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Friday, 28 February 2020

President U Win Myint witnesses signing 10 MoUs on second-day of visit in India

PRESIDENT U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho attended a ceremonial welcome of India's President Shri Ram Nath Kovind in New Delhi, the capital of India, yesterday.

He also held talks with Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and witnessed signing the 10 Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs).

At 9:30 local time, President U Win Myint met with External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr S Jaishankar at the Taj Palace Hotel and discussed bilateral relations and fostering cooperation between the countries.

The call was also attended by Union Minister for International Cooperation U Kyaw Tin, Union Minister for Transport and Communications U Thant Sin Maung, Myanmar Ambassador to India U Moe Kyaw Aung and officials.

The President, the First Lady and Myanmar delegation attended the welcoming ceremony of his Indian counterpart at the latter's residence Rashtrapati Bhavan.

After taking the salute of



President U Win Myint inspects the Guard of Honour at the welcoming ceremony in New Delhi, the capital of India, yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

Guard of Honour, President U Win Myint inspected it before the two leaders introduced of-

ficials from both sides.

The President and the First Lady also visited the Raj Ghat which is a memorial dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, and scattered flowers on the monument before they signed the visitors' book and exchanged gifts with officials at the memorial.

President U Win Myint and party arrived at the Hyderabad House, a building used by the Government of India for ban-

quets and meetings for visiting foreign dignitaries.

They were welcomed by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and held talks at the Nilgiri Room of the House.

The meeting focused on fostering friendly relations, cooperation in trade, investment, energy, agriculture, education, training assistance of India in skill buildings of English language for Myanmar young

people, aid for socioeconomic development in Rakhine State, national reconciliation, internal peace, democratization processes, support of India government to Myanmar in addressing issues in Rakhine State and promoting collaboration with international and regional organizations such as UN agencies.

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President U Win Myint also put emphasis on shipment of Myanmar pigeon peas, black grams and green grams to India up to 400,000 metric tons, and the Indian PM promised to take priority on the request.

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Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw hears controversial articles in constitution amendment bill



MP U Nai Thiha. PHOTO: MNA



MP U Tun Tun. PHOTO: MNA



MP U Kyaw Thein. PHOTO: MNA



MP U Nay Htet Win. PHOTO: MNA



Major Zaw Win Naing. PHOTO: MNA

THE second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw convened its 14th day meeting of 15th regular session yesterday, and Hluttaw representatives continued their debates on whether to amend or not some articles and sub-articles in the 2008 Constitution.

MP U Nai Thiha from Mon

State constituency 7 supported the amendment of Article 8 for the substitution of ‘Union system’ with ‘democratic federal union’.

MP U Tun Tun from Pwintbyu constituency supported the amendment of sub-article (f) of Article 6 to put the wording ‘in accordance with public con-

sent’ into it.

MP U Kyaw Thein from Rakhine State constituency 7 supported the amendment of Article 8 to meet the expectation of ethnic people for the establishment of a democracy federal union.

MP U Nay Htet Win from Sinbaungwe constituency also

supported the removal of wording ‘disciplined’ from sub-article (a) of Article 405.

Tatmadaw Pyithu Hluttaw representative Major Zaw Win Naing objected the amendment of Myanmar wording for ‘shall’ at the ends of two sub-articles (a) and (b) of Article 226.

The other 25 Hluttaw rep-

resentatives from both military and political parties debated the amendments in the bill.

The 15th day meeting of second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw will be held on 28th February.—Aung Ye Thwin and Aye Aye Thant/Photo : Soe Win Tun

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Proclamation of Myanmar’s Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) Measures

1. In recent years Myanmar has opened up to the international community through an ongoing process of democratization, alongside a multitude of other key reform amidst equally multidimensional challenges. In doing so, the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has taken on a range of regional and global commitments, amongst the most important of which has been to join the fight against money laundering, and the financing of terrorism.
2. With respect to the Financial Action Task Force’s (FATF) anti-money laundering (AML) and countering the financing of terrorism (CFT) designations, Myanmar had been included amongst a list of “Non-Cooperative Countries and Territories (NCCT)” from 2001 to 2006. Subsequently, Myanmar was counted amongst “Jurisdictions with strategic AML/CFT deficiencies” that have not made sufficient progress from 2011 to 2016. In 2017, Myanmar undertook a mutual evaluation, an extensive assessment by regional peer countries that identified areas for improvement in its AML and CFT policies. As part of this process, the FATF’s evaluation methods became more stringent in such a way that not only regulatory standards but also implementation effectiveness, were measured. As a result of the Mutual Evaluation Report (MER) released in 2018, 99 action plans were identified to strengthen Myanmar’s AML/CFT compliance.
3. Myanmar has made significant efforts in accomplishing these action plans through

- the establishment of the AML/CFT Steering Committee chaired by the Vice President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the establishment of consolidated inter-agency task forces to conduct joint supervisions, and the issuance of Presidential Orders followed by specific directives issued by relevant government agencies. With this high political commitment, the Steering Committee managed to overcome deficiencies in legislation within three months of its establishment and has achieved many other tangible results in improving implementation effectiveness. As a result of this progress, Myanmar has managed to accomplish a significant number of action plans identified in the Mutual Evaluation Report, of which only eight now remain to be fulfilled.
4. The FATF has recognized Myanmar’s high-level political commitment to strengthening the effectiveness of its AML/CFT regime. The FATF has also stated that, since the completion of Myanmar’s Mutual Evaluation Report, Myanmar has proactively pursued a number of its MER recommended actions to improve technical compliance and effectiveness.
 5. The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar remains resolute in its commitment to implementing the eight remaining action plans within the next 15 months, and to continuing its reform journey as a responsible member of the international community.

Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism Working Committee

SSB, ILO discuss social security reforms

OFFICIALS from the Social Security Board under the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population and the International Labour Organization yesterday discussed technical assistance from ILO in reform works undertaken by the SSB at the meeting hall of the headquarters of the SSB in Nay Pyi Taw.

During the meeting, the director-general of SSB and the deputy director-general of ILO discussed cooperation with ILO in implementing social security reforms, difficulties, further processes, and technical assistance.

The number of insurance-holder workers in Myanmar has crossed 1.4 million from 700,000 on 1 April, 2014

after the enactment of the Social Security Law 2012. The SSB has carried out reforms to facilitate insurance-holder workers’ access to healthcare services and financial benefits, in keeping with the law, with the ILO’s technical assistance.

The SSB has carried out the ILO-Korea project in the information and technology sector, the ILO-Luxembourg project in the healthcare services sector, the ILO-Vision Zero Fund project in the management sector, and the ILO-Labour Law Reform project in the legal sector. The SSB has also implemented e-services for social welfare payments and payout of social benefits.—Thant Zaw

(Translated by TTN)



Officials from Social Security Board and International Labour Organization hold a meeting in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

President U Win Myint witnesses signing 10 MoUs on second-day of visit in India

FROM PAGE-1

President U Win Myint also put emphasis on shipment of Myanmar pigeon peas, black grams and green grams to India up to 400,000 metric tons, and the Indian PM promised to take priority on the request.

The meeting was also attended by Union Ministers U Kyaw Tin, Thura U Aung Ko, U Thant Sin Maung, Rakhine State Government Chief Minister U Nyi Pu, the Myanmar Ambassador to India and officials.

President U Win Myint and Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi witnessed the signing ceremony of MoUs between the two countries.

A total of 10 MoUs included cooperation for prevention of illegal trades of timber, protecting wildlife, development programmes in Rakhine State, cooperation in medical researches, telecommunications, petroleum products, prevention of trafficking in persons and rehabilitation works.

telecommunications, petroleum products, prevention of trafficking in persons and rehabilitation works.

President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho attended luncheon hosted by the Indian Prime Minister at the same venue.

The President and party then visited the Central Cottage Industries Emporium where they looked around traditional handicrafts such as jewelries and accessories, art pieces and furnishings.

In the evening, the President, the First Lady and delegation members enjoyed a state-dinner hosted by their Indian counterparts at the presidential residence.

In the morning, the President and party visited the India Gate in New Delhi.—MNA
(Translated by Aung Khin)



President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho lay a wreath at the Memorial for Mahatma Gandhi in New Delhi, India yesterday. PHOTO: MNA



President U Win Myint shakes hands with Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in New Delhi, India yesterday. PHOTO: MNA



President U Win Myint shakes hands with External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr S Jaishankar in New Delhi, India yesterday. PHOTO: MNA



President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho visit souvenir shop at the Central Cottage Industries Emporium in New Delhi, India yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

National Complaints Mechanism: MoLIP promises to protect whistle-blowers, victims



Union Minister U Thein Swe attends the workshop on effectively dealing with forced labour complaints under the National Complaints Mechanism in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

THE Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population briefed experts from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and representatives of employers and employees about the National Complaints Mechanism

(NCM) and pledged to protect those who blow the whistle on forced labour. “After resolving complaints, the authorities will provide feedback to whistle-blowers and report the completion of cases

to the national committee. The cases would be put on record systematically and information about the cases would be released to the international community with the permission of the national committee,”

said Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe.

He made the remarks at a workshop on effectively dealing with forced labour complaints under the National Complaints Mechanism. The workshop was held yesterday in Nay Pyi Taw.

The workshop was attended by representatives of the tripartite group formed by the government, employers, and employees; and, representatives from the International Labour Organization.

“To prevent retaliation to whistle-blowers and victims, the ministries concerned have been informed to keep facts confidential while resolving cases,” added the Union Minister.

To fight forced labour, representatives of the government, employers, and employees signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) (2018-2021) in September, 2018.

The project on elimination of forced labour was written in accordance with the DWCP, and the National Complaints Mechanism was launched on 3 February, 2020.

The significance of the National Complaints Mechanism is that representatives of employers and employees are involved in it, U Maung Maung, president of the Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM) told the *Global New Light of Myanmar* after the workshop yesterday.

“We welcome the suggestion of the Amyotha Hluttaw’s committee on 5th February to oversee the National Complaints Mechanism,” he added.

“I am confident that we can eliminate forced labour in the country because the mechanism is comprised of the necessary stakeholders, such as employers, employees, the military, and the Ministry of Home Affairs,” said U Maung Maung. —GNLM

International media crews cover developments in Maungtaw villages

NEWS reporters from local and foreign media groups arrived at the villages in Maungtaw Township, Rakhine State, yesterday, to cover the locals and developments in the areas affected by the recent violence among different communities.

Media crews from Myanmar Now, Eleven Media Group, VOA, CNA, European Pressphoto Agency (EPA), BBC Media Action and Aljazeera met with

Maungtaw district officials and common people in Padin Village, Nyaungchaung Village and Shwezar Village where shelters are constructed with the donations of India.

The government has arranged 36 media tours to Maungtaw area to date since December 2016.—Myint Maung and JT

(Translated by Aung Khin)



Journalists gathering news in Maungtaw, Rakhine State yesterday. PHOTO: THET LWIN SOE (MAUNGTAW IPRD)



Immigration officials conducting national verification process to the voluntary returnees at the Nga Khu Ya Reception Centre in Maungtaw Township, Rakhine State. PHOTO: THET LWIN SOE (DISTRICT IPRD)

Voluntary returnees accepted at Nga Khu Ya Reception Centre, Maungtaw Township

A TOTAL of 16 voluntary returnees including 9 males and 7 females was accepted after the government verification procedures at the Nga Khu Ya Reception Centre in Maungtaw Township, Rakhine State on 25 February.

Ten, out of 16, returnees were then given the NV Cards, healthcare and other provisions.

Deputy Director U Htay Maung, in-charge of the Nga Khu Ya Reception Centre, transferred

the voluntary returnees to the Hla Phoe Khaung Transit Camp where camp in-charge Director U Soe Shwe Aung received and provided them with rice, edible oil, salt and kitchenware.

These sixteen returnees were then relocated to Nganchaung Village in Maungtaw Township through the village-tract administrator.—Thet Lwin Soe (District IPRD)

(Translated by Aungthu Ya)

Five-day watermelon, muskmelon fair to be held at Myaypadethakyun

By Nyein Nyein

A five-day Myanmar Watermelon and Muskmelon Fair will take place between 29 February and 4 March at the Myaypadethakyun in Yangon, according to the Myanmar Fruit, Flower and Vegetable Producers and Exporters Association (MFVP).

At the fair, various kinds of watermelons and muskmelons will be displayed and sold on special offers. In addition, a delivery service will be offered to big buyers.

The fair is being organized with the support of the Yangon Region government, the Yangon City Development Committee, and the Ministry of Commerce.

Besides watermelons and muskmelons, other fruits will be displayed in about 30 stalls at the fair.

"Currently, watermelon and muskmelon exporters are facing difficulties due to COVID-19 (novel coronavirus). The fair aims to support farmers and traders," said U Soe Than Min Din, chairman of the MFVP.

"The coronavirus outbreak has led to the suspension of border trade between China and Myanmar. Therefore, traders have turned to the domestic market and the concerned officials have arranged the fair," he said.

"The fair will serve as a great opportunity to consumers to observe the different kinds of watermelons and muskmelons and the producing areas.

It might help sellers link with foreign buyers," he added.

"Even after the fair, growers and traders will be allowed to continue selling fruits at the site by the Yangon Region government," said U Naing Win, chair of the Myanmar Watermelon and Muskmelon Producers and Exporters Association (Central).

"The authorities have temporarily designated four warehouses of the Ministry of Commerce in Satsan, Yangon and 1.5 acres of land near the Tamway chicken and duck market as points of sale for watermelons and muskmelons. Additionally, the government is also planning to create more points of sale in Danyingon and other local markets for the fruits," he said.

"Only a small volume of melons is being traded currently owing to the coronavirus outbreak, causing the price to plunge by half. Losses have mounted to US\$55 million within one month (27 January to 26 February)," said U Naing Win.

Watermelons and muskmelons will be harvested across the country, except Kayah and Chin states, until May.

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)

Myanmar rice export declines by 3,000 tons in second week of Feb



Myanmar exports rice and broken rice being loaded to cargo vessels. PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR

MYANMAR exported more than 45,000 tons of rice and its broken grains in the second week of February, a decline of 3,000 tons compared to the previous week, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Myanmar exports rice and broken rice via sea and land routes. It ships rice and broken rice mainly to markets in EU and Africa via maritime trade routes and to China through the Muse border checkpoint.

Between 8 and 14 February, the country exported nearly 3,900 tons of rice through the

Myanmar-China border trade camps. Myanmar sent 2,700 tons of rice via the 105th Mile Muse border checkpoint, 620 tons through Chinshwehaw, and nearly 520 tons through Lwejel. Myanmar also exported 1,250 tons of broken rice, worth US\$0.298 million, through the border checkpoints in the second week of February.

Between 9 and 15 February, Myanmar exported more than 25,000 tons of rice, worth \$8.231 million, via the sea route. It also exported over 15,000 tons of broken rice, worth \$0.401 mil-

lion, via the sea route.

Myanmar earned over \$256 million from the export of 894,889.703 tons of rice and broken rice between 1 October and 27 December in the 2019-2020 financial year, according to the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF).

During the period, Myanmar exported over 600,000 tons of rice to 53 countries, earning over \$180 million, while it shipped 290,000 tons of broken rice to 45 countries, earning over \$75 million.—Aye Maung (Translated by Hay Mar)

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Feasibility studies conducted in 4 areas to set up metal industries

By Nyein Nyein

FEASIBILITY studies are being undertaken in four regions and states as part of efforts to implement an iron and steel industrial zone, said U Sit Taing Aung, chairman of the Myanmar Steel Association (MSA).

Studies for the implementation of the iron and steel industrial zone project are under way in Ayeyawady and Taninthayi regions and Rakhine and Mon states. The project is slated to commence three to five year after the studies are completed, he said.

At present, Myanmar's

steel demand is estimated at about 2.5 million tons, 92 per cent of which is imported. The demand is likely to grow to 5.4 million tons per year by 2030, according to the MSA.

Myanmar imported steel worth US\$1.7 billion from foreign countries in the previous FY, MSA data showed.

"If Myanmar can fulfill the requirements of local steel consumption and focus on import substitution, the steel industry will strategically contribute to national interest. Steel consumption is included in calculations of economic growth," said U Sit Taing Aung.

"Having said that, 11 executive members of the MSA have established the MSA Public Company Limited, and they are making efforts to set up an iron and steel industrial zone with a view to reducing the outflow of US dollars, bringing about the development of the steel industry, and assisting in the country's infrastructure building effort," he said.

"We hope the locals near the project area can benefit from it. The industrial zone is expected to create job opportunities for locals and offer vocational training courses," he added.

In addition, the MSA said it is prioritizing responsible business and therefore, it is carrying out Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and Social Impact Assessment (SIA) of projects with the help of experts.

According to the MSA, the government needs to support the steel sector by granting tax relief and land rights, control illegal imports, implement the anti-dumping law, and formulate a steel policy.

"The steel industry is pivotal to industrial infrastructure building. This project needs to

be implemented for future progress of the country's economy," said U Sit Taing Aung.

The MSA will move forward with the development of industrial standards which are compatible with the country and the emergence of a steel library and steel laboratory. The association will work with international organizations for the growth of the steel sector, he added.

China is the main supplier of steel to Myanmar. Iron and steel are also imported from India and the Republic of Korea.

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

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Bago Region prepares for investment fair

BAGO region government held a coordination meeting at its office on 26 February to organize an investment fair. Chief Minister U Win Thein emphasized the crucial role of public-private partnership for regional development.

“Bago Region is strategically located with motor roads and railways. It can be linked to ports. Furthermore, investors can enjoy a tax break for two more years than Yangon, which is part of adequately developed regions (Zone 3) that grant tax exemptions for three years. Bago has been included in the list of moderately developed regions (Zone 2), which enjoy a five-year tax holiday. I hope the fair will bring investments to the region,” he said.

Bago Region Investment Committee Secretary U Ko Ko Lat detailed the preparations for the trade fair, while director Dr Wunna Aung listed the objectives of the fair. The experiences gained during previous investment fairs were also discussed at the meeting.

The event aims to showcase business opportunities, highlight the region’s investment potential, promote foreign investment, create jobs for local people, and build connections between local businesses and their international counterparts.

Meanwhile, the Yangon Region Investment Forum 2020, which was earlier scheduled to be held in February-end for investment promotion in the region, has been postponed to a later date on account of COVID-19, according to the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA).

In a bid to boost investments in all regions and states, investment fairs are being held with the support of the region and state governments.

The DICA has been apprising local and international investors of the latest developments, such as the recent enactment of the new Myanmar Investment Law and investment opportunities.

Investments in Bago Region primarily flow into manufacturing businesses.

More than 80 foreign businesses are being executed in the Bago Region, according to the regional Investment Committee.

According to the Myanmar Investment Law, the region and state Investment Committees are allowed to grant permissions to local and foreign proposals, where the initial investment does not exceed K6 billion, or US\$5 million, as part of efforts to simplify the verification process of investment projects. — Tin Soe/ Ko Htet

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)



Bago Region Chief Minister U Win Thein holds a coordination meeting to organize Bago Region Investment Fair 2020 in Bago on 26 February. PHOTO: TIN SOE

Remains of Japanese soldiers found in Mawlu town



Remains of Japanese soldiers discovered in Mawlu town, Indaw township, Sagaing Region. PHOTO: MAUNG CHIT LIN (INDAW)

A home-owner in Mawlu Town, Indaw Township, Sagaing Region found the remains of Japanese soldiers while digging his yard this month. A team from Japan confirmed the find on 26 February.

According to witness accounts, U Ye Tint was digging in the yard of his house located in Min Yarzar Ward when, to his surprise, he found human remains. He continued to dig and found more remains. As the remains included gold-plated teeth and boots, he and other residents presumed they belonged to Japanese soldiers and informed the authorities.

“On 26 February, a Japanese team led by Mr Katsuyuki Imoto reached the scene and examined the remains. Then, the team gave K600,000 to U Ye Tint. The remains of the Japanese soldiers are currently stored at U Ye Tint’s house,” said U Cheik, secretary of the Mawlu Antiques Preservation Society.

The Japanese team left for Pin Wae Village, where excavations are on for remains of Japanese soldiers. — Maung Chit Lin (Indaw)

(Translated by Hay Mar)

anese soldiers and informed the authorities.

“On 26 February, a Japanese team led by Mr Katsuyuki Imoto reached the scene and examined the remains. Then, the team gave K600,000 to U Ye Tint. The remains of the Japanese soldiers are currently stored at U Ye Tint’s house,” said U Cheik, secretary of the Mawlu Antiques Preservation Society.

The Japanese team left for Pin Wae Village, where excavations are on for remains of Japanese soldiers. — Maung Chit Lin (Indaw)

(Translated by Hay Mar)

Myanmar welcome over 400,000 tourists in January

MYANMAR received more than 400,000 tourists in the month of January. Although tourist arrivals increased by 7 per cent compared with the year-ago period, the number of tourists from China, South Korea, and Singapore declined significantly because of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), according to the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population.

In January, a total of 183,416 tourists arrived in Myanmar via the international airport, 671 tourists came to the country via cruise liners, and 19,958 tourists entered via the border checkpoints on a visa. In addition, 204,137 tourists entered Myanmar via the border controls using border passes. The number of tourists visiting Myanmar totaled 408,182 in the month of January, an increase

of 28,010, or 7 per cent, compared with the same period of last year. The number of tourist arrivals stood at 380,172 in January, 2019.

The number of tourists visiting Myanmar from the West and European countries has fallen of late because of the political situation in the country. However, the number of tourist arrivals from Japan, China, South Korea, and other Asian countries has increased, though the number of Chinese, South Korean, and Singaporean tourists dropped significantly in January this year because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Myanmar welcomed 4.6 million tourists in 2015, 2.91 million in 2016, 3.44 million in 2017, 3.55 million in 2018, and 4.4 million in 2019. —Aye Cho

(Translated by Hay Mar)

Trade Mark Ads Call

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Deputy Information Minister tracks school textbook printings in Mandalay



Deputy Minister for Information U Aung Hla Tun inspects printing jobs of the private printing houses in Mandalay. **PHOTO:MNA**

DEPUTY Minister for Information U Aung Hla Tun visited private owned printing houses, which are producing school text books under tender system, in Mandalay yesterday.

The Deputy Minister and

party looked into the progress in production processes, and also discussed timely completion of the jobs, quality control, fire safety and repository of text books in line with the contracts.

On arrival at the state-owned

printing factory in Chanmyathazi Township, Manager U Bo Hla briefed on production and revenue figures in each financial year.—Min Htet Aung (Mandalay Sub-Printing House)

(Translated by Aung Khin)

News release on ongoing surveillance of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-2019)

1. The Ministry of Health and Sports is conducting surveillance activities on the COVID-19 acute respiratory disease that has spread in China and other nations around the world. Surveillance is carried out at border entry-exit checkpoints, hospitals, communities, and private hospitals.
 2. According to a report from the National Health Laboratory (NHL) (Yangon), the following observations have been made at designated hospitals:
(a) A 23-year old male patient in Muse Township hospital,
(b) And a 32-year old male patient at Waibargi Specialist Hospital
- The lab results of both patients reveal they do not have COVID-2019.
3. There are currently no patients under surveillance as of 8 p.m. on 27-2-2020, and neither has there been any confirmed cases of COVID-2019. Surveillance activities are continued with full momentum. COVID-19 has spread across China and 38 other countries among our neighbours and the world. The public is urged to adhere to the disease protection health information published by the Ministry of Health and Sports.—Ministry of Health and Sports
- (Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

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Uncertainty looms ahead of US-Taliban deal signing

WASHINGTON— Washington and the Taliban are set to sign a deal Saturday to secure America’s exit from its longest war through gradually withdrawing troops and starting talks between Kabul and the insurgents.

The agreement will likely be heralded as marking the start of a hopeful new era for Afghanistan, which has seen 40 years of conflict.

But what happens next is anyone’s guess, with questions swirling around the Taliban’s intentions and Afghanistan once more in the grip of a political crisis threatening to plunge the impoverished country further into the abyss.

The accord, to be signed in Doha, comes after more than a year of talks between the Taliban and the US that faltered repeatedly as violence raged.

While the deal’s contents have not been publicly disclosed, it is expected to see the Pentagon begin pulling troops from Afghanistan, where between 12,000-13,000 are currently based.



The Afghan conflict has become the longest war the US has ever fought. **PHOTO: AFP**

The US has said an initial drawdown over the coming months would be to about 8,600 – similar to the troop level President Donald Trump inherited after his 2016 election win.

Further reductions depend on how well the Taliban honour pledges to start talks with the government of President Ashraf Ghani – who until now they have dismissed as a US-backed puppet – and seek a comprehensive “intra-Afghan” ceasefire and peace deal.

The insurgents are also supposed to guarantee Afghanistan is never again used by jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda and Islamic State to plot foreign attacks – a concept even some of Trump’s closest advisors remain deeply sceptical of.

Saturday’s signing comes after a week-long, partial truce that has mostly held across Afghanistan aimed at building confidence between the warring parties and showing the Taliban can control their forces.—AFP

Assange’s UK extradition hearing paused until May

LONDON — A British judge on Thursday paused Julian Assange’s extradition hearing following four days of intense legal wrangling over Washington’s request for the WikiLeaks founder to stand trial there on espionage charges.

Judge Vanessa Baraitser, who will ultimately rule on the controversial case, ordered the legal teams for the 48-year-old Australian and the US government to reconvene for brief case management hearings in March and April.

The full extradition hearing is then set to resume for three weeks in mid-May, when witnesses will be called and cross-examined, with an eventual ruling expected by August at the latest.

The judge refused a request Thursday by Assange’s lawyers to let him sit with his defence team, and not in the secure glass-walled dock area of the courtroom, when the hearing

resumes.

The one-time hacker has repeatedly stood up and interrupted this week’s proceedings to complain about being unable to hear the arguments or confer confidentially with his lawyers.

“I’m not able to guide them,” Assange said Thursday, in his latest courtroom outburst – which Baraitser has repeatedly advised him against making.

Arguing the current set-up could impinge on Assange’s right to a fair hearing, defence lawyer Mark Summers invited the judge to “permit him confidential, discreet access to his lawyers” by letting him sit alongside them.

“Someone can be in custody in this room without being in that glass cabin,” he said.

But Baraitser refused the application, arguing various “sensible, proportionate measures” – such as Assange passing notes to his team and requesting regular breaks – would ensure he could participate.—AFP

Sri Lankan govt to build first electric rail track in Kandy

COLOMBO — Sri Lanka's Transport Services Management Ministry has decided to build the country's first-ever electric rail track in the central provincial

city of Kandy.

State Minister Dilum Amunugama said that the decision was taken on Wednesday during a discussion on expedit-

ing the railway projects in Kandy and suburbs in order to ease traffic, Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka) reported.

The discussion, held at the Transport Ministry in Kandy, was headed by the transport Minister Mahinda Amaraweera. The transport Minister has advised extending the new railway project to Nawalapitiya.

The new railway track will be laid between Rambukkana and Kadugannawa, from Kadugannawa to Kandy via Katugastota.

The total project would be built using concrete pillars above the existing railway line.

The relevant construction project would be carried out by a company based in Spain, meanwhile, the preliminary phase of the project commenced yesterday.— ANI ■



Representative Image. PHOTO: ANI

US taking issue of possible coronavirus outbreak 'incredibly serious', says Health Secy

WASHINGTON — A day after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warned Americans of coronavirus outbreak in the United States, Health and Human Services Secretary Alexander Azar said on Wednesday that the officials are taking the issue "incredibly serious".

"We are taking this incredibly serious here in the United States. We are doing the most aggressive containment efforts in modern history to prevent further spread of coronavirus in the United States.

We are going to continue taking those measures," Azar said. Earlier, President Donald Trump announced that Vice President Mike Pence will be in charge of his government's task force to combat the spread of coronavirus.

His remarks came during a press conference with officials from the CDC and others to discuss the spread of the virus.

Recently, the Trump administration had also requested the Congress to allocate at least USD 2.5 billion to fight the coronavirus. That funding will go toward public health preparedness, lab-

oratory testing, quarantine costs, the development of vaccines and other healthcare priorities.

As per The Washington Post, the US reported another case of coronavirus on Wednesday, bringing the total number of cases to 60. Accusing the media of stoking fear among people, Trump said, "The risk to the American people remains very low."

According to the latest official data, over 81,200 confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported worldwide, leading to the deaths of over 2,700 people.— ANI ■



Australia has reported 22 cases of the new coronavirus, but none that were contracted or passed from person-to-person inside the country. PHOTO: AFP

Australia warns virus pandemic now 'upon us'

CANBERRA — Australia's prime minister said the country considered the new coronavirus to be a pandemic Thursday, going a step beyond the WHO as he extended a travel ban on visitors from China.

Announcing a national emergency response plan to the contagion, Scott Morrison said he was considering "additional measures" for monitoring travellers arriving in the country.

"We're effectively operating now on the basis that there is one — a pandemic," Morrison said.

"We believe the risk of a global pandemic is very much upon us."

The World Health Organization has stopped short of calling the virus a pandemic, even as the number of new infections outside China exceed those inside the hardest-hit country. More than 2,700 people have died in China and some 78,000 have been infected. There have been more than 50 deaths and 3,600 cases in dozens of other countries. The extended travel ban will come as

a blow to Australian universities which stand to lose \$2 billion in fees as tens of thousands of Chinese students are unable to take up places Down Under. Students stuck in China "have been provided with a range of options", said Catriona Jackson, chief executive of Universities Australia, which represents the sector.

They include postponing start dates, delaying assessments, fee-free deferrals and accessing course content online.

Australia has reported 22 infections, but none that were contracted or passed from person-to-person inside the country.

Morrison's warning comes as he scrambles to burnish his leadership credentials after fierce criticism of his handling of the months-long bushfire crisis.

His government is also embroiled in a deepening political scandal over the funnelling of taxpayer money into areas his coalition targeted in last year's election. One minister has already been forced to resign as a result.— AFP ■

Japan at 'crossroads' on virus outbreak, expert warns

TOKYO — Japan is at a "crossroads" in its bid to prevent a major coronavirus outbreak and may need to reconsider the Olympics if domestic transmissions are not brought under control, an expert advising the government has warned.

Norio Ohmagari, an infectious disease specialist, told AFP in an interview he believes measures being taken by the government can still prevent the virus from spreading more widely, but that the next three weeks will be critical.

"We are now on the cross-

roads for the containment of the COVID-19... within our country," said Ohmagari, director of the department of infectious diseases at Japan's National Center for Global Health and Medicine.

Japan has confirmed at least 186 domestic infections, including three deaths since the outbreak began, and the government has come under pressure for a relatively hands-off approach.

But Ohmagari, who helps advise the government, defended measures, including requesting — but not ordering — the



Japan faced significant criticism for its handling of a cruise ship placed in quarantine after a former passenger contracted the virus. PHOTO: AFP

cancellation of major events, and encouraging teleworking and off-peak commuting.

"If we keep going with what we are doing right now we do have (the) significant possibility for the containment or the elimination of this COVID-19," he said. He conceded however there is still significant uncertainty, which has cast a shadow as Tokyo gears up to host the Olympics from July. Ohmagari said he would want to see domestic transmissions of the virus brought under control before the Games.— AFP ■

China’s lunar rover unveils underground secrets on far side of moon

BEIJING — China’s lunar rover Yutu-2, or Jade Rabbit-2, has helped scientists unveil the secrets buried deep under the surface on the far side of the moon, enriching human’s understanding about the history of celestial collision and volcanic activities and shedding new light on the geological evolution on the moon.

China’s Chang’e-4 probe made the first-ever soft landing on the eastern floor of the Von Karman Crater within the South Pole-Aitken Basin on the far side of the moon on Jan. 3, 2019. After its landing, the spacecraft immediately deployed its Yutu-2 rover,

which uses Lunar Penetrating Radar (LPR) to investigate the underground it roams.

A study conducted by a research team led by Li Chunlai and Su Yan at the National Astronomical Observatories of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (NAOC) reveals what lurks below the lunar surface. As a result of the tidal locking effect, the moon’s revolution cycle is the same as its rotation cycle, and the same side always faces Earth. The research team used the LPR on Yutu-2 to send radio signals deep into the surface of the moon, reaching a depth of 40 meters by the

high-frequency channel of 500 MHz — more than three times the depth previously reached by the Chang’e-3 lunar probe, which was sent to the near side of the moon at the end of 2013. This data allowed the researchers to develop an image of the subsurface stratigraphy of the far side of the moon. “We found that the signal penetration at the Chang’e-4 site is much deeper than that measured by the LPR at the landing site of the Chang’e-3 probe on the near side of the moon,” said Li Chunlai, a research professor and deputy director-general of NAOC.—Xinhua ■

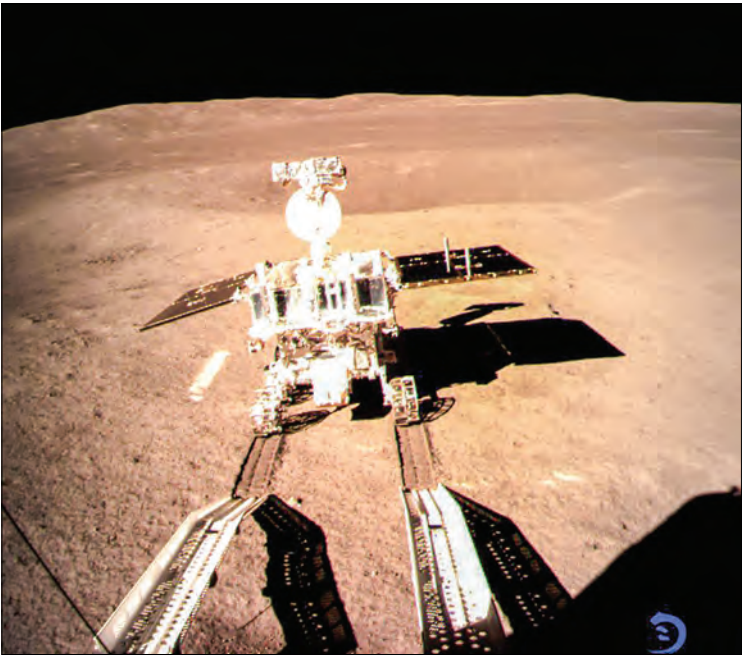


Photo provided by China National Space Administration on 3 January, 2019 shows Yutu-2, China’s lunar rover, leaving a trace after touching the surface of the far side of the moon. **PHOTO: XINHUA**



Earth has captured a ‘mini moon’ but it not likely to be in orbit for long. **PHOTO: AFP**

Earth captures new ‘mini moon’

CAMBRIDGE — Earth has acquired a second “mini-moon” about the size of a car, according to astronomers who spotted the object circling our planet.

The mass — roughly 1.9-3.5 meters (6-11 feet) in diameter — was observed by researchers Kacper Wierzechos and Teddy Pruyne at the NASA-funded Catalina Sky Survey in Arizona on the night of 15 February.

“BIG NEWS. Earth has a new temporarily captured object/Possible mini-moon called 2020 CD3,” likely to be a C-type asteroid, Wierzechos tweeted on Wednesday.

The astronomer said it was a “big deal” as “this is just the second asteroid known to orbit Earth (after 2006 RH120, which was also discovered by the Catalina Sky Survey).”

Its route suggests it entered Earth’s orbit three years ago, he said. The Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory’s Minor Planet

Center, which collects data on minor planets and asteroids, in an announcement said “no link to a known artificial object has been found,” implying it was likely an asteroid captured by Earth’s gravity.

“Orbit integrations indicate that this object is temporarily bound to the Earth.”

Tech entrepreneur Elon Musk said the car-sized object was not the Telsa Roadster he launched into space in 2018, which is now orbiting the Sun.

“It’s not mine,” he tweeted.

Earth’s new neighbor is not in a stable orbit around the planet and is unlikely to be around for very long.

“It is heading away from the Earth-moon system as we speak,” Grigori Fedorets, research fellow at Queen’s University Belfast in Northern Ireland, told New Scientist magazine, and was likely to escape in April.— AFP ■

Cannibalism on rise among polar bears, say Russian scientists

MOSCOW — Cases of polar bears killing and eating each other are on the rise in the Arctic as melting ice and human activity erode their habitat, a Russian scientist said Wednesday.

“Cases of cannibalism among polar bears are a long-established fact, but we’re worried that such cases used to be found rarely while now they are recorded quite often,” said polar bear expert Ilya Mordvintsev, quoted by Interfax news agency.

“We state that cannibalism in polar bears is increasing,” said Mordvintsev, a senior researcher

at Moscow’s Severtsov Institute of Problems of Ecology and Evolution. Speaking at a presentation in the northwestern city of Saint Petersburg, he suggested that the behaviour could be due to lack of food.

“In some seasons there is not enough food and large males attack females with cubs,” he said.

The rise in cases may also be partly due to more people working in the Arctic and reporting such behaviour, he said.

“Now we get information not only from scientists but also

from the growing number of oil workers and defence ministry employees.”

This winter the area from the Gulf of Ob to the Barents Sea, where polar bears used to hunt, is now a busy route for ships carrying LNG (liquefied natural gas), Mordvintsev said.

“The Gulf of Ob was always a hunting ground for the polar bear. Now it has broken ice all year round,” he said, linking this to active gas extraction on the huge Yamal peninsula that borders the Gulf of Ob, and the launch of an Arctic LNG plant.— AFP ■



Russians living in Arctic settlements have sounded the alarm over dozens of bears entering areas of human habitation, particularly to raid rubbish dumps for food. **PHOTO: AFP**

Commercial satellites dock mid-space for servicing mission

WASHINGTON — In a first, two commercial satellites pulled off the impressive manoeuvre of docking with each other, where one of them would service the other.

According to The Verge, if successful, the mission would en-

able the Intelsat 901, to continue its job for five more years. The daring effort can usher a whole new industry to refurbish ailing satellites, consequently reducing the amount of space junk clogging the Earth’s orbit. A vice president at Space Logistics, Joe Anderson,

told in a press conference that “this is the first time in history, a docking has ever been performed with a satellite that was not pre-designed with docking in mind.” “This is the first time two commercial satellites have ever docked,” he further said.— ANI

New Zealand exports to China soars in January

WELLINGTON — Exports to China rose 31 per cent to 1.3 billion NZ dollars (800 million US dollars) in January 2020 compared with January 2019, led by increases in dairy, meat, and logs, New Zealand's statistics department Stats NZ said on Thursday.

This was the biggest increase in dollar value for any New Zealand export market in January and accounted for most of the lift in total exports. Trade data for January 2020 covers the period just before travel restrictions were imposed after the coronavirus outbreak in China, Stats NZ said.

"China is New Zealand's top trading partner and exports have grown strongly over the past three years, continuing into the first month of 2020," international statistics manager Darren Allan said in a statement.

China is an especially important market for New Zealand's top three exports, accounting for more than a quarter of dairy,

about half of all meat, and almost two-thirds of wood exports in January, statistics show.

"We will see any initial economic impact of coronavirus in February trade figures. This may reflect a change in demand because of the extended Chinese New Year holiday and quarantine imposed in some areas in China," Allan said.

In January 2020, New Zealand exported 27 per cent of its total exports to China alone. On an annual basis, 28 per cent of New Zealand's total exports were to China, he said.

Total imports from China in January 2020 were worth 1.1 billion NZ dollars, which is 22 per cent of New Zealand's total monthly imports. On an annual basis, 20 per cent of New Zealand's total imports were from China, statistics showed.

Imports from China make up most imports of all cell phones and computers coming into New Zealand, Allan said.—Xinhua ■

Standard Chartered's 2019 pre-tax profit rises to \$4.2bn



Standard Chartered bank warned income growth will be lower in 2020 because of the coronavirus. **PHOTO: AFP**

HONG KONG — Standard Chartered said Thursday its pre-tax profit rose to \$4.2 billion last year but warned growth for 2020 would likely be dented by the coronavirus outbreak.

The Asia-focused British bank said pre-tax profit surged eight percent in 2019 despite

what the group's chief executive Bill Winters described as "an increasingly challenging external environment".

In a statement attached to the results, Winters said the bank faced low interest rates, a slowing global economy, the US-China trade war and several

months of pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong last year.

And now coronavirus is wreaking growing economic havoc.

"These external challenges will mean that income growth in 2020 is likely to be lower than our anticipated 5-7 per cent medium term range," said Winters, although he described the economic headwinds in 2020 as "transitory".

The results showed greater China and North Asia fared well with three percent growth while Africa and Middle East surged 29 percent and was the bank's fastest-growing market.

Bank chairman Jose Vinals said geopolitics and societal change have become "more uncertain than ever".

"This means that instability and rapid change are becoming the new normal," Vinals added.—AFP ■

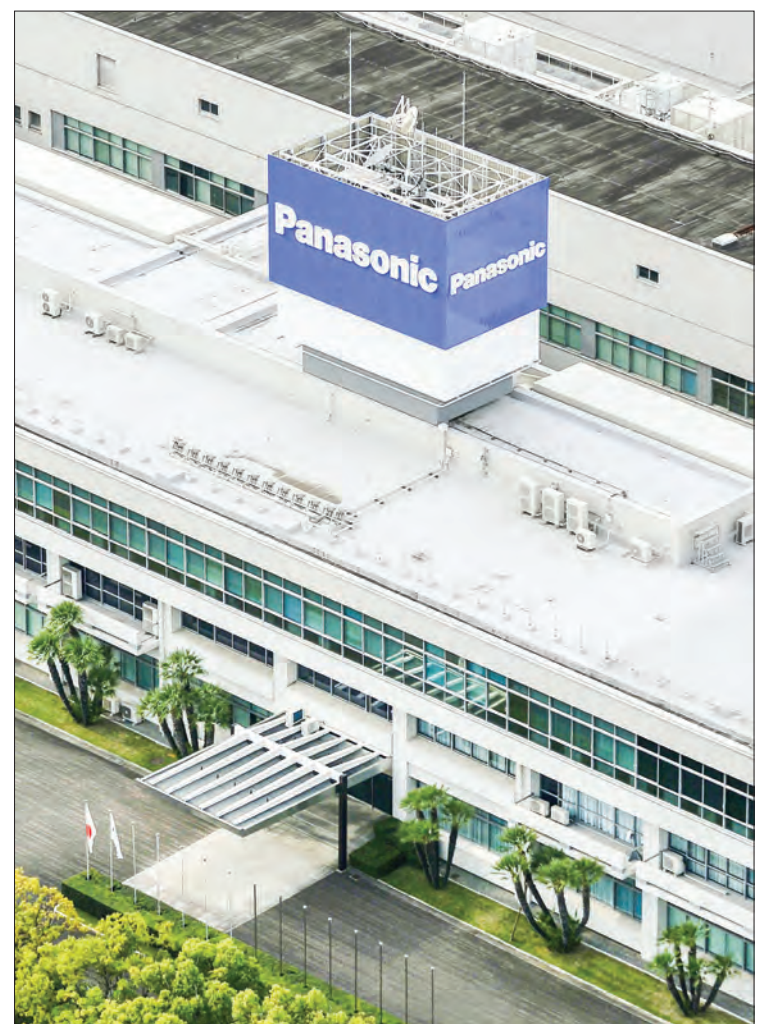
Panasonic to end solar cell production in US with Tesla

OSAKA — Panasonic Corp said Wednesday it will end its joint solar cell production with US electric car maker Tesla Inc. by the end of May and focus on sales of its own brand solar panels in the US market.

The Japanese electronics maker said it will continue its joint production of electric vehicle batteries with Tesla.

The two companies agreed in 2016 to jointly produce solar cells at Tesla's factory in the state of New York. Since then, cheaper products from Chinese manufacturers have been dominating the global solar panel market.

"The decision to transit away from US solar manufacturing in Buffalo aligns with our global solar strategy, our efforts to optimize development and production, and supports Tesla's long-term plans to continue and expand its operations," Panasonic said. Panasonic's EV battery business for Tesla achieved profitability in the October to December period after suffering a series of losses resulting from the huge initial investment.—Kyodo News



This file photo shows Panasonic Corp.'s headquarters in Kadoma, Osaka Prefecture. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**



Fonterra's Hautapu dairy factory, located near the rural town of Cambridge, some 150 km south of New Zealand's largest city, Auckland. **PHOTO: AFP**

US farmers cautious on income, investment: survey

WASHINGTON — A majority of US farmers and ranchers expect flat or lower profits and declining investment in 2020 despite much-touted new US trade agreements, according to a survey released Wednesday.

While farmers are "cautiously optimistic" that the US-China trade agreement and a new North American trade agreement with Mexico and Canada will lift exports, "they are reluctant to make significant investments in buildings, machinery or equipment," said the American Farm Bureau Federation. More than 86 per cent plan to "keep their capital investments to a minimum in

2020," according to a survey of about 300 people conducted by the farm advocacy organization.

The caution reflects in part the impact of higher operating costs, which have risen by 16 per cent over the last decade.

US farm incomes are projected to rise 3.3 per cent this year to \$96.7 billion, due in part to government subsidies, according to the latest forecast by the US Department of Agriculture.

Median farm household income grew an estimated 5.6 percent between 2018 and 2019 to \$76,810 after declining between 2015 and 2018, the USDA said.—AFP ■

Foreign firms in China forecast revenue drop due to virus



Foreign firms in China have seen a drop in demand due to the virus as well as logistics disruptions with millions of people under quarantine or urged to stay indoors.
PHOTO: AFP

BEIJING — Foreign firms in virus-hit China are expecting large drops in revenue, especially for the first half of the year, with some planning to lower their business targets, said trade associations on Thursday.

Close to half of almost 580 firms surveyed by the German and European Union chambers of commerce this month expect a double-digit fall in revenue for the first six months of 2020.

Among top reasons for the hit to business were a drop in demand for products and services, staff shortages, as well as an inability to meet delivery deadlines due to logistics disruptions. Half of those surveyed planned to lower their annual business targets as well. A survey by the American Chamber of Commerce in China, also released on Thursday, said close to half of its 169 respondents expect revenues in China to drop this year if business cannot return to normal before end-April.

About 10 percent said they lose at least half a million yuan (\$71,000) a day.

China has seen a slow resumption of business after an extended Lunar New Year holiday in late January, with firms suspending operations to prevent a further spread of the deadly coronavirus.—AFP ■

Mexico’s central bank downgrades 2020, 2021 growth forecasts

MEXICO CITY — The central bank of Mexico (Banxico) on Wednesday downgraded its growth forecasts for 2020 and 2021, citing slower than expected recovery in domestic demand and US industrial activity.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is now expected to expand between 0.5 and 1.5 per cent this year, less than the 0.8 to 1.8 per cent previously forecast, according to the bank’s report on last year’s fourth quarter results.

Banxico lowered its 2021 growth forecast to between 1.1 and 2.1 per cent, from the previous 1.3 to 2.3 per cent. In 2019, Mexico’s GDP shrank 0.1 per cent, marking the first contraction in a decade, mainly due to a slowdown in global economic growth.

The central bank’s governor Alejandro Diaz de Leon cited “marked uncertainty” for the downgrade.—Xinhua ■

Tech giants free to censor content under US Constitution: ruling

LOS ANGELES — Tech giants including Google are free to censor content as they wish, a US court ruled Wednesday, in a landmark freedom-of-speech case concerning private internet platforms.

The decision by San Francisco’s Ninth Circuit appeals court rejected a conservative news outlet’s claims that YouTube had breached the First Amendment by censoring its content.



Despite its two billion monthly users, Google-owned YouTube “remains a private forum, not a public forum subject to judicial scrutiny under the First Amendment,” according to a US court ruling. **PHOTO: AFP**

The US Constitution’s First Amendment prohibits the government, but not private parties, from censoring free speech.

Despite its two billion monthly users, Google-owned YouTube “remains a private forum, not a public forum subject to judicial scrutiny under the First Amendment,” the court found.

Conservative non-profit PragerU had argued that Google unlawfully limited access to

its videos discussing topics such as “male-female differences,” “environmental issues” and “other topics discussed on university campuses.”

Google had acted “in an arbitrary or capricious manner that provides them with unbridled discretion to discriminate against a speaker based on her or his identity,” PragerU wrote in its original lawsuit.

It pointed to similar videos from more liberal accounts such as BuzzFeed, TEDx Talks and Real Time with Bill Maher which had not been restricted.

But in a written opinion for the three-judge panel, Circuit Judge M. Margaret McKeown said that no matter how many users platforms like YouTube may acquire, they do not become “state actors subject to First Amendment constraints.”—AFP

Notice of Company Name Change
LG Life Sciences, Ltd Registered following herbicide at Pesticide Registration Board of Myanmar and appointed Golden Lion High Tech Agricultural Resources Co., Ltd as a distributor. LG Life Sciences, Ltd was already merged into LG Chem, Ltd in Korea. So we will mention manufacture company name as LG Chem, Ltd on product Label.

Sr.	Trade Name	Active Ingredient	Registration	
			Type	Number
1.	Fluto 10 WDG	Flucetosulfuron	Provisional	P-2019-2334

Any objection regarding to this company name change notice can notify at Co Secretary, Myanmar Pesticide Registration Board, West Gyogone, Insein Township within (14) days.

CHANGING DISTRIBUTOR OF REGISTERED PESTICIDE
This is a notification of the change of distributor of below herbicide, registered by **Bayer AG**, under the Myanma Pesticide Registration Board, from **Bayer Thai Co., Ltd. (Myanmar Branch)** to **Wi Sar Ra International Co., Ltd.** Any objection to this change can notify to Joint Secretary, Pesticide Registration Board, Plant Protection Division, West Gyogone, Insein, within 14 days.

Trade Name	Active Ingredient	Reg. Type	Reg. Number
Lineout 480SC	Flubendiamide 240g/l + Thiacloprid 240g/l	Provisional	P2019-2348

Bayer Thai Co., Ltd. (Myanmar Branch)- PH : 01-8382710 (Ext. 40600)

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
M.V TOVE MAERSK VOY. NO. (008W/009E)
Consignees of cargo carried on M.V TOVE MAERSK VOY. NO. (008W/009E) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 28-2-2020 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of MITT/MIP 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 SEALAND MAERSK ASIA PTE LTD**

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
M.V PRESIDIO VOY. NO. (034W/E)
Consignees of cargo carried on M.V PRESIDIO VOY. NO. (034W/E) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 28-2-2020 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of MITT/MIP where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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Malaysia's Parliament to meet Monday to decide on next PM

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysia's Parliament will meet on Monday to resolve a political impasse that followed Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's shock resignation earlier this week, the interim premier said Thursday.

Speaking to reporters, Mahathir said that King Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin informed him in a meeting that after personally interviewing lawmakers from the House of Representatives, there was no candidate with a

"distinct majority."

"He said the right forum would be the Parliament so the Dewan Rakyat (the House) will be called on March 2 in order to determine who gets the majority support...to be the next prime minister," he said after unveiling a 20 billion ringgit (\$4.75 billion) economic stimulus package to cushion the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

"However, if the Dewan Rakyat fails to find a person with the majority, then we will have to

go for a snap election," he added.

Mahathir, 94, had shocked the nation on Monday by resigning in an apparent tactical move to prevent the opposition from forming a new government with members of his four-party ruling coalition that had jumped ship, leading to the collapse of the Alliance of Hope.

What ensued was an unprecedented move involving the monarchy where the king had to personally interview each lawmaker in the 222-seat



Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad gives a lecture in Fukuoka, southwestern Japan, on 8 August 2019. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

lower house, except Mahathir, over the past two days, to gauge their choice of prime minister. —Kyodo News ■

NEWS In BRIEF

Thai drug smugglers dodge death penalty in Bali

BANGKOK — Two Thai women convicted of smuggling methamphetamine into Bali have escaped a possible death sentence on the Indonesian holiday island after a court sentenced them to 16 years in jail.

The district court in Bali's capital Denpasar said Kasarin Khamkhao and Sanicha Maneetes — a janitor and an operator of a motorcycle rental shop in Thailand — had shown remorse for their crimes and deserved leniency.

The verdict Wednesday comes four months after the pair were arrested by suspicious airport officials who found nearly a kilogram of methamphetamine hidden under their clothes after arriving on a flight from Bangkok. Muslim-majority Indonesia has some of the world's toughest drug laws, including the death penalty for traffickers.

At the time of their October arrest, police said the Thai women could face a firing squad if found guilty.

Prosecutors, who had demanded a 19-year jail term, said Wednesday they may appeal against the lighter-than-requested sentences. —AFP ■

Sonia seeks removal of Home Minister, urges President ask government to protect 'raj dharma'

NEW DELHI — Congress leaders including party chief Sonia Gandhi and former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met President Ram Nath Kovind here on Thursday and sought the removal of Home Minister Amit Shah over Delhi violence, alleging that he "abdicated his duty" and "allowed the situation to escalate through inaction".

The party leaders urged the President to use his powers to ask the central government to protect "raj dharma" so that people were assured of peace tranquillity and justice. In its memorandum, submitted to the President, the party also attacked the Kejriwal government, saying that instead of taking active steps to remedy or diffuse the situation it has remained a mute spectator. —ANI ■

US, S Korea postpone joint drills as virus cases top 1,700

SEOUL — The United States and South Korea will postpone, until further notice, joint military exercises planned for the spring due to the spread of the new coronavirus, the two sides said Thursday.

South Korea has been hit by a rapid rise in infections, with the total topping 1,700 as more than 500 new cases were reported Thursday.

An official of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the postponement was made for the safety of both South Korean and US soldiers, and for the need to contain the epidemic after the nation elevated the alert status for COVID-19 to its highest level.

A number of South Korean

military personnel have contracted the virus, while the US military said Wednesday one of its soldiers serving in South Korea had tested positive, the first case of infection among US service members.

With 505 new cases reported Thursday, the number of infections has reached 1,766, while the overall death toll has risen to 13, according to the Health and Welfare Ministry.

Of the new cases, 422 were in the southeastern city of Daegu, at the center of the rapid transmission of the pneumonia-causing virus. Most cases confirmed in Daegu are linked to a branch of a minor Christian sect known as Shincheonji Church of Jesus.



In a photo taken on 30 June, 2019, US and South Korean military personnel are seen during a visit by US President Donald Trump and South Korean President Moon Jae-in at the Joint Security Area. **PHOTO: AFP**

The latest death case of the virus was a man in his 70s and is still being investigated. —Kyodo News ■

Sporadic violence in Delhi as death toll hits 32

NEW DELHI — Sporadic violence hit parts of Delhi overnight as gangs roamed streets littered with the debris of days of sectari-

an riots that have killed 32 people, police said Thursday.

Thousands of riot police and paramilitaries patrolled the af-

fectured northeast fringes of the Indian capital of 20 million people, preventing any major eruptions.

The unrest is the latest bout

of violence over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's citizenship law, which triggered months of demonstrations that turned deadly in December.

Sunil Kumar, director of the Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) Hospital, said Thursday the hospital registered 30 deaths while the chief doctor at Lok Nayak Hospital said that two people had died there.

"All of them (at the GTB) had gunshot injuries," Kumar told AFP. The new fatalities — up from 27 on Wednesday — were all from the violence on Monday and Tuesday when mobs of Hindus and Muslims fought running battles. Homes, shops, two mosques, two schools, a tyre market and a fuel station were torched.

More than 200 people were also injured. —AFP ■



Police stand guard following clashes between supporters and opponents of a new citizenship law in New Delhi. **PHOTO: AFP**

Syria rebels fight back but army makes more gains

DAMASCUS — Syrian rebels on Thursday reentered a key northwestern town they had lost earlier this month, reversing one of the main gains of the government's devastating offensive in the region.

The counteroffensive could be short-lived however and Russian-backed Syrian troops continued to chip away at other parts of the rebel bastion, ignoring growing appeals for a ceasefire.

The UN Security Council, where Moscow has systematically vetoed truce initiatives, was due to meet again on Thursday amid growing concern Idlib was witnessing the nine-year-old war's worst humanitarian emergency yet.

On Thursday, jihadists and Turkish-backed rebels managed to reenter Saraqeb, a key crossroads town in Idlib province they had lost earlier in February.

State news agency SANA acknowledged that there were "fierce clashes" between the army and "terrorist groups on the Saraqeb front".

An AFP correspondent accompanied the rebels into Saraqeb, where he found a ghost town of bombed out buildings deserted by its inhabitants. The counter-attack by the rebels temporarily reverses one of the key gains notched up by the government since the launch of its offensive against the country's last rebel enclave in December.

Turkish casualties

The cash-strapped government had been keen to fully secure the M5, a highway which connects Syria's four main cities and passes through Saraqeb.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that the air strikes were carried out by government ally Russia, which has come under heavy Western criticism for the high civilian death toll from its bombing campaign. State media accused the "terrorists" of launching car bombings and other suicide attacks against government forces attempting to retake the town. — AFP ■



A rebel tank patrols the streets of Saraqeb, reduced to a ghost town abandoned by its residents after weeks of fighting. PHOTO: AFP



(l-r) Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, Police Chief Alfonso Morales and Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers speak to the media following the shooting that left five brewing company workers dead, plus the shooter. PHOTO: AFP

Five killed at brewery in another US mass shooting

MILWAUKEE — A gunman killed five co-workers at one of America's best-known breweries on Wednesday before turning the weapon on himself in the latest burst of mass gun violence in the US.

More than 1,000 employees were at the Molson Coors brewing complex in Milwaukee, Wisconsin when the early-afternoon tragedy occurred, the city's police chief Alfonso Morales told reporters.

He said officers found the suspect, a 51-year-old local man, dead from an apparently self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Morales later said the suspect was a Molson Coors employee.

Mayor Tom Barrett said five other people, all workers at the facility in the northern US state's biggest city, were killed.

"They thought they were gonna go to work, finish their day, and return to their families," Barrett said at the press conference.

President Donald Trump earlier gave the first official word of the toll.

"A wicked murderer opened fire at a Molson Coors brewing company plant, taking the lives of five people, a number of people wounded, some badly wounded," Trump said at a press conference about the new coronavirus.

US media including ABC News and the local Fox affiliate reported the shooter had been

fired earlier in the day from the beer giant, which owns the Coors and Miller brands.

The local CBS affiliate said the shooter appeared to have stolen the nametag of another employee, then returned to the office complex with a gun. But The New York Times quoted Representative Gwen Moore, a Democrat whose district includes Milwaukee, as saying the gunman was an employee who was in uniform.

Locked in a room

Molson Coors, a Canadian-US company, said it was working with the police department, adding: "Our top priority is our employees." — AFP ■

Bullied Australian boy to donate \$475,000 to charity

SYDNEY — An Australian boy with dwarfism whose distress from bullying became a viral video will donate hundreds-of-thousands of dollars in donations to charity rather than a trip to Disneyland.

The clip of nine-year-old Quaden Bayles showed him crying and repeatedly saying he wanted to die after being bullied at school, sparking an outpouring of support from around the world.

The video was watched millions of times and prompted US comedian Brad Williams to start

a GoFundMe page that eventually raised almost US\$475,000.

Although the funds were meant to send Bayles and his mum to Disneyland, his aunt told Australia's NITV News that the money would be used for charities instead.

"What kid wouldn't want to go to Disneyland, especially if you have lived Quaden's life. To escape to anywhere that is fun that doesn't remind him of his day to day challenges," she was quoted as saying.

"But my sister said 'you



Quaden Bayles' video was watched millions of times and prompted US comedian Brad Williams to start a GoFundMe page. PHOTO: AFP

know what, let's get back to the real issue'. This little fella has been bullied. How many suicides, black or white, in our society have happened due to bullying." "We want the money to go to community organisations that really need it. They know what the money should be spent on, So as much as we want to go to Disneyland, I think our community would far off benefit from that." Australian actor Hugh Jackman and NBA player Enes Kanter were among the hundreds of thousands posting support for Bayles. — AFP ■

MNL Week-8 matches to be broadcast live on free-to-air channels

THE Week-8 matches of the Myanmar National League will be broadcast live on free-to-air channels, according to a statement issued by the league.

The match between ISPE and Zwekapin United, scheduled at 3.30 pm today at Mandalay Thiri Stadium, will be streamed live on MySports' Facebook page.

Another match featuring Southern Myanmar vs Yadanarbon United scheduled at the same time at Mawlamyine Stadium, will

be streamed live on MySports' Facebook page.

The match between Hantawady and Ayeyawady United will be played at 3.30 pm at Patheingyi Stadium, and it will be broadcast live on Fortune TV and streamed live on MySports' Facebook page.

Meanwhile, on 29 February, defending champions Shan United will take on Chin United at Thuwunna Stadium, and the match will be broadcast live on

MRTV and streamed live on MySports.

On the same day, Magwe FC will play against Sagaing United at Monywa Stadium, and the match will be streamed live on MySports' Facebook page.

Rakhine United will take on Yangon United on the same day at Waitharli Stadium.

The match will be shown on Fortune TV and streamed live on MySports' Facebook page. —Lynn Thit (Tgi) ■



Shan United's defender Hein PhyoWai (red) passes the ball from Yangon United's Yan PaingSoe during the two team's MNL derby match at Yangon United Sports Complex on 22 February. **PHOTO:SUFC**

New generation referee course to be opened in March



FIFA recognized referees (with blue uniforms) seen at an AFC Cup match at Thuwunna Stadium in Yangon. **PHOTO:MFF**

A referee training course designed for youths will be conducted at the Thuwunna Stadium in Yangon from 24 to 30 March, according to the Myanmar Football Federation.

Those who want to take the course will need to meet some requirements set up by MFF officials. Interested individuals can be from anywhere in Myanmar,

healthy in mind and body, under 30 years of age and not required to wear glasses, officials said.

Those who complete the course should be willing to serve their duties in any committee of referees in any State and Region.

Qualified referees will then be selected from the duty serving course finishers for assigning as Myanmar National League refer-

ees, or possibly as FIFA-recognised referees after completion of foreign referee courses, said an MFF official.

For further information, contact the official at 09-420128064 complete the submission process no later than 20 March, according to the Myanmar Football Federation. —Lynn Thit (Tgi) ■

Liverpool post healthy profit despite transfer spending

LONDON — Premier League leaders Liverpool made a pre-tax profit of £42 million (US\$54 million) last year despite a record £223 million investment on players, figures showed on Thursday (Feb 27).

While that top line is well below the record £125 million profit for the year ending May 2018, the rewards are being felt on the pitch, with the club just four victories away from winning their first league title in 30 years.

Figures released for the financial year to May 31, 2019

incorporate the big-ticket purchases of Alisson Becker, Naby Keita, Fabinho and Xherdan Shaqiri.

They also include the increased costs of new contracts for 11 players, including those for captain Jordan Henderson, Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane, who have all played a key role in helping Jurgen Klopp's champions-elect establish a 22-point lead at the top of the table. Some of that cost was offset by sales including Danny Ings, Dominic Solanke and Danny Ward. —AFP ■



Liverpool have announced healthy financial results as they close in on the Premier League title. **(PHOTO: AFP/PAUL ELLIS)**

Premier League to launch Hall of Fame to honour former players

LONDON — The Premier League on Thursday announced its plan to launch its official Hall of Fame, which will recognise and celebrate the exceptional skill and talent of players who have graced the competition since its inception in 1992.

Membership of the Premier

League Hall of Fame will be the highest individual honour awarded to players by the League. The first two inductees to have their careers commemorated in the Premier League Hall of Fame will be revealed at a special event on March 19. A shortlist of nominees will also be announced at the

same time, with fans invited to vote to help select the additional former players to join the Premier League Hall of Fame 2020.

"Since 1992, the Premier League has been home to world-class players who have defined generations and provided us with compelling football season after

season," Premier League Chief Executive Richard Masters said.

"A place in the Premier League Hall of Fame is reserved for the very best. It will be an occasion for our fans around the world to look back over the years and help us celebrate some truly exceptional playing careers," he

added. To be eligible for the Premier League Hall of Fame, players must be retired, and only a player's Premier League career is considered in their candidacy. Each inductee will receive a personalised medallion, engraved with the year of their induction. —ANI ■