government measures to ease the impact," he told AFP.—AFP

Tokyo stocks fall on weaker October-December GDP, Topix down for 6th day

TOKYO — Tokyo stocks dropped Monday as weaker-than-expected Japanese gross domestic product data for the October to December quarter raised concerns, with the Topix index falling for the sixth consecutive day.

The uncertain prospect for Japan's economy along with concerns over the impact of increasing cases of domestic coronavirus infections could weigh on the Tokyo stock market for the time being, brokers said.

"The Japanese economy will likely face a difficult moment for some time, with the spread of the new virus adding extra weight on consumer spending as well as business activity," said Shingo Ide, chief equity strategist at the NLI Research Institute.

The 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average ended down 164.35 points, or 0.69 per cent, from Friday at 23,523.24. The broader Topix index of all First Section issues on the Tokyo Stock Exchange finished 15.10 points, or 0.89 per cent, lower at 1,687.77, marking the longest losing streak since 25 December when the index declined for the sixth straight day.

Decliners were led by air transportation, food and metal product issues.

The Nikkei index briefly dropped about 350 points, after the GDP data released prior to the open.

The data showed the domestic economy shrank an annualized real 6.3 percent in the October-December quarter — its sharpest fall since a 7.4 per cent slump in the April to June period of 2014 — due to a sales tax increase and a devastating typhoon.

The outcome compares with an average forecast of a 3.7 per cent contraction made by private-sector economists polled by Kyodo News. — Kyodo News ■

FOUR PAWS is an international animal welfare organisation committed to encouraging people to treat animals with respect, compassion and understanding. We are registered as an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) since 2018.

We would like to announce that **with effect from 9 July 2019**, Dr. Phone Win and Mrs. Yuza Mon Htoon are no longer executive members of our INGO in Myanmar. As such, Dr. Phone Win and Mrs. Yuza Mon Htoon are no longer authorized to use our stamp or letterhead, to act in the name or on behalf of FOUR PAWS, or to make any commitments or assume any obligations on the account of FOUR PAWS. FOUR PAWS shall not be bound by any actions of Dr. Phone Win, Mrs. Yuza Mon Htoon or their representatives.

We would further like to announce that we are no longer working with Mingalar Myanmar and/or their staff/representatives

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INVITATION TO OPEN TENDER

Sealed tenders are invited by Department of Medical Services, Ministry of Health and Sports for the supply of Drip Bottles (4-Items), Consumables for Nuclear Medicine Group, Consumables for Dental Group in the (2019-2020) Budget year.

Tender documents are available during office hours at the Procurement and Supplying Division, Department of Medical Services office No (4), Ministry of Health and Sports Commencing from (21.2.2020).

Sealed bids are to be submitted to the office, not later than (20-3-2020), 12:00 noon, after which no bid will be accepted. No telegraph/telex proposal will be accepted.

For detail information please contact the Phone No.067-3411510, 067-3411544, Procurement and Supply Division Office, Department of Medical Services, Ministry of Health and Sports.

Procurement and Supply Division
Ministry of Health and Sports

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V ALVAN VOY. NO. (SCY 1073)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V ALVAN VOY. NO. (SCY 1073) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 18-2-2020 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of MITT 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.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S LAND AND SEA INTERMODAL LOGISTICS SDN BHD LINE
Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V ISEACO FORTUNE VOY. NO. (021W)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V ISEACO FORTUNE VOY. NO. (021W) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 18-2-2020 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of MIP/MITT 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.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA LINES
Phone No: 2301185

EU in 'frank' talks with Balkan nations seeking membership

BRUSSELS (Belgium) — European Council president Charles Michel on Sunday met with leaders of the six Western Balkan nations seeking to join the EU, for 'frank' talks ahead of a key summit in Zagreb in May.

The EU is struggling to maintain credibility in the Balkans after it broke promises to start membership talks with Albania and North Macedonia last October, leading to another postponement despite major reforms on their part.

"I look forward to a frank, intense and open discussion," Michel said before the meeting began.

While most member states were ready to open the negotiations, France has led a small group that vetoed the move, while Germany has led efforts to get the accession process back on track..

"We are going to work today and tomorrow for the next European Council (summit) to open the door to the European perspective of the Balkan countries," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Sunday.

He attended the informal talks as did EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen and Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic of Croatia, which currently holds the EU's rotating presidency.

North Macedonia's Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov (L) was among Balkan nation leaders who met European Council President Charles Michel for talks. **PHOTO: AFP**

Next month the European Commission is due to publish an individual report for each of the six Western Balkan candidate countries — Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia and Serbia.

"It's about engaging in a political dialogue at the highest level" with the Balkan nations "and to understand their expectations, before the summit in Zagreb" on 17 May, a European official said.—AFP ■

Iran's beleaguered President Rouhani rules out resigning

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani speaks during a news conference in the capital Tehran, on 16 February 2020. **PHOTO: AFP**

TEHRAN (Iran) — Iran's President Hassan Rouhani on Sunday ruled out resigning and vowed to see out his term, even as he admitted he had offered to step aside twice since being elected.

Speaking ahead of a general election next Friday, Rouhani also appealed to voters to turn out despite the fact that many moderate and reformist candidates were disqualified from the race.

Rumours have swirled in Iran recently that the 71-year-old, whose second and last term ends next year, had been planning to quit, but his office denied the reports.

Rouhani's government has come under fire over the state of Iran's sanctions-hit economy and for allegedly failing to fulfil election promises.

The legitimacy of Rouhani and his government have been called into question after they were left in the dark for days after the armed forces admitted they "accidentally" shot down a Ukrainian airliner on January 8.

Hardliners have attacked his administration for negotiating a nuclear deal with world powers that ultimately backfired when the United States withdrew unilaterally and reimposed harsh sanctions.

"My resignation does not make much sense... we have made promises to the people and we will continue to fulfil those promises" despite the economic situation and pressure from "the enemy", Rouhani said, referring to the US. "The idea of resigning (because of these recent problems) never occurred to me."

But Rouhani admitted he had offered to resign twice in the past, and that they were rejected by supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. "In the first months after my election, I told the supreme leader 'If you think for some reason that someone else or another government can serve the country better, I'm ready to go'," said Rouhani.—AFP ■

Trump, Turkey call for Russia to stop backing Syrian 'atrocities'

WASHINGTON (United States)— President Donald Trump has called for Russia to end its support for the Syrian regime's "atrocities" as he expressed US concern over violence in the Idlib region, the White House said Sunday.

Turkey's foreign minister also pressed his Russian counterpart over the attacks by Damascus on the last rebel-held bastion in the country.

Backed by Russian air power, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made fresh gains Sunday as he intensified his assault on the holdout northwestern province of Idlib.

In a call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Trump "expressed concern over the violence in Idlib, Syria and... conveyed the United States' desire to see an end to Russia's support for the Assad regime's atrocities."

Turkey has 12 observation posts in Idlib as part of a 2018 deal reached between Ankara and Moscow to prevent a regime offensive, but Syrian regime forces have pressed ahead regardless.

Four of the Turkish posts are believed to be encircled by Syrian forces, and Ankara has threatened to attack Damascus if they do not retreat by the end of February.

"I stressed that the attacks in Idlib must stop and it was necessary to establish a lasting ceasefire that would not be violated," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told journalists at the Munich Security Conference, after he met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Rebel supporter Turkey and Damascus ally Russia have worked closely on Syria in recent years despite being on opposing sides of the nine-year conflict.

A Turkish delegation will head to Moscow on Monday, after Russian officials visited Ankara last weekend but failed to reach a concrete deal.

War monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on Sunday said regime forces "were in control of all the villages and small towns around Aleppo for the first time since 2012."

Regime forces have for weeks been making gains in northwestern Syria and chipping away at territory held by jihadists and allied rebels, focusing their latest operations on the west of Aleppo province.

The Russian-backed offensive has triggered the largest wave of displacement in Syria's civil war, with 800,000 people fleeing since it began in December, the United Nations has said.

Backed by Russia, Iran and the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah, Assad's forces now control more than 70 per cent of Syria and the president has repeatedly vowed to retake the entire country. In the Saturday phone call with Erdogan, Trump also "reiterated that continued foreign interference in Libya would only serve to worsen the situation."

Libya has been mired in chaos since a 2011 NATO-backed uprising killed longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi, with two rival administrations vying for power.

States including Russia, France, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt support strongman Khalifa Haftar, while the UN-recognized Government of National Accord is backed by Turkey and Qatar.—AFP ■

The offensive has triggered the largest wave of displacement in Syria's civil war, with 800,000 people fleeing since December, according to the UN. **PHOTO: AFP**

Indonesia military to blame for 2014 Papua killings: rights commission

JAKARTA (Indonesia) — Indonesia's military shot dead four students in the country's restive Papua region during 2014 protests and carried out "gross human rights violations", a commission investigating the uprising concluded Monday.

Komnas HAM issued its findings five years after the high-school students were gunned down in Paniai, a central area of insurgency-wracked Papua province, which shares a border with independent Papua New Guinea. "This incident constitutes crimes against humanity," the commission's chief investigator Muhammad ChoirulAnam told AFP in a statement Monday. The military did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Komnas HAM said it had forwarded its dossier on the unrest to the country's attorney general for possible prosecution.

The probe was hampered by long delays due to attempts by unnamed individuals to hide evidence, the human rights commission said.

Activists in Jakarta protest against the 2014 shootings of four teenagers in Indonesia's insurgency-wracked Papua province. **PHOTO: AFP**

'Torture'

Rank-and-file soldiers and their superiors should shoulder the blame for the deaths of the students, aged 17 and 18, as well as "torturing" another 21 demonstrating Papuans, it said, without elaborating. The protests were sparked by the alleged beatings of other Papuan youths by the army. Security forces eventually opened fire on a crowd after demonstrators threw stones at a military office. The commission interviewed two dozen witnesses, analysed documents and visited the scene to determine whether the military was involved in the deaths.— AFP ■

Armed gang steals toilet rolls in panic-buying Hong Kong

HONG KONG (China) — A gang of knife-wielding men jumped a delivery driver in Hong Kong and stole hundreds of toilet rolls, police said Monday, in a city wracked by shortages caused by coronavirus panic-buying.

Toilet rolls have become hot property in the densely packed business hub, despite government assurances that supplies remain unaffected by the virus outbreak.

Supermarkets have found themselves unable to restock quickly enough, leading to sometimes lengthy queues and shelves wiped clean within moments of opening. There has also been a run on staples such as rice and pasta, as well as hand sanitiser and other cleaning items.

Police said a truck driver was held up early Monday by three men outside a supermarket in Mong Kok, a working-class district with a history of "triad" organised crime gangs.

"A delivery man was threatened by three knife-wielding men who took toilet paper worth more than HK$1,000 ($130)," a police spokesman told AFP.

A police source told AFP the missing rolls were later recovered and two suspects were arrested on scene although it was not clear if they were directly involved in the armed robbery.

Toilet roll has become hot property in Hong Kong thanks to panic-buying. **PHOTO: AFP**

Footage from Now TV showed police investigators standing around multiple crates of toilet roll outside a Wellcome supermarket. One of the crates was only half stacked.

Hong Kongers reacted with a mixture of bafflement and merriment to the heist.

One woman passing by the scene of the crime who was interviewed by local TV station iCable quipped: "I'd steal face masks, but not toilet roll."

The city, which has 58 confirmed coronavirus cases, is currently experiencing a genuine shortage of face masks.

The hysteria that has swept through Hong Kong since the coronavirus outbreak exploded on mainland China is partly fuelled by the city's tragic recent history of confronting a deadly disease.

In 2003, some 299 Hong Kongers died of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), an outbreak that began on the mainland but was initially covered up by Beijing — action that left a lasting legacy of distrust towards the authorities on public health issues.

The new coronavirus outbreak also comes at a time when the city's pro-Beijing leadership has historic low approval ratings after refusing to bow to months of angry pro-democracy protests last year.

Authorities have blamed online rumours for the panic-buying and say supplies of food and household goods remain stable.

But the panic-buying has itself created shortages in one of the world's most densely populated cities where supermarkets and pharmacies have limited floor space. Photos posted online have shown some people proudly stuffing their cramped city apartments with packets of hoarded toilet rolls.

On Sunday, the head of the city's Consumer Council warned people not to stockpile toilet rolls in their flats as they were prone to mould in the notoriously humid climate. She also reiterated that there were ample stocks of paper.

Supermarket chain Wellcome called Monday's robbery a "senseless act", and called on people not to bulk buy or hoard toilet roll. — AFP ■

NEWS In BRIEF

Nepal's former parliamentary speaker cleared of rape charges

KATHMANDU — A court in Nepal on Monday acquitted a senior politician who resigned from the post of parliament speaker last October after facing allegations that he raped a public servant.

The District Court of Kathmandu said it found insufficient grounds to conclude that Krishna BahadurMahara, a former Maoist rebel, committed the alleged crime.

Mahara who resigned from the post of speaker on 1 October. 1 and was taken into judicial custody on 6 October, had consistently denied wrongdoing, calling the allegation a politically motivated attempt at character assassination.

He was released from custody Monday after the court ruling. The woman, who works at the Parliament Secretariat, alleged that Mahara came to her apartment in Kathmandu in an inebriated state and raped her on 29 September. —Kyodo News ■

India offers help to southeast Asian countries to fight coronavirus

NEW DELHI (India) — Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Monday said that India has offered help, including evacuation and quarantine facilities, to the South East Asian countries for combating the deadly coronavirus that has claimed more than 1700 lives in mainland China.

"We have offered help to the South East Asian countries, including research and medicines.

We also offered help to the Maldivians who have been shifted to the Chhawla camp.

We are not averse to helping anybody," the minister said after meeting the people who will be discharged this week after their health reports pertaining to the virus test were found negative.— ANI ■

MPT MNL 2020: Emeka leads top scorer list with 8 goals after sixth week

AFTER the sixth week matches of the MPT Myanmar National League 2020, striker Emeka of Hantharwaddy United F.C. is leading the top scorer list with 8 goals, according to the league's website.

Emeka is followed by teammate Donald Bissa with 7 goals, and Ella Edubat Patrick of Sagaing United with 6 goals.

After Week-6, Hantharwaddy United F.C. is at the top of the standing table of the MPT Myanmar National League with 18 points from six wins, followed by Yangon United in the second place and Ayeyawady F.C. in the third place with 16 points each. Meanwhile, Shan United F.C. is in the fourth place and Rakhine United is fifth on the standing table. — Kyaw Khin

Emeka of Hantharwaddy United F.C.
PHOTO: MFF

VUC's De Carvaiho Junior named best scorer in MFF Futsal League

AFTER landing 39 goals in the Myanmar Futsal League 2019-2020, De Carvaiho Junior of VUC F.C. was named the best scorer in the league, followed by teammate Thiago Mora De Oliveira, who scored 33 goals, according to the Myanmar Football Federation.

Aung Zin Oo, also from VUC F.C., was named the second runner-up with 22 goals scored.

Nyein Min Soe and Naing Lin Tun Kyaw of VUC F.C., Htet Wai Nyein Chan of On Doctor F.C., and Aung Myo Tun of Dream Team F.C. were next with 21 goals each. They were followed by Myo Myint Soe of VUC F.C., who scored 19 goals, and Sai Pyone Aung and Ko Ko Lwin of MIU F.C. (16 goals each).

MIU F.C. won the championship this year. VUC F.C. placed second, and was followed by GV F.C., On Doctor F.C., and the MFF U-19 Team.

A total of 132 matches were played in the tournament.

The MFF Futsal League deemed De Carvaiho Junior of VUC F.C. as the most valuable player in the league and Nyi Nyi Thant of GV F.C. the best goalkeeper. The MFF U-19 Team got an award for fair play, and the VUC F.C. emerged as the team with the most goals scored. — Kyaw Khin

Guardiola to stick with City despite ban: reports

LONDON (United Kingdom)— Pep Guardiola has told friends he is going to remain as manager of Manchester City even if the appeal against their two-year European football ban is rejected by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), according to media reports on Monday.

The 49-year-old Spaniard is said by The Times to have told both the City board and the players he will be staying despite the sanction and reported interest from Serie A champions Juventus.

Guardiola, who has been at City for four years, reportedly told the players of his intention at a meeting on Saturday.

"Look, whatever league we are in, I will still be here," Guardiola told them according to Sky Sports News.

"Even if they put us in League Two, I will still be here. This is a time for sticking together."

He is likely to confirm this at the press conference on Wednesday following the re-arranged Premier League match with West Ham. The match on February 9 was postponed due to Storm Ciara.

The Sun claims the former Barcelona and Bayern Munich manager has told friends he is going to at least see out his contract with the club which runs until 2021.—AFP

Guardiola's contract with City runs until 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

Casillas to run for president of Spanish Football Federation

MADRID (Spain)—Spain's World Cup-winning captain Iker Casillas will run for the presidency of the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF), he confirmed on Monday.

The date of the election has not yet been decided but Casillas said he has informed his current club Porto of his decision, with the 38-year-old now expected to retire from playing the game.

"Yes, I will run for the presidency of the RFEF when the elections are called," Casillas wrote in a statement.

"Together we will put our federation at the top of the best football in the world, the football of Spain.

"I have informed the president of my club, FC Porto, to whom I can only express the deepest gratitude."

Casillas is considered one of the greatest goalkeepers of his generation and led Spain to their first World Cup triumph in South Africa in 2010.

He played 167 times for Spain, also winning two Euros in 2008 and 2012, and made more than 700 appearances for Real Madrid, with whom he won five La Liga titles and the Champions League three times, before joining Porto in 2015.

In this file photo taken on 30 November 2019 Spanish football player Iker Casillas holds up a slip of paper after drawing Finland from the pot during the UEFA Euro 2020 football competition final draw in Bucharest. **PHOTO: AFP**

Casillas was named in the FIFA FIFPro World XI five years in a row between 2008 and 2012.

But last April, he suffered a heart attack during training and has not played another competitive match since.

Casillas had been linked with the RFEF presidency for several months and is now expected to go up against current incumbent Luis Rubiales for the post. "We are working with the utmost respect and determination in our candidacy," added Casillas. "More than 23,000 voters are waiting for us in fair and transparent elections. The 139 assembly members will decide."

Rubiales has been in perpetual conflict with Javier Tebas, the president of La Liga, and the pair have clashed over numerous issues, including fixtures on Monday and Friday nights, matches abroad and the postponement of the Clasico in October.

According to the rules, the elections should be held in the second half of this year after the Tokyo Olympics but Rubiales has requested they be brought forward, before Euro 2020, which will run from 12 June to 12 July. —AFP