COOPERATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT, EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYEES KEY TO ELIMINATING FORCED LABOUR PAGE-8 (OPINION)

PARLIAMENT
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw continues debate on constitution amendment bill
PAGE-2

NATIONAL
MoPFI launches 'Project Bank' website to assist development programmes
PAGE-2

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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President U Win Myint, First Lady Daw Cho Cho arrive in India

President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho arrive at the Palam Air Force Station in New Delhi, India. **PHOTO: MNA**

AT the invitation of President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind, a goodwill delegation led by President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho left Nay Pyi Taw for India by special flight yesterday morning.

Vice Presidents U Myint Swe and U Henry Van Thio, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Nay Pyi Taw Council Chairman Dr Myo Aung and wife Daw Khin Saw Mu, Nay Pyi Taw Command Commander Maj-Gen Myint Maw, Charge d'affaires a.i. of India Dr Sumit Seth and officials saw off the President and First Lady at the Nay Pyi Taw International Airport.

The President and First Lady were accompanied by Union Minister for International Cooperation U Kyaw Tin, Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko, Union Minister for Transport and Communications U Thant Sin Maung, Chief Minister of Rakhine State U Nyi Pu, departmental heads and officials from the Office of the President and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The President, First Lady and party arrived at the Palam Air Force Station in New Delhi, India in the afternoon.

Deputy Minister of State for Food Processing Industries Shri Rameswar Teli, Myanmar Ambassador to India U Moe Kyaw Aung and wife, Military Attache Brig-Gen Thein Zaw and wife, Indian Ambassador to Myanmar Mr Saurabh Kumar, and officials from the Myanmar Embassy in India and Ministry of External Affairs of India welcomed the President and First Lady at the airport.

Afterwards, the President, First Lady and party went to the Taj Palace Hotel where they will be staying temporarily.

SEE PAGE-3

INSIDE TODAY

NATIONAL
MoHS organizes daily meeting on COVID-19 prevention
PAGE-4

LOCAL NEWS
Taninthayi VMS centre conducts surveillance of offshore fishing vessels
PAGE-6

LOCAL NEWS
Third Myanmar Thanakha Festival in Mandalay to feature Bagan cultural display
PAGE-6

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw continues debate on constitution amendment bill

The Second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw holds its 13th-day meeting at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Hall in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: HTAN PHON**

THE Pyidaungsu Hluttaw continued debate in its 13th day meeting yesterday on the articles and sub-articles in the second bill to amend the State Constitution.

MP U Nay Soe Aung from Wuntho constituency discussed the change of Myanmar language wording of 'the disabled' in sub-articles (a) and (b) under Article 32 and Article 344. He also suggested to annul Article 338 regarding the command of Defence Services on the armed forces, and Article 339 about the role of Defence Services to lead in safeguarding the Union against all international and external dangers.

MP U Thaung Aye from Pyawbwe constituency objected to the removal of wording 'disciplined' from sub-article (d) from the Article 6 in Chapter 1 of the Constitution.

He also opposed deletion of similar wording in Article 7, 39 and sub-article (a) of Article 405, and suggested amendments, annulments and stipulations of Constitution to be done in favour of national interest.

MP Dr Hla Moe from Aungmyethazan constituency supported amendment of sub-article (b) of Article 396 with regard to the recalling measure of Hluttaw representative.

The amendments of sub-articles and articles were also discussed by the other 16 Hluttaw representatives.

The report on second six-months tax revenue of Union Ministries and agencies for 2018-2019 financial year sent by the Union Government and the findings and recommendations (2/2020) of the Joint Public Accounts Committee on the report were discussed.

MP U Sai Tun Aye from Mongshu constituency discussed control for increasing exploitation of natural resources to gain more tax revenue.

MP Daw Nang Htwe Thu from Phasaung constituency supported the recommendations of JPAC to expand the sector for tax collection.

The motion was also discussed by the other six Hluttaw representatives.

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker U T Khun Myat explained the Hluttaw office's errors in omission of some words in the amendment bill's sub-article (k) of Article 262 submitted by Tatmadaw Hluttaw representative Brigadier General Aung San Chit and the correction for excluded words.

He also informed that any confusion in the bill might be directly reported to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw office.

The 14th day of second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw will convene on 27 February.—Aung Ye Thwin and Aye Aye Thant

(Translated by Aung Khin)

MoPFI launches 'Project Bank' website to assist development programmes

Union Ministers U Soe Win and Dr Than Myint, officials from GIZ Myanmar and attendees pose for a documentary photo at the launching ceremony of the Myanmar Project Bank in Nay Pyi Taw on 26 February 2020. **PHOTO: MNA**

THE Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry, in coordination with GIZ Myanmar, introduced the Myanmar Project Bank website yesterday morning.

The launching ceremony of 'Myanmar Project Bank' was held at Thingaha Hotel in Nay Pyi Taw, and Union Minister U Soe Win highlighted 3 Cs (Coordination, Cooperation and Communication) to be able to sustain the project bank.

Country Director of GIZ Myanmar Dr Petra Shill extended greeting and launched the website together with the Union Minister.

Deputy Ministers U Set Aung and Dr Min Ye Paing Hein explained the website and its future plan.

The website is aimed to support communications among the government agencies and development partner organizations through predictable and transparent systems in implementing the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan (MSDP), to help local and foreign private sectors access to MSDP, and to establish a simple and consistent mechanism for implementation.

The launching ceremony was also attended by Union Minister for Commerce Dr Than Myint, Yangon Mayor U Maung Maung Soe, Permanent Secretaries, Directors-General, Managing Directors, officials from relevant ministries and State/Region governments, representatives from development partner organizations and private sector and the invited guests. —MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

President U Win Myint, First Lady Daw Cho Cho arrive in India

FROM PAGE-1

In the evening, the President, First Lady and party visited the Akshardham Hindu Temple where Sadhu Gnanmunidas and officials welcomed them and explained about the religious buildings, art works and the history of India.

The President and First Lady posed for a group photo together with officials from the temples. They also signed the temple's guest book and exchanged gifts.

In the late evening, the President and the First Lady went to the Myanmar Embassy in New Delhi, met with officials from the embassy, military attaché's office and their family members, gave advice and comments to ensure coordination and presented gifts.

Afterwards, the President, First Lady and party attended the dinner hosted by Myanmar Ambassador U Moe Kyaw Aung and wife.—MNA

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

The Myanmar Goodwill delegation led by President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho pose for a documentary photo at the Akshardham Hindu Temple in New Delhi, India yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

Union Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor delivers statement at the High-Level Segment of the 43rd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

UNION Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor U Kyaw Tint Swe attended the High-Level Segment of the 43rd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council held in Geneva from 24 to 26 February 2020 and delivered a statement on 26 February 2020.

In his statement, the Union Minister stressed that cooperation with the United Nations is a cornerstone of the Foreign Policy of Myanmar. Recalling 27th anniversary of the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, he highlighted that "States have the duty for promotion, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, thus, reinforcing the principle of exhaustion of domestic remedies".

He added that peace and security, development and enjoyment of human rights are intertwined, so that achievement of national reconciliation and peace is the topmost priority for Myanmar, a country of internal conflicts for 70 years. He also apprised the Council of the Government's efforts in bringing the ethnic armed groups to the negotiating table as well as achievement and progress made in signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). He further informed the Council that 4th session of the Union Peace Conference- 21st Century Panglong is scheduled to be held in first four months of 2020.

On the issue of Rakhine State, while sharing the concern of the international community over the conflict which affects all communities, he reaffirmed the Myanmar Government's commitment in resolving the issue and pointed out that the deliberate attacks of ARSA in 2016 and 2017 not only triggered the humanitarian situation, also derailed the efforts to bring social cohesion, reconciliation, peace and development to Rakhine State. He underscored that "priority now is to expedite the repatriation of verified displaced persons to Rakhine State under voluntary, safe and dignified conditions". In this regard, he encouraged Bangladesh to show genuine political will, committed efforts and cooperation by strictly adhering to the signed agreements.

Union Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor U Kyaw Tint Swe. **PHOTO: MNA**

Turning to the accountability matter, he reiterated that "the Government of Myanmar firmly stands for principles which are cornerstone of international legal order". Relating to the Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICOE), he informed the Council that the final report of ICOE, based not on narratives but on interviews of close to 1,500 witnesses, was submitted to the President on 20 January 2020, and subsequently, the President Office instructed the Attorney General for further investigation and prosecution. He continued, "Tatmadaw, Myanmar Defence Services have announced that the Office of the Judge Advocate General will take action with military justice procedures if there is credible evidence of any commission of offence by members of Tatmadaw".

While celebrating the 75th year of the founding of the United Nations, he recalled that Human Rights Council was created to address the weakness and failings of the Human Rights Commission. Moreover, he stated that the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process is the best mechanism to address human rights challenges based on equal footing and equal voice. He further informed the Council of the upcoming third UPR review of Myanmar at the 37th session of the UPR working group.

Furthermore, he recalled the huge expectations and aspiration of member states at the time when the Human Right Council was created, saying "we dreamed of a Human Rights Council where all human rights are treated equally; where the realization of the right to development is given due priority; where sovereignty of nations are upheld; ensuring equality of action and scrupulously avoiding double standards; where unwieldy mandate or unilaterally extending its power without accompanying due diligence is not allowed; where no nation is made to feel its value is decided by the degree of material wealth and political influence it can muster". "Regretfully this dream has not been realized", he continued.

He concluded by stressing "Dreams do not become reality unless we work to make it happen" and called on all member states to cooperate, so that dreams will be fulfilled and Human Rights Council will truly become a beacon of hope where all can work in concert for common good - the enjoyment of Human Rights for everyone.—MNA

Union LIP Minister discusses garment sector, labour issues

UNION Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe discussed garment sector and labour issues at the separate meetings with delegates from the Garment Advocacy Group of Eurochan Myanmar and the International Labour Organization at his office in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

At the meeting with a delegation Garment Advocacy Group of Eurochan Myanmar, led by Mr Serkan Tanka, the Union Minister discussed matters relating to assistances from the European Union in expansion of Myanmar's garment sector.

The Eurochan Myanmar was cooperating with Ministry of Commerce, related ministries and garment businesspersons to prevent the shortages of raw materials at the factories in Myanmar due to China's COVID-19 outbreak.

They also discussed the measures for setting minimum wages to be completed in a timely manner, skills assessment of the National Skill Standard Authority (NSSA) for workers' skill development in Myanmar and continuing cooperation on Myanmar's industrial development after seeking the advice from the Eurochan Myanmar.

At the meeting with ILO's Deputy Director-General Mr Greg Vines, the Union Minister discussed the implementation of IT reform with ILO-Korea Parnership Programme, medical reform with ILO-Luxembourg Project, management reform with ILO-Vision Zero Fund Project and legal reform with ILO-Labour Law Reform Project, and the condition of drawing a Master Plan by the ILO.

Union Minister U Thein Swe holds talks with a delegation led by International Labour Organization-ILO's Deputy Director-General Mr. Greg Vines in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

They also discussed to establish a regular office as the ILO has been long operating its liaison office in Myanmar with 14 projects and more than 80 employees, and the condition of ongoing implementation of National Complaints Mechanism-NCM in accordance with the ILO's provisions.—MNA

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

MoHS organizes daily meeting on COVID-19 prevention

UNION Minister for Health and Sports Dr Myint Htwe presided over the daily meeting (24/2020) on prevention of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) at his office in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

At the meeting, the minister discussed the spread of disease in some countries, preventive measures against it, collection of global information about COVID-19 at the Central Epidemiology Unit, doing reviews and analysis and reporting updated situations.

The Union Minister also advised to learn successful medical treatments on the positive cases in regional countries, and make an assessment on the achievement in awareness campaign at the border towns.

He added increasing momentum for surveillance and screening the visitors arrived from South Korea, Japan and Singapore, collaboration with the hotels and guesthouses they stay, coordination among the officers from the immigration department, custom departments and aviation department.

The Minister called for conducting surveillance more closely at the residential areas of Chinese visitors, and awareness campaigns on public buses, express cars and passenger ships.

He continued to say tightly control on the arrival of foreign cruise ships into Myanmar, and to check the previous 14-day travel histories of passengers onboard cruise ship as they are scheduled to visit Myanmar on 4 March, to review free visa programmes for visitors from some foreign countries. He also discussed accumulation of medicines and medical equipment, systematic taking of specimens from the suspected patients and report on medical treatments for COVID-19 at the private hospitals and clinics.

Union Minister Dr Myint Htwe suggested the Myanmar Red Cross Society to conduct screening mainly at the border crossings, changes of norms to confirm COVID-19 in accordance with rules of the countries on the disease, while the MoHS and other relevant ministries need to utilize more human resources, budgets and equipment.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Union Minister for Health and Sports Dr Myint Htwe attends the daily meeting on prevention against Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

Surveillance and investigation of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Updates at 8 pm 26 February 2020

1. The Ministry of Health and Sports is closely monitoring the outbreak of COVID-19, with conducting surveillance at international gateways and at the public hospitals and private healthcare facilities.

2. A 32-year-old man from Gilbert of Arizona State in the United States, arrived in Myanmar on 22 February 2020 after his visit to Malaysia from 20 to 22 February and three-month stay in Harbin city of China. He suffered symptoms of vomit, diarrhoea, sore throat and fever on 25 February afternoon. He was taken to Yangon People's Hospital on the following morning, and he was transferred to the Waibargi Special Hospital. He is regarded as a person under investigation with medical treatments, and his specimens will be sent to the National Health Laboratory (Yangon) for tests. He is not diagnosed with acute respiratory disease until now.

3. There are two patients under surveillance at the hospitals till 8 pm on 26 February 2020, and they were in good health conditions. Results from his diagnosis will be released in real-time report.

4. Although there is no laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19 until 26 February , the ministry is conducting round-the-clock surveillance in upward momentum. As the COVID-19 is spreading in 34 countries, including China and some of its neighbouring countries, people are suggested to follow health awareness of the Ministry of Health and Sports on prevention of the disease.— MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

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Coord meeting held to make Myanmar Motion Picture, Yangon University centenary celebrations a success

Union Minister Dr Pe Myint attends the coordination meeting held for Centenary celebrations of Myanmar Motion Picture and Yangon University in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

UNION Minister Dr Pe Myint of the Ministry of Information stressed the needs to put forward the measures already undertaken, the work still to be done, and additional advice and suggestions where necessary for the celebrations of the Myanmar Motion Picture Centenary and the Yangon University Centenary. Comprehensive discussions should be taken place at the coordinating meetings of the Steering Committee, the Work Committee and relevant sub-committees.

The coordination meeting was held at the meeting hall of the Ministry of Information and attended by Union Minister Dr Pe Myint, Deputy Minister U Aung Hla Tun, Permanent Secretary U Myo Myint Maung, departmental heads and officials among others.

Director-General U Ye Naing of the Information and Public Relations Department then explained the matters pertaining to the establishment and responsibilities of the Steering Committee for convening the Motion Picture Centenary in line with the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Office of the President Notification No 33/2020 on 13 February 2020, the arrangements to form the Work Committee and Sub-committees and their respective tasks, and the participation in the Work Committees to organize the Yangon University Centenary celebration.

Next, Permanent Secretary U Myo Myint Maung clarified the broadcasting programmes of the Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) for the centenary celebrations of the Motion Picture and the Yangon University and the programmes to be broadcast in four parts of celebration periods – initial period, pre-celebration period, the periods during and after the celebration.

Afterwards, Director-General U Aung Myo Myint of the Printing and Publishing Department explained the plan to publish commemorative record books and the committees-wise participation in the preparatory work for the celebrations. Acting Managing Director U Thet Swe of the News and Periodicals Enterprise also clarified the news items for centenary celebrations already published in the State-run newspapers and more news items to be published.

Deputy Minister U Aung Hla Tun then led a round of general discussions with the attendees.

The Union Minister concluded the meeting by instructing additional needs on the discussions.—MNA

(Translated by Aungthu Ya)

Deputy Information Minister inspects progress of printing school text books

DEPUTY Minister for Information U Aung Hla Tun inspected the progress of printing school text books in Mandalay yesterday afternoon.

They visited Htate Tan Printing House and Yadanabon Newspaper House in Pyigyidagun Township, where the text books are being produced under the contracts with private sector.

The Deputy Minister instructed timely completion of school books for 2020-2021 academic year with particular quality and effective coordination among the printers and the publishers.

During the visit, the Deputy Minister was accompanied by Director-General U Aung Myo Myint from the Printing and Publishing Department, Assistant Director (Admin) for Mandalay Region Education Office U Kyaw Kyaw Mon, and Mandalay Region's Printers and Publishers Association Chairman U Tun Tun Soe.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Deputy Minister for Information U Aung Hla Tun observes the school text books at the printing house in Mandalay yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

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Trade exceeds $9 bln in first three months of 2019-2020FY

IN the first three months of this fiscal year, which started in October, Myanmar's total trade with foreign countries stood at US$9.75 billion.

The country's exports were registered at $4.76 billion, with normal exports pegged at $2.72 billion and border exports amounting to $2.04 billion.

For the same period, Myanmar's imports stood at $4.99 billion, with normal imports totaling $4.17 billion and border imports reaching $817.33 million. Myanmar's trade deficit was valued at $228.12 million for the October-December period, according to the Central Statistical Organization. In the month of December in the 2019-2020 financial year, Myanmar's exports were registered at $1.43 billion, with normal exports valued at $870.72 million and border exports pegged at $561.17 million.

During the same period, Myanmar's imports reached $1.892 billion, with normal imports valued at $1.6 billion and border imports estimated at $291.59 million. The total trade volume for December was $3.32 billion, with the trade deficit touching $460.75 million. – MNA *(Translated by TTN)*

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

Taninthayi VMS centre conducts surveillance of offshore fishing vessels

THE Taninthayi Vessel Monitoring System Control Centre is keeping a careful watch on offshore fishing vessels in Myanmar waters, according to the Fisheries Department.

The control centre is temporarily operating out of the Myeik District Fisheries Department as the three-storeyed building where it will be housed is still under construction. The control centre is being built with funds allocated by the Taninthayi Region government.

Fishing vessels mooring in Taninthayi Region. **PHOTO: KHINE HTOO (IPRD)**

Vessel monitoring systems (VMS) have been installed on a total of 1,414 offshore boats and 116 fish collecting vessels so far, while some vessels have been issued warnings regarding their installation.

"The control centre is monitoring fishing vessels to check whether they are complying with the law. The vessels are being inspected at checkpoints before leaving for their designated ports. The inspections are aimed at curbing illicit fishing and transportation," said U Than Chaung, head of the Taninthayi Region Fisheries Department.

The Taninthayi coast is situated in southern Myanmar and it is the longest coast in Myanmar, spanning 200 miles. More than 47,000 workers are engaged in offshore fishing on 1,530 vessels along the coast.—Khaing Htoo (IPRD)

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Third Myanmar Thanakha Festival in Mandalay to feature Bagan cultural display

Girls select to buy piles of Myanmar thanaka bark in the market.
PHOTO: MIN HTET AUNG (MANDALAY SUBPRINTING HOUSE)

THE 3rd Myanmar Thanakha Festival will be held from 27 to 29 March at the Kyauktawgyi pagoda at the bottom of the Mandalay Hill in Aungmyethazan Township, and it will feature a Bagan cultural display, said U Kyaw Moe, chair of the Myanmar Thanakha Association, which is organizing the festival.

"What would be unique at this festival would be the Bagan cultural displays, which will start from the entrance. Traditional items of Bagan era will be exhibited at the festival. The event will link Thanakha growers with cosmetics producers and bring opportunities to extend the Thanakha market," he said.

The three-day Thanakha expo will feature more than 50 booths. It will also include a Miss Thanakha contest, performances, and quiz shows. Exhibitors keen on joining the festival can reach the Myanmar Thanakha Association at 09400531505 for further details. Meanwhile, the Myanmar Thanakha stakeholders have asked the government to declare the Tabodwe Full Moon Day, as Thanakha Day. As part of a concerted effort to achieve this, they have held Thanakha festivals in five cities — Shwebo, Ayadaw, Yesagyo, Myaing, and Pauk.

Thanakha, a yellowish-white paste made from ground bark, is a natural cosmetic used in Myanmar. It is a distinctive feature of Myanmar culture. — Min Htet Aung (Mandalay Sub-printing House)

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

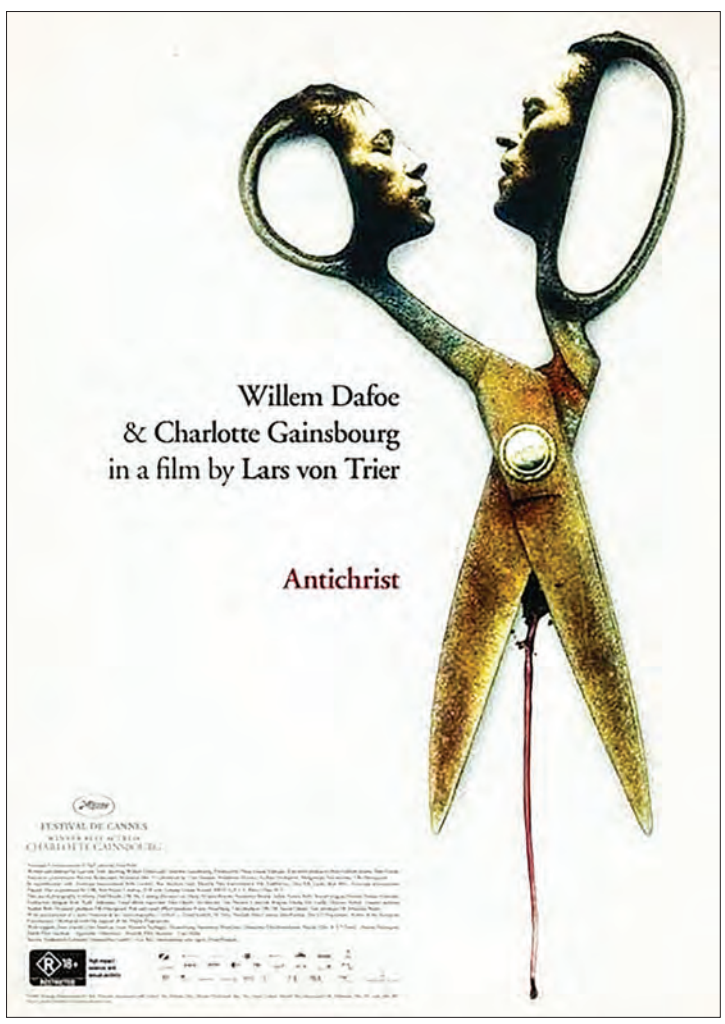
FDC to analyse prize-winning film "Antichrist"

THE Film Development Centre will screen 'Antichrist" film for analysis in its 37th event of the Cinematheque Programme at its office No. 50, Shwe Taung Gyar Road (Golden Valley Road), Bahan Township, at 12 noon on 1 March. The drama horror film directed by Lars Von Trier won the Cannes Best Actress Award.

The "Antichrist" is about a couple who moved to a cabin in the woods after their toddler accidentally died.

In their cabin, the husband got mysterious visions and the behaviours of his wife became violent.

The event will be led by Dr Aung Min, a member of FDC management board.—Win Htain (FDC) *(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)*



Corn farmers in Pwintbyu Township profit from high prices

CORN growers in Pwintbyu Township of Magway Region said they have earned a good profit due to the crop fetching higher prices this year compared with last year.

"A majority of farmers from the Mezali village-tract in Pwintbyu Township grow corn, bananas, chillies, onions, tomatoes, chick peas, and other vegetables on a commercial scale. Corn can be grown across three seasons — rainy, winter, and summer. This year, the yield of winter corn has been high and it is getting a good price. Last year, corn was priced at just K50-80. This year, the price has increased to K150-200. Therefore, growers are doing well financially. I made a profit of K1 million from corn this year," said Ma Lwin Maw, a corn grower from Mezali village-tract.

Corn farmers from Nyaungpinwine Village, Pwintbyu Township, use underground water for cultivation. They grow kitchen crops and vegetables commercially. — Ye Win Naing (NyaungU)

Thriving maize in Pwintphyu Township, Magway Region. **PHOTO: YE WIN NAING (NYAUNGU)**

COVID-19: Watermelon, muskmelon exports down $55 mln

By Nyein Nyein

ON account of the coronavirus outbreak, exports of watermelons and muskmelons to China have dropped, with losses pegged at US$55 million within one month (27 January to 26 February), said U Naing Win, chair of the Myanmar Watermelon and Muskmelon Producers and Exporters Association.

"At this time last year, 700 trucks of watermelons were seen at Muse gate. Only 40-50 trucks of watermelons were sent to China per day amid China's coronavirus outbreak. It led to the decay of fruits and fell in prices. Growers and traders suffered due to this," he said.

After China's customs office, schools, and banks reopened on 24 February, about 200 trucks of watermelons and muskmelons were allowed to enter China's market. But, melons are fetching a low price, said traders.

"China's demand has increased from 50 to 200 trucks. However, watermelon exports can cover only packing costs as only 200 out of 700 truckloads of watermelons are being exported per day. The muskmelon market is not that bad," said U Naing Win.

"At present, the price of watermelons is ranging from 10,000-28,000 Yuan per truck. Muskmelons are fetching 30,000-35,000 per truck. Melon prices have dropped by half compared with last year. Myanmar's watermelon and muskmelon export market will return to normal only after the COVID-19 is brought under control in China. Chinese traders are also observing the market conditions," according to the association.

"Chinese traders are concerned about market demand. The demand is gradually increasing," said U Naing Win.

In order to remedy the current situation, the association has asked growers and traders to look for information and hold discussions with fruit depots.

Myanmar exports more than 800,000 tons of watermelons and 150,000 tons of muskmelons every year. At present, only 330,000 tons of watermelons and 40,000 tons of muskmelons have been shipped to external markets.

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Chin State Chamber of Commerce seeks tax breaks on import of old off-road vehicles

By Nyein Nyein

THE Chin State Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CSCCI) has forwarded a request to the Private Sector Development Committee, led by Vice President U Myint Swe, to permit importation of old-model off-road vehicles with Chin State licence and grant tax exemption on imports of budget cars for the benefit of hotels and tourism entrepreneurs in Chin State.

U Kap Khen Pau, chair of the CSCCI, made the request at the 32nd regular meeting of the Private Sector Development Committee with private entrepreneurs on 22 February at the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

"Chin State's roads are not suitable for luxury vehicles. Only station wagons that are specially designed for rough roads can run in the state. At present, the import of old model cars is restricted in the country, and only latest models are allowed. Travel entrepreneurs cannot afford to buy the latest model cars," said U Kap Khen Pau.

"In addition, Chin State sees potential in the development of small and medium enterprises. But, the grant of land by the government has gotten delayed, making it difficult for private entrepreneurs to access loans," he said. Therefore, to help SMEs obtain loans, the CSCCI has asked the government to grant them land rights as soon as possible.

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

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Mineral exports up $600 mln in current fiscal

MYANMAR'S mineral exports have shown a marked climb this financial year, touching US$944.4 million between 1 October and 14 February, an increase of $602.5 million compared with the year-ago period, according to data from the Ministry of Commerce.

Last year, mineral exports were pegged at just $341.9 million.

Both private and public sector mineral exports witnessed an increase in the current financial year, with private sector exports valued at $489.5 million and public sector exports estimated at $454.87 million.

Of the seven export groups, exports of agricultural goods, minerals, fishery, and finished industrial goods showed an increase, while the exports of livestock, forest products, and other goods declined.

Export values stood at $1.39 billion for agricultural products, $51.4 million for livestock, $373 million for fishery products, $65.4 million for forest products, over $3.79 billion for manufactured goods, and $132 million for other goods.

The country's export sector relies more on the agriculture and manufacturing sectors. While export earnings from the CMP (cut, make, and pack) garment businesses are rising, the country's reliance on natural resources has been lessening.

Due to limited extraction of natural resources, exports of forest products and minerals dropped significantly in the previous years. Permits for mining blocks were suspended in 2016, but after a period of two years, Myanmar's mining sector has now been opened to local and foreign investors, according to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation.—GNLM *(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)*

27 FEBRUARY 2020
THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Cooperation between government, employers, employees key to eliminating forced labour

MYANMAR'S labour reforms are crucial for the future of the country and for ensuring peace, strengthening democracy, and helping our people prosper.

With the recent launch of the National Complaints Mechanism (NCM), Myanmar has taken a step forward towards eradicating forced labour in the country.

However, for putting an end to forced labour, the mechanism needs to be effective and gain the trust of the people.

Hence, a mobile phone application and database need to be developed for the NCM, with the assistance of the International Labour Organization, so that it can work systematically and accurately for the elimination of forced labour and recruitment of child soldiers.

> It would be worth noting that just amending laws related to labour would not be enough for achieving the goals we are marching towards. Both employers and employees must respect and observe them.

In addition, while amending the 2011 labour organization law, care must be taken to ensure the new law conforms to the situation in the country and factors in the demands of employers and employees.

Laws must safeguard and prevent the exploitation of those who do not understand them, or, the needy, who cannot obey them.

It would be worth noting that just amending laws related to labour would not be enough for achieving the goals we are marching towards. Both employers and employees must respect and observe them. Or, the efforts made by the tripartite group, including government representatives, employers, and employees, would not result in success.

Besides, it is necessary to take action against those who break the law.

Our commitment to the elimination of forced labour is a milestone for the labour sector and for the country as well.

We welcome the constructive agreements that were reached at the 10th and 11th tripartite meetings of the Technical Working Group on Labour Law Reform (TWG-LLR), held in October, 2019 and 11 January, 2020.

Again, we hope that more constructive agreements are inked in the upcoming 12th meeting.

We believe that cooperation between the government and labour organizations, which represent and lead the labour force across the country, as a model of solidarity serving in the interests of employees, would become a milestone in efforts to eliminate forced labour in our country.

Scramble to contain coronavirus as infections spread in Europe

"In light of the significant infection risks, we will ask that national sporting or cultural events that will attract large crowds be either cancelled, postponed or downsized for the next two weeks,": Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

CORONAVIRUS cases spread beyond the outbreak's European hotspot Italy Wednesday, as the world scrambled to contain the deadly epidemic that is fast growing outside China's borders.

New cases linked to Italy -- the hardest hit European country -- have emerged in several countries in Europe and beyond, amid warnings from health experts that nations are not ready to contain a global outbreak.The novel coronavirus has killed over 2,700 people and infected more than 80,000, the vast majority in China.

But on Wednesday the World Health Organization said more new cases were now being clocked outside China than inside the country, where the deadly virus first emerged in December. Greece confirmed its first case Wednesday, a woman who had recently travelled to northern Italy; while a suspected case was reported in Brazil—a traveller recently returned from Milan. If confirmed, it would be Latin America's fist case of the virus.

Croatia, Austria and Algeria have all reported cases linked to Italy, while a hotel in Spain remained under lockdown Wednesday after an infected Italian tourist was hospitalised with the virus. A World Health Organization official warned that nations were "simply not ready" to contain the outbreak.

"You have to be ready to manage this at a larger scale... and it has to be done fast," said WHO's Bruce Aylward, who headed an international expert mission to China to assess containment measures. Several governments have advised against travel to Italy, particularly to outbreak epicentre in the north, and introduced checks for passengers arriving from the country. Italy has confirmed 374 cases of the disease and 12 deaths, and says the virus has spread to some southern regions as well.

People wear protective masks outside the Rafik Hariri University Hospital in the outskirts of Beirut, Lebanon, where a coronavirus patient is being treated on February 21. **PHOTO: AFP**

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

France reports first citizen to die from coronavirus

A 60-year-old man has become the first French victim of the coronavirus in the country, the health ministry announced Wednesday.

The man died overnight after being rushed to a Paris hospital in serious condition on Tuesday evening, bringing the total death toll in the country to two, said the ministry's deputy head Jerome Salomon.In a televised statement, Salomon said a 60-year-old French man in a very serious condition was tested at Paris' Pitie-Salpêtrière hospital late on Tuesday.

"Unfortunately (he) died during the night," Salomon said.

Xi chairs leadership meeting on COVID-19

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, on Wednesday chaired a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee on the prevention and control of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Responding to a call of the CPC Central Committee to all Party members, Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Li Zhanshu, Wang Yang, Wang Huning, Zhao Leji and Han Zheng all made donations to support the COVID-19 prevention and control work.

Addressing the meeting, Xi said the positive trend in preventing and controlling the epidemic is expanding and economic and social development is rapidly recovering, but the situation in Hubei Province and its capital city of Wuhan remains complex and grim, and the risk of a rebound of the epidemic in other regions can not be overlooked. Xi said at this moment it is important to make unremitting epidemic containment efforts and accelerate all aspects of work in economic and social development.

Public events cancelled

Japan reported two more deaths linked to the coronavirus Wednesday as the government called for organisers to reconsider holding major events in coming weeks to limit the outbreak.

The news came as dozens of passengers allowed off a virus-stricken cruise ship were reported to have developed symptoms including fever, and will be asked to be re-tested for the virus.

A Tokyo man in his 80s who tested positive for the infection died of pneumonia, the health ministry said. He had not travelled to China recently and there was no sign he had contact with known infected individuals, it said in a statement. Another elderly person in the Hokkaido region of northern Japan died of viral pneumonia, the ministry said. Testing done after the death confirmed the infection of the individual, whose details have not been released at the request of the family.

A pedestrian passes a board displaying share prices of Asian stock markets in Tokyo, Japan on Wednesday. **PHOTO: AFP**

Seven deaths linked to the virus have now been reported in Japan—four of them former passengers from the Diamond Princess—while the country has also recorded more than 700 infections from the boat and at least 160 off it.

"In light of the significant infection risks, we will ask that national sporting or cultural events that will attract large crowds be either cancelled, postponed or downsized for the next two weeks," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told a cabinet task force meeting.

Coronavirus rumours

Iranian cyberpolice have arrested 24 people accused of online rumour-mongering about the spread of the coronavirus in the country, semi-official news agency ISNA reported on Wednesday. The Islamic republic has been battling to control an outbreak of the novel coronavirus that has claimed 19 lives among 139 infections in the past week.

"Twenty-four people were arrested and handed over to the judiciary and 118 (internet) users were talked to and let go" after receiving warnings, said Vahid Majid, head of the Iranian police force's cyber unit.

The arrests were carried out after the establishment of a special unit to "combat rumour-mongers regarding the 'spread of coronavirus in the country'," he was quoted as saying.

Virus threatens Afghanistan, Pakistan

With porous borders, creaking hospitals and large illiterate populations, Afghanistan and Pakistan face a potentially devastating health crisis after the new coronavirus erupted in neighbouring Iran. Islamabad has closed official border crossings while Kabul has suspended all travel to the Islamic republic, which has reported 15 deaths out of nearly 100 infections -- making it one of the hardest hit countries outside the virus epicentre China.

But experts fear the measures could prove ineffective with thousands of people -- refugees fleeing violence, Shiite pilgrims, smugglers and migrants looking for work -- likely crossing the long, poorly patrolled frontiers every day. The virus has spread to more than 25 countries, killing over 2,700 and infecting 80,000, mostly in China. But new outbreaks in Europe, the Middle East and in Asia have fanned fears of the contagion taking hold in poor nations which lack the healthcare infrastructure to cope.

North Korea imposes 'extraordinary' measures

Loudspeakers blaring hygiene messages, foreign ambassadors locked in their compounds and state media demanding "absolute obedience" to health authorities—North Korea is taking what diplomats call "unprecedented" measures as it seeks to prevent a crippling coronavirus outbreak.

North Korea maintains extensive control over the lives of its citizens and is pulling out all the stops to try to protect itself from the virus that first emerged in neighbouring China, long its key diplomatic ally and trade partner.

First case confirmed among U.S. troops

South Korea said Wednesday that its total coronavirus infection cases have exceeded 1,200 as the situation rapidly worsens in the country, with the first case confirmed among U.S. military personnel. With 284 new cases reported the same day, the number of infections has reached 1,261, and the death toll has risen to 12, up from 10 on Tuesday, according to the Health and Welfare Ministry.

South Korea is on its highest alert over the outbreak of the pneumonia-causing virus, which first emerged in neighboring China, as the number of cases of infection skyrocketed from 51 a week ago.

REFERENCES

Xinhua; AFP; Kyodo Updated News

Objectives of the 75th anniversary of the Armed Forces Day

(1) Uphold our three main national causes: Non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity, and perpetuation of national sovereignty as a national duty, to serve the country at the risk of our lives
(2) Participate in the peace-making process with the State Government under the six-point peace policy of the Tatmadaw as part of efforts to gain eternal peace
(3) Guard peace and stability and protect the interests of the people; build a modern, strong, and capable army
(4) Safeguard the fine traditions of the Tatmadaw which has been dutiful in discharging State and national political duties

Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Wednesday 26th February, 2020)

BAY INFERENCE: Weather is a few cloud over the Southwest Bay and partly cloudy over the Andaman Sea and elsewhere over the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL AFTERNOON OF THE 27th February, 2020: Rain or thundershowers will be scattered in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin State, isolated in Lower Sagaing and Magway Regions, Northern Shan and Chin States. Degree of certainty is (80%). Weather will be partly cloudy in the remaining Regions and States.

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

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Continuation of likelihood of isolated rain or thundershowers in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin State.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 27th February, 2020: Partly cloudy.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 27th February, 2020: Partly cloudy.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 27th February, 2020: Partly cloudy.

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Chinese robotics company showcases innovative gadgets at NYC Toy Fair

NEW YORK — Robosen Robotics (Shenzhen) Co, a Chinese tech startup, made its debut at the annual Toy Fair in New York City, aiming to bring innovative gadgets to overseas consumers.

A lineup of miniature robots called T9 has been on display during the exhibition.

Launched in China last summer, the product has entered the US market since 2020, Jerry Li, sales director of the Shenzhen-based company, told Xinhua on Tuesday.

The company hopes the gadget with a combined focus on education and entertainment could be well-received by international consumers including those in North America and Europe.

Equipped with 22 servomotors, the programmable robot is able to perform high-speed, upright bipedal walking, while also automatically converting from robot to vehicle form.

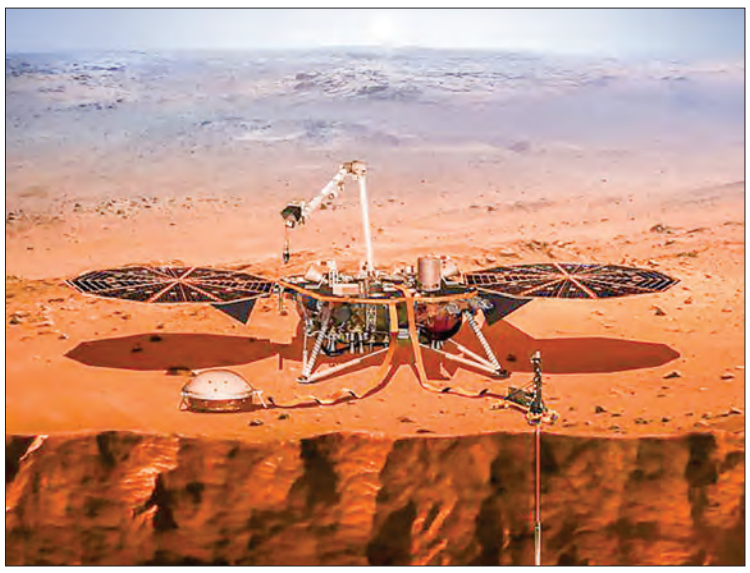
Designed and developed in China, the robot features a full set of functions including automatic convertible movement, bipedal walking ability, racing, programmable development and robot control by either voice or via app, said Jacob Cheng, general manager of the company's US subsidiary.

"Its debut at the Consumer Electronics Show last month in Las Vegas attracted plenty of attention, boosting our confidence in the prospects," he said.

China's robotics industry is advancing rapidly, buoyed by the nation's prowess in innovation and integrating different industries as well as rich human resources, noted John Engle, vice president of sales at the company's US subsidiary.

The 2020 Toy Fair New York, a four-day event starting Saturday, has drawn more than 1,000 exhibitors from around the world to showcase some 150,000 toys, games and youth entertainment products. Inaugurated in 1903, the exhibition takes place each February as a trade-only event. —Xinhua ■

T9 miniature robots are on display at the 2020 Toy Fair New York held in New York, the United States, 25 February, 2020. Robosen Robotics (Shenzhen) Co., a Chinese tech startup, made its debut at the annual Toy Fair in New York City, aiming to bring innovative gadgets to overseas consumers. **PHOTO: XINHUA**



This handout file illustration obtained on 27 April, 2018 courtesy of NASA shows NASA's Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport (InSight). **PHOTO: AFP**

First direct seismic measurements reveal a geologically active Mars

MARYLAND — Based on first reports, Mars has been found to have a moderate level of seismic activity and ground vibrations, intermediate between Earth and the Moon.

The findings are based on preliminary results from the InSight mission, which landed a probe on Mars on 26 November, 2018. An international team that includes University of Maryland geologists released data from the mission's Seismic Experiment for Interior Structure (SEIS), which provided the first direct seismic measurements of the Martian subsurface and upper crust-the rocky outermost layer of the planet. The results were published in a special issue of the journal Nature Geoscience on February 24 this year. "This is the first mission focused on taking direct geophysical measurements of any planet besides Earth, and it's given us our first real understanding of Mars' interior structure and geological processes," said Nicholas Schmerr, an assistant professor of geology at UMD and a co-author of the study. "These data are helping us understand how the planet works, its rate of seismicity, how active it is and where it's active."

The seismic data acquired over 235 Martian days showed 174 seismic events or marsquakes. Of those, 150 were high-frequency events that produce ground-shaking similar to that recorded on the Moon by the Apollo program.— ANI ■

Higher ocean temperatures putting extreme stress on Australia's Great Barrier Reef

SYDNEY — Higher than average ocean temperatures have put Australia's iconic Great Barrier Reef on the brink of a severe coral bleaching event, the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) has warned on Tuesday.

Recording an increase of 1.0 to 2.5 degrees centigrade in recent weeks, AIMS Oceanographer Craig Steinberg said the World Heritage Listed Area is now facing an enormous threat.

"Our knowledge and long-term understanding of northern Australian waters tell us warming oceans place enormous pressure on the reef's ecology," he explained.

"If heatwave conditions persist or worsen, we can expect corals to exhibit stress and experience some level of regional bleaching."

Causing the corals to expel algae from their tissue and turn white, the process can then lead to stagnant growth rates, decreased reproductive capacity, increased susceptibility to diseases and a declines in genetic and species diversity.

Using satellites, weather stations and even an in-water autonomous robot to monitor ocean temperatures in real time, there is also a network of 170 electronic temperature loggers which have been deployed across the 350,000 square km reef.

"We have re-deployed an Integrated Marine Observing System (IMOS) underwater glider to areas of concern in the waters north-east of Townsville," Steinberg said.

"With its on-board sensors, the glider provides our scientists with information about ocean properties at different depths of the water column including temperature and light, to help explain any observed levels of coral bleaching."—Xinhua ■

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has singled out rising sea temperatures due to climate change as the organism's biggest threat. **PHOTO: AFP**

IAEA chief says Fukushima water release plan meets global standards

TOKYO — The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency said Wednesday that Japan's plan to release radioactive water from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the environment meets global standards of practice in the industry.

The comment by IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi made during a tour of the facility that was devastated by a powerful earthquake and tsunami in 2011 comes amid strong opposition to the plan from local fishermen and neighboring South Korea.

"Whatever way forward must be based on a scientific process, a process which is based on a scientifically based and proven methodology," Grossi told reporters after the tour.

"It is obvious that any methodology can be criticized. What we are saying from a technical point of view is that this process is in line with international practice," he said.

This is a common way to release water at nuclear power plants across the globe, even when they are not in emergency situations, he said.

The government and Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., the operator of the crippled complex at the time, are considering ways to safely dispose of the more than 1 million tons of water contaminated with radioactive materials after being used to cool the melted fuel cores at the plant that straddles the towns of Okuma and Futaba.

The water, which is increasing at a pace of about 170 tons a day, is being treated using an advanced liquid processing system, or ALPS, to remove most contaminants other than the relatively nontoxic tritium. The water is being stored in tanks on the facility's premises but space is expected to run out by summer 2022. Methods being discussed include releasing the water into the Pacific Ocean and evaporating it, both of which the government says will have minimal effect on human health. But local fishermen have voiced strong opposition to such plans for fear that Japanese consumers would shun seafood caught nearby. South Korea, which currently bans imports of seafood from the area, has also repeatedly voiced concern about the environmental impact. —Kyodo News ■

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (r) meets with International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi at his office in Tokyo on 25 February, 2020. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

'Plastic police': Qatar market promotes sustainability

DOHA — In Qatar, not often associated with zero-waste initiatives, one weekend market is bucking the trend and encouraging visitors to ditch plastic for more sustainable choices.

At the Torba Farmers' Market in northwest Doha, shoppers are encouraged to shun plastic bottles, cups, cutlery and plates in favour of reusables.

"People didn't necessarily have the means or the place to do it before," the market's creative director, Ghada al-Khater, told AFP on a recent sunny Saturday afternoon.

Nearby, expats and Qataris rubbed shoulders among stands selling locally grown produce, buying artisan coffee served in reusable cups brought from home and filling stylish tote bags with hand-baked sourdough bread.

For forgetful shoppers, a stall manned by volunteers hands out free porcelain mugs on condition they are returned, after which they are washed and reused.

Single-use plastic bottles are entirely banned in favour of water stations that provide free rehydration to visitors and their canine friends.— AFP ■

The Torba Farmer's Market in the Qatari capital is encouraging people to sort their waste. **PHOTO: AFP**

Why coronavirus could help save China's endangered species

BEIJING — The novel coronavirus outbreak in China may end up saving one of the world's most trafficked animals after Beijing announced a total ban on the sale and consumption of the pangolin.

The scaly mammal — listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (ICUN) as threatened with extinction — is a traditional delicacy across China and much of southeast Asia.

Following research linking the critters with the transmission of coronavirus to humans in the outbreak epicentre of Wuhan, Chinese officials on Monday slapped a ban on eating wild animals. The measures, intended to halt the spread of the virus that has infected over 80,000 people worldwide and killed more than 2,700, could end up helping a number of endangered species — but only if the ban holds long term.

"I applaud the ban, as we see that the Chinese government is determined to change a thousands-year-old tradition which is so inappropriate in today's society," said Jeff He, China director at the International Fund for Animal Welfare. "I think the ban is an important Step One for wildlife conservation in China." He called for "stronger and more progressive revisions" of China's existing wildlife protection laws. Beijing implemented similar measures following the SARS outbreak in the early 2000s, but the trade and consumption of wild animals, including bats and snakes, made a comeback.— AFP ■

The pangolin, the most trafficked mammal on Earth, is prized for its meat and its unique scales, which are said to have medicinal properties. **PHOTO: AFP**

Environmentalists dressed as canaries protest UK coal mine

LONDON — Activists from environmental campaign group Extinction Rebellion, some dressed as canaries, blocked the entrance to a British open-cast mine on Wednesday to protest against plans to expand it.

The activists have promised three days of action at the Bradley mine in County Durham, northeast England, which belongs to The Banks Group.

One of the few open-cast coal mines left in Britain, the site has been operational since 2018 despite plans for the polluting fuel to be totally phased out by 2025.

Four "human canaries" in wire cages joined scores of other campaigners at the site.

"If things got unsustainable for life underground, the canaries down the mine used to peg it (die) before the miners did," said one protester, who wished to remain anonymous.

"Here we are, trying to stop the coal mine because there's no need for coal."

Others wore yellow hats and scarves, chanting "we are non-violent".

They are demanding that local authorities and the government reject The Banks' request to expand the mine.

The company responded by saying coal was needed for certain industries, and that if Britain stopped producing coal, it would have to be imported from Australia and Russia. — AFP ■

SAS sees limited impact from coronavirus as Q1 loss widens

STOCKHOLM — Scandinavian airline SAS said Wednesday its net loss widened in the first quarter and forecast that the economic impact from the novel coronavirus would be limited, while noting the outlook was "uncertain".

SAS said in a statement that it booked net loss of 861 million Swedish kronor ($88.6 million, 81.5 million euros) for the three months to January, compared with a bottom-line loss of 469 million kronor a year earlier.

At midday local time (1100 GMT), SAS shares were down more than 11 per cent on the Stockholm stock exchange.

In late January, the carrier had said it was suspending flights to Beijing and Shanghai following the outbreak of the coronavirus COVID-19.

It subsequently announced that the suspension would remain in place until the end of March.

Presenting its first-quarter earnings, the company estimated that the cancelled flights would result in a loss in revenues of 200 million kronor.

"As long as the COVID-19 outbreak is contained in scope and the suspension of flights is isolated to the winter season, this should only have a marginal impact on our earnings," said chief executive Rickard Gustafson. But Gustafson also pointed out that "the economic outlook remains uncertain," and that the outbreak of the new coronavirus added "additional concerns regarding a slowdown in key economies."

Speaking to news agency TT, Gustafson also noted that if the situation did not stabilise before the "important summer season," it could have "major consequences for the industry and SAS." First-quarter revenues increased by 3.2 per cent to 9.7 billion kronor, driven primarily by an increase in passenger numbers.— AFP ■

SAS says the economic outlook for the airline sector is "uncertain". **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

Belgium's Solvay to cut 350 jobs worldwide

BRUSSELS — Belgian chemicals giant Solvay, facing difficulties linked to the coronavirus and the Boeing 737 MAX scandal, on Wednesday announced plans to cut 350 jobs around the world by the end of 2021.

The company said in a statement it would axe 500 posts including some in senior management, but create 150 in the advanced materials sector, which supplies compounds to the aviation industry.

Turning to its 2019 results, Solvay announced a 1.0-percent percent decline in bottom-line net profit to 1.075 billion euros ($1.2 billion) last year, while revenues stagnated at 10.244 billion euros.

And the group warned of challenges in the months to come. Results for the first three months of 2020 were "expected to be down by high single digit as a combined result of the 737MAX production halt, the impact of the COVID-19 virus, and the increasingly challenging oil and gas market," Solvay said.

The chemicals giant has ramped up its target for reducing costs by 2024, aiming to cut more than 350 million euros a year.

Previously, it had set itself a goal of 300-350 million euros.

Of the job losses, CEO Ilham Kadri said "it is never easy but it is necessary for the company's competitiveness".

She said it was too early to assess the full impact of coronavirus on the company's business, but that precautions had been taken to protect employees in affected areas including China, which accounts for 10 percent of sales. — AFP ■

Solvay said its bottom-line net profit fell in 2019. **PHOTO: AFP**

French carmaker PSA defies sales slowdown with record profits

PARIS — French car giant PSA Peugeot-Citroen, currently in the process of merging with rival Fiat Chrysler, said Wednesday it shook off a drop in sales to notch up record profits in 2019.

"We have achieved record results in 2019," chief executive Carlos Tavares said in a statement.

The group, whose brands include Opel in Germany and Vauxhall in Britain, booked bottom-line net profit of 3.2 billion euros ($3.5 billion) last year, an increase of 13.2 per cent over the figure for 2018.

Despite a 10.3-per cent drop in unit sales to 3.5 million vehicles worldwide, revenues inched up 1.0 per cent to 74.7 billion euros.

PSA said its operating margin — which measures underlying profit as a proportion of sales — increased by 0.8 percentage points to 8.5 per cent.

In terms of vehicles sold, PSA suffered from its absence from the key US market and a shrinking market share in China.

But the group attributed the modest increase in revenues to an improved product mix and higher prices, which it said helped offset negative exchange rate effects and falling volumes.

Looking ahead to anticipated market developments in the current year, PSA said it forecast a decline of around 3.0 per cent in Europe but no change in Latin America.— AFP ■

Coronavirus to cut Diageo drink sales by up to £325 mn

LONDON — British drinks group Diageo, the maker of Guinness stout and Smirnoff vodka, on Wednesday said the coronavirus would slash annual sales by up to £325 million ($422 million, 388 million euros).

Diageo, which produces also Baileys liqueur and Johnnie Walker whisky, said sales for the group's financial year ending June 30 would be impacted by between £225 million and £325 million owing to the spreading virus.

Operating profit would be hit by between £140 million and £200 million, it added in a statement.

Diageo said "significant disruption since the end of January" to its business in China was expected "to last at least into" next month. "Thereafter, we expect a gradual improvement with consumption returning to normal levels towards the end of fiscal 2020."

Diageo added that in other Asian countries affected by the outbreak, notably Japan, South Korea and Thailand, it expects a gradual improvement in trade throughout the group's final quarter of 2019/20.

"The COVID-19 situation is dynamic and continues to evolve and these ranges exclude any impact of the COVID-19 situation on other markets beyond those mentioned," Diageo said.

"We remain confident in the growth opportunities in our Greater China and Asia Pacific business. "We will continue to invest behind our brands, ensuring we are strongly positioned for the expected recovery in consumer demand," it added.

The new coronavirus epidemic swelled on Wednesday with cases in South Korea surging past 1,000 after deaths soared in Iran and infections appeared in previously untouched countries, prompting dire warnings that the world was not ready to contain it.

The virus has rapidly spread in parts of Asia, Europe and the Middle East, even as the number of fresh cases and deaths decline at the disease epicentre in China.

Diageo shares slumped 2.5 per cent to £28.85 in early trading on London's benchmark FTSE 100 index, which was down 1.5 per cent overall.— AFP ■

Diageo sees the coronavirus hitting its sales this year. **PHOTO: AFP**

A customer looks at vegetables in a supermarket in Tokyo on 16 July, 2019. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

Japan supermarket sales remain weak in January as tax impact lingers

TOKYO — Japan's supermarket sales showed a fourth consecutive monthly fall in January, remaining pressured since the consumption tax hike last year, while a warmer-than-usual winter caused many vegetables to grow faster and their prices to decline, an industry body said Wednesday.

Sales in the reporting month declined 2.0 per cent from a year earlier on a same-store basis, according to the Japan Chain Store Association.

Sales at 10,543 supermarkets operated by 55 companies totaled 1.00 trillion yen ($9.1 billion), the association said. The data reflected the country's sluggish personal spending since the consumption tax was raised in October to 10 per cent from 8 per cent and the effect of the warm winter on sales of food, the main revenue source for supermarkets. Food sales in January declined 0.1 per cent from a year earlier on the same-store basis. Sales of clothing fell 8.0 per cent, and those of household goods sagged 6.2 per cent, the association said. — Kyodo News ■

CCEA approves creation of national technical textiles mission

NEW DELHI — The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) on Wednesday approved setting up a national technical textiles mission with a total outlay of Rs 1,480 crore.

The aim is to position the country as a global leader in technical textiles. The mission will have a four-year implementation period from FY 2020-21 to 2023-24. Technical textiles are used for various applications ranging from agriculture, roads, railway tracks, sportswear and health on one end to bulletproof jacket, fireproof jackets, high altitude combat gear and space applications on another end of the spectrum.

The Indian technical textiles segment is estimated at 16 billion dollars which is six per cent of 250 billion dollar global technical textiles market, according to an official statement.

The penetration level of technical textiles is low in India varying between 5 to 10 per cent against the level of 30 to 70 per cent in developed countries.

"The mission will aim at an average growth rate of 15 to 20 per cent per annum, taking the level of domestic market size to 40 billion to 50 billion dollars by 2024 through market development, market promotion, international technical collaborations, investment promotions and 'Make in India' initiatives."— ANI ■

Hong Kong's budget to fall into red amid virus outbreak, unrest

HONG KONG — Hong Kong on Wednesday unveiled a record budget deficit as it dishes out a HK$120 billion (US$15.4 billion) relief package to shore up an economy battered by the China-US trade war, lingering social unrest and the coronavirus epidemic.

Announcing the annual budget at the legislature, Financial Secretary Paul Chan said HK$37.8 billion deficit was expected for the 2019 fiscal year, which spans from April to March, marking the first budget deficit since 2005, while a record high deficit of HK$139.1 billion was estimated for the 2020 fiscal year.

"I forecast a deficit for the next five years as well," Chan said. "Although a record high deficit is envisaged in next year's budget, I believe that only with such a budget can we help our community and local enterprises ride out their difficulties." On top of HK$30 billion earmarked for job-saving and economy-boosting measures, a HK$30 billion anti-epidemic fund will ease the financial burden for businesses and individuals caused by the new coronavirus epidemic, including tax breaks, social welfare handouts, rental subsidies for public housing, utilities subsidies and a healthcare funding hike.

Cash handouts of HK$10,000 will be given to some 7 million people aged 18 or above, Chan said, to hopefully boost spending and relieve people's financial burdens caused by social unrest in the past months and the epidemic.— Kyodo News ■

Photo taken 8 October, 2019, shows the chamber of Hong Kong's legislature that underwent repair work after it was occupied on July 1 by protesters opposed to an extradition bill. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V MCC SEOUL VOY. NO. (007S)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V MCC SEOUL VOY. NO. (007S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 27-2-2020 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 MCC TRANSPORT (S'PORE) PTE LTD

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V UNI ARISE VOY. NO. (0192-602 N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V UNI ARISE VOY. NO. (0192-602 N/S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 27-2-2020 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of HPT where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S EVERGREEN MARINE (S'PORE) PTE., LTD

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V OCEAN PROBE VOY. NO. (035N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V OCEAN PROBE VOY. NO. (035N/S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 27-2-2020 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of TMIT 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 CONTINENTAL SHIPPING LINE PTE LTD

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V CAPE FLORES VOY. NO. (150 N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V CAPE FLORES VOY. NO. (150 N/S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 27-2-2020 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of AWPT where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA SHIPPING LINES

Phone No: 2301185

Malaysia in turmoil as Mahathir, Anwar vie for power

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysia was plunged into a bitter power struggle Wednesday as Mahathir Mohamad sought to form a unity government following his shock resignation, but old foe Anwar Ibrahim also pushed to become premier.

The shock developments deepened a crisis that began when the ruling coalition — which included both men when it stormed to a historic poll victory in 2018 — fell apart after a failed weekend bid to form a new government without Anwar.

Anwar was Mahathir's designated successor, but he would likely have been pushed out and blocked from becoming leader if the weekend's bid had succeeded.

Their notoriously stormy relationship has shaped Malaysian politicians ever since Mahathir — during a first stint in office in the 1990s — sacked Anwar as his deputy, and he was jailed on dubious sodomy and corruption charges.

They reconciled ahead of the 2018 polls to oust a corruption-plagued coalition led by Najib Razak, but many were sceptical Mahathir would stick to a vow to hand power to Anwar.

Malaysia's King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah hands out packages of fast food to reporters camped outside the National Palace. The king is currently meeting members of parliament to ask who they support as premier. **PHOTO: AFP**

Mahathir, at 94 the world's oldest leader, was appointed interim leader following his resignation Monday, and he appeared initially to have strong support to return as premier.

But backing fell away early Wednesday and rumours swirled Anwar had garnered enough support from MPs for the top job.

Expectations rose that Mahathir might finally cede power — only for the elderly leader to announce in a televised address to the nation that he wished to establish a unity government, and was willing to return as premier.

"Party politics must be put aside for now," said Mahathir. "If allowed, I will try to form an inclusive government, not siding with any political parties."

"If I still have the support I will return. If not I will accept whoever is chosen," he added. —AFP ■

Qatar eyes diplomatic win with US-Taliban deal

DOHA — Providing neutral space for talks on ending Afghanistan's 18-year conflict has boosted Qatar's international profile and helped it defy a painful embargo enforced by neighbours and former allies.

After quietly brokering dialogue between the warring sides in Afghanistan, Qatar is on the verge of reaping a major diplomatic dividend if a deal is signed in Doha this Saturday that would see the Pentagon withdraw thousands of troops.

The negotiations have created incongruous scenes of Taliban fighters-turned-dealmakers rubbing shoulders with guests in revealing outfits in the lobby of a luxury Doha hotel, to strains of pop classics played by the resident pianist.

And Qatar has undertaken the ambitious project during a period of major regional challenges.

Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain cut ties with Doha in 2017, closing their airspace, borders and ports, and severing all trade.

Talks to resolve the wider rift have stalled, after a flurry of diplomacy late last year raised hopes of a breakthrough.

But if it all goes to plan, when the embargo hits the 1,000-day mark on Saturday, Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, will be riding high on the success of the mediation efforts, at a time when he is shoring up alliances and forging new ones. —AFP ■

Qatar has parlayed gas riches into a regional reputation for diplomatic efforts -- as well as a controversial 2022 World Cup bid victory. **PHOTO: AFP**

Modi calls for calm as Delhi riots kill 22

NEW DELHI — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for calm Wednesday after Delhi's worst sectarian violence in decades left at least 22 people dead and calls for a military curfew.

This week's battles between Hindus and Muslims have seen mobs armed with swords, guns and acid raze parts of a northeastern district of the Indian capital.

The clashes, which also left almost 200 injured, were triggered by protests against a citizenship law seen by many critics as anti-Muslim and part of Modi's Hindu nationalist agenda.

They exploded into brutal violence on Monday and Tuesday, with residents forced to flee their homes after seeing dwellings destroyed, a mosque attacked and a tyre market and two schools set ablaze.

"I appeal to my sisters and brothers of Delhi to maintain peace and brotherhood at all times. It is important... calm and normalcy is restored at the earliest," Modi tweeted on Wednesday.

Delhi's chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, a political opponent, called for the army to be deployed and for a curfew to be imposed.

"Police, despite all its efforts, (are) unable to control situation and instil confidence," Kejriwal tweeted.

Fear, anger

Sunil Kumar, the director of the hospital where many of the wounded were taken, told AFP on Wednesday that almost 60 had gunshot injuries and that 16 new patients were admitted on Wednesday. On Wednesday morning residents cleaned out the blackened interior of a trashed mosque, including a charred Koran, burned out during the violence in the Ashok Nagar area.

A video circulated on social media and verified by AFP showed men ripping off the muezzin's loudspeaker on top of the mosque's minaret and installing a Hindu religious flag.—AFP ■

Mobs were armed with swords, guns and acid. **PHOTO: AFP**

Chinese court hands Hong Kong bookseller to 10-year sentence

HONG KONG/BEIJING — A Chinese court said Tuesday that Hong Kong bookseller Gui Minhai has been sentenced to 10 years in prison for "illegally providing intelligence to foreign entities."

The Intermediate People's Court of Ningbo Municipality in the eastern province of Zhejiang said in a statement that Gui, a naturalized Swede who was detained in mainland China in 2018, will not appeal the sentence handed down on Monday.

Gui was a major shareholder of the parent company of a bookstore in Hong Kong named Causeway Bay Books that published and sold gossipy titles about Chinese leaders.

He was one of five booksellers in Hong Kong who suddenly disappeared in 2015, prompting fear that one or more had been kidnapped by Chinese agents and taken to the mainland to be punished for selling books banned in China. Four of the five later returned to Hong Kong after being investigated by the authorities, but Gui served time in China for a traffic accident he was accused of causing in the early 2000s. Even though he was released in October 2017, Gui was not allowed to leave China and was detained again in January 2018. He was seized aboard a Beijing-bound train while accompanied by Swedish diplomats who were said to be taking him to seek medical treatment abroad, according to his daughter Angela, who is in Britain.—Kyodo News ■

UK, France and Germany intensify bid to save Iran nuclear deal

VIENNA — Western European powers stepped up efforts on Wednesday to try to save a 2015 deal to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions — on life support since a 2018 decision by the US to withdraw and reimpose sanctions.

Officials from Britain, France and Germany began a meeting in Vienna — the first since they launched a dispute process over alleged violations by Iran — aiming to persuade the Middle Eastern country to fall back into line with the deal.

The other parties to the deal, China and Russia, are also taking part in the talks overseen by the European Union, with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov saying on Twitter there was still a chance "to stop escalation before it is too late".

In its last announcement in early January, Tehran said it would no longer observe limits on the number of centrifuges used to enrich uranium.

A diplomat who asked no to be named told AFP that no timetable had been fixed for solving the dispute, adding 'we are still far from a result'. **PHOTO: AFP**

It was its fifth step away from the deal since US President Donald Trump's withdrawal, and led to Germany, Britain and France triggering the dispute process on 14 January.

The process spells out several steps, the last one of which is notifying the UN Security Council. UN sanctions would then automatically "snap back" after 30 days unless the Security Council voted to stop it.

'Far from a result'

A diplomat who asked no to be named told AFP that no timetable had been fixed for solving the dispute, adding "we are still far from a result". "We all want to save the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as the deal is known) so that the inspectors can continue their work in Iran," the diplomat said, referring to the inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The Vienna-based UN nuclear agency has been tasked with monitoring the deal's implementation and issues regular reports, the latest of which is expected within days. Western diplomats believe Iran is highly unlikely to heed calls to come back into full compliance without substantial concessions in return — such as an end to US sanctions or Europe taking measures to offset their economic impact.— AFP ■

Riot police used tear gas and flash grenades on the protesters. **PHOTO: AFP**

Greek islanders strike as migrant camp row intensifies

LESBOS ISLAND (Greece) — The Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios and Samos staged a general strike Wednesday, as protests against the construction of new migrant camps intensified.

For a second day, protesters on Lesbos faced off against riot police near the town of Mantamados, close to the site of a planned camp for up to 7,000 people.

Small groups of protesters threw stones and firebombs at the police, who responded with tear gas and flash grenades.

"You're going to die here," a protester shouted as police, as others screamed obscenities at them.

"We are in a wartime situation," local priest Father Stratis told AFP. "(The police) have the weapons, we have our heart and soul."

The regional governor's office has called a 24-hour strike, rejecting the government's plans to build the new camps to replace currently overcrowded facilities where asylum-seekers live in dire conditions.

On Chios, hundreds gathered in a protest at the main square of the island's capital.

There are more than 38,000 migrants crowded into camps on the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos despite an official capacity of just 6,200.

The islanders, who have long complained that the presence of thousands of asylum seekers threatens safety and public health, oppose government plans to build new camps for them there.— AFP ■

Trial opens for US students over Italy police death

ROME — Two US students appeared in an Italian court on Wednesday on the first day of their trial over the fatal stabbing last year of a policeman during a botched drugs bust.

Finnegan Lee Elder and Gabriel Natale-Hjorth are charged with killing newlywed Mario Cerciello Rega, 35, who was stabbed 11 times last July.

The Californians, who had been on holiday in Rome and were teenagers at the time, face life sentences if convicted.

In Italy, the slaying aroused an outpouring of public sympathy for Cerciello, who had just returned from his honeymoon when he was killed. Huge crowds attended his funeral — which was broadcast live on television — where he was hailed as a hero.

"His murder cannot and must not go unpunished," his wife, Maria Rosaria Esilio, said in a statement on the eve of the trial.

"My family has ended with Mario's death because our unborn children and dreams were buried with him," she said.

But the case has also been marked by major blunders — especially the blindfolding of Natale-Hjorth during his police interrogation — and contradictory statements made by the key prosecution witness, Cerciello's police partner Andrea Varriale.

In the aftermath, Varriale said he and Cerciello had been attacked by men of North African descent. He also initially claimed he had been armed.

Both officers were in fact unarmed and acted without backup, in violation of police procedure.

Amid the intense media focus in the case, comparisons have been made to the high-profile trial of Amanda Knox, a US student convicted and later acquitted of a 2007 murder in Italy.

As Elder was led out during a break he looked at his parents and held up crossed fingers.

Elder has admitted to stabbing Cerciello with a 7-inch (18 cm) serrated-edge combat knife he had stashed in his sweatshirt but told investigators he thought he and his friend were being set upon by drug dealers.

The young men and Varriale have given opposing versions of what happened during the 32-second attack in the early hours of the morning, which followed a botched drug deal.

Hours earlier, the young men from the San Francisco Bay Area had gone looking for cocaine in the popular night-life area of Trastevere. Intermediary Sergio Brugiatelli introduced them to a dealer who sold them aspirin instead.— AFP ■

Carabinieri officer Mario Cerciello Rega was killed last July in an altercation with two American students. **PHOTO:AFP**

AFC Cup 2020: Shan United suffers 1-3 loss against PSM Makassar

SHAN United lost to Indonesian club PSM Makassar F.C. by two goals in the Group H match of the AFC Cup 2020 yesterday at the Madya Stadium in Jakarta, Indonesia.

PSM Makassar made an early opening goal at three minutes, and the goal was scored by Giancarlo.

Shan United tried to equalize the goal, but missed scoring opportunities due to misunderstandings between the forward players. The first half ended with a 1-0 score in favor of PSM Makassar. PSM Makassar stayed strong in the second half, with YakobSayuri scoring the second goal for the team at 53 minutes. The goal lifted the team's spirit and they redoubled efforts for their victory.

Shan United attacked back and created goal chances, but PSM stayed strong in their defense. Shan United managed a lone goal at 79 minutes. The goal was scored by Htet Phyo Wai.

The winning goal for PSM was scored by Ferdinand Sinaga just before the match ended, handing the team a 3-1 win over Shan United. — Lynn Thit (Tgi) ■

Myanmar's Yan Naing Oo (white) carries the ball past PSM Makassar player Gatra at the Group H match of the AFC Cup, held yesterday at the Madya Stadium in Jakarta, Indonesia. **PHOTO: SUFC**

Japan-ASEAN U-19 football tourney: Myanmar beat Kagoshima United 7-1

THE Myanmar U-19 national football team secured a huge 7-1 victory over Japan's Kagoshima United (U-18) yesterday in the JENESYS (Japan-ASEAN U-19) football tournament, which is being held in Kagoshima, Japan.

Yesterday's match saw a hat-trick by Myanmar youth player PyaePhyoKhaing.

Both teams played a tough game from the start, but team Myanmar got more scoring opportunities.

The opening goal for team Myanmar was scored by LwinZawMaung at 2 minutes.

Then, at 18 minutes, Yan Naing Lin scored another goal for Myanmar.

Myanmar netted their third goal at 21 minutes. The goal was scored by LwinZawMaung.

PyaePhyoKhaing landed the fourth goal for team Myanmar at 40 minutes.

The first half ended with Myanmar leading by four goals.

PyaePhyoKhaing scored the fifth goal for Myanmar at 55 minutes, and NyiNyi scored the sixth goal at 78 minutes.

Then, PyaePhyoKhaing bagged the seventh goal for the team at 83 minutes. The goal completed his hat-trick.

The Myanmar U-19 team has been placed in Group B for the tourney with the U-19 teams of Cambodia, Timor Leste, and Kagoshima U-18 F.C.

Meanwhile, Group A comprises the U-19 teams of Malaysia, Laos, and a Japanese team.

Team Myanmar will next play against Timor Leste on 27 February.

It will play its third group match against Cambodia on 28 February. — Lynn Thit (Tgi) ■

AFC youth panel member visits Mandalay football academy

AFC youth panel member Mr Peter De Roo. **PHOTO: MFF**

AFC youth panel member Mr Peter De Roo visited the National Football Academy in Mandalay yesterday as part of the AFC Elite Youth Scheme Panel Visit program, according to a statement issued by the Myanmar Football Federation.

The technical director of the Myanmar Football Federation, Mr Eric Abrams, and director of MFF Youth Football Development, U Nyi Nyi Latt, accompanied Mr. Peter De Roo.

The AFC youth panel member is in Myanmar to determine whether the national football academies of Mandalay, Pathein, and Yangon can get an AFC 2-Star Assessment, said MFF officials.

During his visit in Mandalay, Mr Peter De Roo discussed football education based on sufficient training, and focused on stadiums and football aid kits for youths.

The AFC youth panel member will visit the Yangon football academy on 27 February. — Lynn Thit (Tgi) ■

Arsenal must keep Aubameyang, says teammate Lacazette

LONDON (United Kingdom)— Alexandre Lacazette says it is crucial that Arsenal keep hold of fellow forward Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, who has been linked with a move away from the Emirates.

Arsenal's results have picked up since Mikel Arteta took over from Unai Emery in December but they are still seven points off fourth-placed Chelsea in the Premier League.

Winning the Europa League would offer the club an alternative route into the Champions League next season.

Arsenal take on Olympiakos on Thursday with a 1-0 lead after last week's first leg in Greece.

Qualifying for the Champions League would be a major boost to their hopes of keeping Premier League joint top-scorer Aubameyang, who has been linked with a move to Barcelona or Inter Milan. "It's really important (to keep Aubameyang)," Lacazette said at Arsenal's pre-match press conference on Wednesday. "He's one of the best or maybe he's been the best player this season for Arsenal. Obviously I hope he's going to stay."

He added: "I think people should talk more about Auba and what he is doing in the game because he is more than a goalscorer. "He is working a lot for the team defensively and making space for the other striker, Eddie (Nketiah) or me, and I think if we start to win more trophies, people will talk more about what he is doing for the team."

Arteta acknowledged after Arsenal's 3-2 win against Everton on Sunday that Aubameyang had not found it easy to cope with Arsenal's reduced status since he arrived from Borussia Dortmund and he hopes a surge up the table will show the club's potential. Lacazette has been struggling for form in recent weeks and has lost his place to youngster Eddie Nketiah for the past two Premier League games.

He scored off the bench in the recent win over Newcastle before netting the only goal in the 1-0 Europa League round-of-32 victory in Greece last week.

They are his only two goals since mid-December and he has been linked with a move away from the Emirates Stadium.

But the Frenchman said he would not push to leave Arsenal at the end of the season even if they do not qualify for the Champions League. Despite reports he has an agreement with the club that he can leave if they are unable to secure a return to Europe's top club competition, the 28-year-old said he has no desire to move. "I didn't know about this," Lacazette replied when asked about the reported exit clause. "I did not know. Yes, I have a contract with the club so there is no point for me to leave. Everybody is happy with me at the club." — AFP ■