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Friday, 22 May 2020

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw discusses referendum postponement, loan proposals of President's Office



Pyidaungsu Hluttaw discusses charter amendments and loan programmes at second day meeting of 16th regular session yesterday. **PHOTO:MNA**

PYIDAUNGSU Hluttaw held its second day meeting of 16th regular session yesterday, with discussions of Union-level organizational members on postponement of referendum to amend some provisions in the 2008 Constitution and the loan proposals sent by the President's Office.

Union Election Commission member U Than Aung discussed the postponement of the referendum for amendments of provisions 32 (a) and 32 (b) in the 2008 Constitution as the changes will have no significant effects on the national affairs, the government activities and the Hluttaw sectors while the cost of referendum is estimated at K14.646 billion.

The Hluttaw approved the postponement of referendum.

The President's Office also

tabled proposals through the members of Union-level organizations to reorganize village-tracts and villages in regions and states.

Deputy Minister for Border Affairs Maj-Gen Than Htut proposed to acquire loans of K2099.31 million budget allocation for the ministry under the Union Budget.

Deputy Minister for Planning, Finance and Industry U Maung Maung Win and Deputy Governor U Bo Bo Ngal from the Central Bank of Myanmar tabled a proposal for getting K 1311.064 billion from the Central Bank of Myanmar for remedy of Union government's account in 2019-2020 financial year.

The Deputy Minister also discussed getting Japanese yen 30 billion from the JICA to alleviate socioeconomic impacts resulted by the COVID-19 and to support economic policy reform of the

country.

He also asked to get US\$60 million from the Asian Development Bank to set up loan insurance corporation for the development of SMEs in Myanmar.

The Deputy Minister then discussed signing of Myanmar in MoU to activate the agreements on relaxing the 8th round of ASEAN financial services.

Deputy Minister for Construction Dr Kyaw Lin and Deputy Minister for Planning, Finance and Industry submitted a motion to get \$20 million loan from the Economic Development Cooperation Fund of the South Korea for expanding Myanmar-Korea Friendship Bridge (Dala).

Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe and Deputy Minister U Maung Maung Win also reported to get Euro 33 million loan with

no interest from the Unicredit Bank of Austria for electronic registration of population to be implemented by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population.

These proposals were agreed to discuss on 26 and 27 May. The proposal of President's Office to get the \$50 million loan from International Development Association for health response emergency project was discussed by 11 Hluttaw representatives.

The Deputy Minister for Planning, Finance and Industry read out the report on annual report on national planning put forward by the Union government.

Daw Shwe Shwe Sein Latt read out recommendations and remarks on this report for discussions at the Hluttaw.

Deputy Minister U Maung Maung Win presented the an-

nual report on Union budget for 2018-2019FY, sent by the Union government.

Secretary of Joint Public Accounts Committee's Secretary U Khin Maung Than read out findings and recommendations of their committee.

The Hluttaw MPs also discussed activities of Myanmar Investment Committee in 2018-2019FY. MP U Khin Cho from Hlaingbwe constituency advised to take measures on maintaining foreign investors, although new investments could not be expected during the economy and income declines worldwide.

The report was discussed by the six MPs and the third-day meeting of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw will be organized on 22 May.—Aung Ye Thwin and Aye Aye Thant

(Translated by Aung Khin)

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Commerce Minister talks with Chinese ambassador to foster bilateral trade

UNION MINISTER for Commerce Dr Than Myint discussed with Chinese ambassador to Myanmar Mr Chen Hai about improvement of trade sector between the two countries.

Their online video conferencing focused on Myanmar's responses to economic and social impacts from COVID-19 disease, including forming a committee led by the State Counsellor in March, and working together with neighbouring countries and international organizations.

He also expressed his appreciation on China for its coordination in this disease control and normality of border trade for rice, beans, corns and cattle.

Both sides also discussed the acceleration of establishment of Muse-Ruili trade zone, and promotion of bilateral trade under the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor signed by Chinese President Mr Xi Jinping during his visit to Myanmar, Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone and deep seaport projects.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

Women's Affairs Federation donates PPE, face masks to NVSC



Union Minister Dr Win Myat Aye receives masks worth of K4 million donated by fourth batch alumni of University of Medicine, Magway. **PHOTO: MNA**

THE Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation supplied 200 personal protective equipment (PPE) and 5,000 face masks to the National Volunteers Steering Committee at the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Students and volunteers from Suu Vocational Institute (Shwepyitha) donated 7, 000 cloth masks for IDP camps, and 100 sets of surgical gown for volunteers who are paying their services in quarantine centres.

On 20 May, U Hoke San and Daw Kyin Kyin Yi, U Ohn Kyin, U Than Htay Aung and Ma Cho Cho Win, Ko Kyaw Kyaw Aung and Ma Khin Moe Moe, Dr Moe Myat Tun and Dr Lin Lin Khaing, Dr Aung Zaw Lin and Dr Ei Mon Mon Kyaw (Moe Moe Kyaw family) donated K3 million worth of face masks, while fourth batch alumni of the University of Medicine, Magway, donated K 4 million worth of face masks.

Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Dr Win Myat Aye received the relief items, and presented back certificates of honour to the donors. — MNA

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Office of the President
Order 15/2020
15th Waning of Kasone 1382 ME
(21 May 2020)

Taninthayi Region High Court
Judge appointed

In accordance with the provisions stated in article 308 (b), sub-section (4) of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Section 82 (d) of Union Government Law, Section 45 of Union Judiciary Law and Section 18 (d) of Region or State Government Law, Daw Cho Mar Myint has been appointed as Taninthayi Region High Court Judge.

Sd/ Win Myint
President
Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Sharing experiences on
provisional measures of ICJ
to be rebroadcast today

The talk show on 27 January sharing experiences of Myanmar delegation members, who heard provisional measures of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), will be broadcast again on Myanma Radio and Television and the Myanma Radio at 7 pm today.

The talk show was participated by the delegation member U Kyaw Tint Swe, Union Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor and party and coordinator U Ko Ko (YIT). — MNA

(Translated by TTN)

Trade Mark Ads

Call Thin Thin May, 09251022355, 09974424848

Nantha Island and Mayyu Estuaries awarded Ramsar Site status

THE Ramsar Convention, also known as the Convention on Wetlands, inscribed Myanmar's Nantha Island and Mayyu Estuaries as a Ramsar Site on 22 May, according to the convention's secretary office.

The proposal to list as a Ramsar site was submitted by the Forest Department and the Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA) with the approval from Rakhine State government.

The Nantha Island and Mayyu Estuaries, located between Yathedaung and Sittway townships in Rakhine State, measures 3,608 hectares (about 8,916 acres).

It has a variety of animal species including endangered birds. It is also a habitat for endangered sea turtles.

The Nantha Island and Mayyu Estuaries met five of nine Ramsar site criteria, and was listed as a Ramsar site. The five Ramsar criteria the Nantha and Mayyu met are as follows;

- (1) It contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region.
- (2) It supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.

SEE PAGE-7



Myanmar's Nantha Island is a habitat of endangered species including sea turtles. **PHOTO: MNA**

"People are the key"

Union Information Minister Dr Pe Myint inspects MRTV

UNION Minister for Information Dr Pe Myint visited the Myanma Radio and Television to look into its ongoing works and safety measures of staff members against the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the coordination meeting, the Union Minister made an opening remark for the staff to work together to overcome difficulties in ordinary works and in their duties not to be infected by the viral disease.

U Ye Naing, Director-General of MRTV, briefed on duty rosters of employees, 21-days quarantine for the staff members after they arrived back from leaves, awareness programmes, the visit of COVID-19 inspection team, information and educational programmes and covering Hluttaw meetings.

Permanent Secretary U Myo Myint Maung and officials then discussed the works of minister office and relevant departments.

The Union Minister also viewed preparatory measures of MRTV ahead of 2020 General Election, and the ‘Electoral Knowledge Programme’.

The Union Minister and party then looked around the process of pre-productions, post-productions and disinfections at the Studio Hall.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)



Union Minister for Information Dr Pe Myint and senior officials look into the works at MRTV yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

Myanmar returnees arrive back from Singapore, Viet Nam



Relief flights from Singapore and Viet Nam landed with Myanmar citizens at Yangon International Airport yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

A total of 145 citizens in the fifth group from Singapore by the Myanmar National Airlines and 9 nationals by Vietjet Air of Viet Nam arrived back to Myanmar yesterday afternoon.

On arrival of the repatriation flights at the Yangon International Airport, officials from the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, the Ministry of Health and Sports, and the Yangon Region government helped for their 21-days quarantine period at the designated places and the respective hotels in line with the regulations of immigration and medical checks.

As per the directives of National-Level Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and in coordination with other relevant ministries in Myanmar and the Myanmar embassies in respective countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs arranged relief flights which have brought back from foreign countries.

A total of 2,037 people have been repatriated to Myanmar until now.—MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)

COVID-19 in Myanmar

Updated at 8 pm 21 May 2020

No new case

Total: now 199

1. Result on testing of 160 samples at the Department of Medical Research and 188 samples in the first group at the National Health Laboratory (Yangon), totalling 348 on 21 May afternoon showed **No new cases**.

2. There are a total of 199 confirmed cases in Myanmar up to 8:00 pm on 21 May.

3. A total of 108 old cases were tested negative two consecutive times up to 21 May. Among them, 101 persons have been discharged from the hospital and they will be kept isolation at the designated places.

4. The total death toll remains at 6.

5. There are a total of 38 new persons under investigation in the past 24 hours from 12 noon of 21 May.

Ministry of Health and Sports
(Translated by Aung Khin)

COVID-19 Laboratory results at 8 pm, 21 May 2020

Samples tested at Department of Medical Research on 20 May	160
Samples tested in first group at National Health Laboratory (Yangon) on 20 May	188
COVID-19(SARS-CoV-2)	0

COVID-19 Situation Report at 8 pm, 21 May 2020

	New	Total
Number of COVID-19 confirmed cases	0	199
Number of recovered persons	0	108
Number of Death	0	6

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Myanmar AJINOMOTO donates products to 2 philanthropic organizations

By Nyein Nyein

JAPANESE seasoning Company Myanmar AJINOMOTO Foods Co., Ltd donated its products to the two leading philanthropic organizations — Khit Thit foundation and Wai Lu Kyaw foundation yesterday.
The company has donated 2,000 sachets of AJINOMOTO 50g seasoning powder, and 7,200 sachets of Birdy Super Creamy Coffee to each charity.
“Due to the pandemic, many families are facing difficulties to manage their daily necessities. We believe that AJI-NO-MOTO is one of the necessary products for Myanmar people and that is why we decided to donate our products to the two leading philanthropy organizations,” said Mr Katsutoshi Saito, managing director of the company, at the donation event. As Myanmar has investment potentials, the company will expand the business in the



Japanese seasoning company Myanmar AJINOMOTO Foods Co., Ltd donate its products to the two leading philanthropic organizations in Myanmar. PHOTO:PHOE KHWAR

country, he continued.
Khit Thit foundation is actively participating in the coronavirus prevention, control and treatment measures. It has been contributing the medical supplies in the clinics and hospitals. Additionally, the foundation is donating the

food supply to the lower-income group.
“We will contribute the products donated by Myanmar AJINOMOTO to the people in need,” said Ko Zeyar Tun, public relation officer of Khit Thit foundation. The company is strictly

following the health guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Sports on the coronavirus pandemic. Myanmar AJINOMOTO will make further donations to people facing difficulties across the country.
(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Markets reopen in second phase of easing stay home restrictions in Mandalay

UNDER the phase by phase relaxing of stay home restriction programme, markets in Mandalay reopened yesterday. Mandalay Zaycho, Yadanarbon and Man Myanmar Plaza have resumed their services in the second phase, according to Mandalay City Development Committee (MCDC).
Out of over 40 markets in Mandalay, Zay Cho, Man Myanmar Plaza and Yadanarbon markets conducted preventive

measures of coronavirus on 16 May to be able to reopen the markets systematically. Then, the market committees conducted scrutinizing and allowed the markets to reopen, according to MCDC.
Those reopened markets must follow the rules and regulations of coronavirus disease prevention adopted by the Ministry of Health and Sports. According to the rules, the markets must be well ventilated, keep walking

space for social distancing, restrict the workers’ number and keep the hand gel. The markets must be opened only from 8 am to 4 pm.
With the reopening of the markets, authorities will allow the tucks to park free of charge only for half an hour for loading and unloading the cargoes in 84th Street. Moreover, the roads in Zay Cho area have been changed into two-way roads in order to prevent the traffic congestion at

84th street between 26th and 28th Streets. If the trucks are parked for more than half an hour, there will be the imposition of fines.
After the opening of the shops in the market, the authorities of MCDC will inspect these shops whether they follow the rules or not. If they do not follow the rules, the shops will be banned from reopening. —Aye Maung
(Translated by Hay Mar)

Fruit sellers at Popa market unhappy with low number of buyers

WITH the number of buyers declining in fruit shops at Popa

market in Kyaukpadaung Township, in Mandalay Region, the

shopkeepers are selling their fruits, having to rely only upon the buyers from Kyaukpadaung town, said Daw Ah Mar Sein, a fruit shop owner at Popa market.
With the outbreak of coronavirus, in Mount Popa in Kyaukpadaung Township, the number of those buying fruits has declined at Popa market. We are selling the fruits only to the local people of Kyaukpadaung town and nearby villages.
The fruit shops in Popa market are selling grapefruits, Seintalone mangoes, E2 R2 mangoes, Mya Kyauk mangoes, Padamyar Ngamauk, soft and hard jackfruits, Pheegyan

bananas, guavas, dragon fruits and magnolia champaca flowers produced from Popa. However, there are only a few buyers in the market. Popa mountain is always crowded with the local and foreign pilgrims the whole year. When the outbreak of coronavirus disease started, only a few pilgrims reached the mountain.
On 25 March 2020, Popa mountain was closed to pilgrims temporarily. The shops from Popa mountain are relying upon the local residents, said U Win Hlaing, a member of the Popa mountain board of trustees. — Ko Htein (Ngathayouk)
(Translated by Hay Mar)



A fruit shop seen in Popa. PHOTO: KO HTEIN (NGATHAYOUK)

EFR Public Company to debut on YSX on 28 May

THE Ever Flow River Group Public Co. Ltd (EFR) will be listed on the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) on 28 May 2020 at the base price of K2,300 per unit and its share trading will be made on the same day, said YSX Senior Executive Manager U Thet Tun Oo.

The upper limit price is set at K2,800 while the lower is at K1,800. If investors place a market order, it can be matched between the upper and lower limit price based on the balance of supply and demand.

Earlier, EFR was supposed to debut on the YSX 20 March, yet it postponed the listing date due to the spread of coronavirus pandemic.

EFR would be the sixth public company to list on the exchange. As per the company's profile, EFR is a fully integrated logistics service provider. There are seven subsidiaries, one affiliate, and two project companies operating under the management of the EFR Group of Companies.

Shares of five listed companies — First Myanmar Investment (FMI), Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings (MTSH), Myanmar Citizens Bank (MCB), First Private Bank (FPB), and TMH Telecom Public Co. Ltd — are being currently traded



Visitors seen at Yangon Stock Exchange in downtown Yangon. PHOTO- PHOE KHWAR

on the stock exchange. As of 21 May 2020, the share prices of FMI were closed at K10,500 per unit, MTSH at K3,750, MCB at K8,200, FPB at K23,500 and TMH at K2,750.

Usually, over K60 million worth shares were traded on the exchange every day. The coronavirus impacts cool down the market at the present time.

In 2016, shares of only three companies were traded on the YSX — FMI, MTSH and MCB. One more public company, FPB

was listed on the YSX in 2017. In 2018, TMH Telecom Public Co. Ltd debuted on the exchange.

More than 2.5 million shares of three listed companies were traded on the YSX in 2016, and their value was estimated at K70 billion. In 2017, despite an increase in the stock trading volume to 2.6 million shares, the trade value was only K22 billion. In 2018, 2.3 million shares of five companies, worth K11.5 billion, were traded on the exchange. A total of 2.4 million

shares worth K13.39 billion were traded on the YSX in 2019, a significant increase compared to the previous year, according to the annual report released by the exchange.

In January 2020, 196,836 shares worth K1.25 billion were traded on the exchange while 188,919 shares, with an estimated value of K1.48 billion, were traded on the exchange in February and 228,913 shares valued K1.42 billion were traded in March respectively. The value

of shares traded on the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) in April touched the lowest of K902 million with 173,808 shares being traded, due to the long market holidays during Thingyan and coronavirus consequences, the exchange's monthly report showed.

The YSX was launched three years ago to improve the private business sector. It disseminates rules and regulations regarding the stock exchange and knowledge of share trading through stock investment seminars.

To boost the trading, the YSX has doubled its stock trade matching time from two to four per day last year. The exchange launched 7 times matching per day on 26 March 2020.

In addition to this, it has held promotional events to attract new investors and encourage existing investors to trade more actively. The stock exchange has also sought the government's support to get more public companies to participate in the stock market and help more institutional investors, such as financing companies, investment banks, and insurance companies, to emerge. — Ko Htet

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Low foreign demand leads to price drop of butter bean during pandemic

THE butter bean prices are declining in the domestic market on the back of falling demand from the foreign markets, according to Mandalay pulses and beans market.

In April, butter bean fetched about K17,000 per basket. This month, it plunged to K13,500 per basket. The price is possible to extend the drop as the foreign demand is extremely low amid the coronavirus pandemic, the traders said.

"Butter bean export to China, Japan and European markets are falling. Now, it is relying only on the domestic market," said a trader from Mandalay market.

The butter bean growers in Pwintbyu Township, Magway Region have been suffering losses since the



Merchants evaluate quality of various categories of beans at the Bayintnaung Commodity Wholesale Centre. PHOTO: AUNG PHYO KYAW

harvest time as the price plunged nearly by half against a-year ago period, said the growers.

Last year, it fetched a good price of K37,000 per basket. In light of this, they mainly cultivated butter beans this year's winter. At the harvest time, it was priced at K20,000 per basket only, resulting in losses to the growers. The price is

extending its drop in the market due to low demand from external markets, said U Than Tun Oo, butter bean grower from Yawsu village-tract in Pwintbyu Township. Myanmar exports about 75 per cent of butter bean production to foreign markets — Japan, China, Denmark, Singapore, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, China (Taipei)

and Viet Nam, with an export volume of 15,000-30,000 tonnes per year.

There are over 160,000 acres of butter bean plantation both in winter and monsoon crop seasons. The butter beans are grown in June and July for monsoon growing season and harvested in October and November. The winter season is in October/November and harvest time from January to March.

The butter beans are primarily cultivated in Sagaing, Bago, Magway, Mandalay and Ayeyawady regions and Mon and northern Shan states. Magway Region produces good-quality butter beans and Japan buyers prefer them. —Ko Htet

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Myanmar-India border trade drop by \$43.58 mln in 2019-2020FY

BILATERAL trade between Myanmar and India via land borders amounted to US\$76.64 million as of 8 May of this fiscal year, according to the latest statistics released by the Ministry of Commerce.

The Myanmar-India total border trade during the period was shared by Myanmar's export of \$74.79 million and its import of \$2.35 million. The current trade value is over \$43.58 million less than that of the same period of last fiscal year's total of \$120.22 million.

Myanmar-India trade is conducted through the Tamu, Reed and Kenglap border points of entry as well as shipping.

Trade volume via Tamu border as of 8 May

in this FY totalled \$35.95 million, with exports valued at \$35.61 million and imports \$0.34 million.

In the same period, the total trade volume via the Reed border stood at \$40.28 million, with exports valued at \$38.27 million and imports \$2.01 million and the export volume via Kenglap border valued \$0.411 million.

Myanmar chiefly exports agricultural products, marine products, and forestry products to the Indian market. Imports from India include medicines and medical equipment, consumer goods, electronic appliances, and other commodities. —Zwe

(Translated by Hay Mar)

China's future prospects beyond COVID-19 crisis

By Nay Soe Oo

THE National People's Congress of the Chinese Communist Party is going to be convened on 22 May, according to the official announcement issued by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The meeting is the outcome emerged from the summit comprising the leaders from the NPC and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the top political advisory board.

Although the annual meeting of the NPC, the country's major political dialogue is usually held in March, it has been postponed as it is timed to coincide with the global pandemic COVID-19 crisis cropping up in the country. Such decision made to hold the NPC seems like the trust China has shown to defeat the COVID-19 outbreak.

Successful containment of the coronavirus

The coronavirus started in Wuhan in Hubei Province, the People's Republic of China in late 2019 spread the entire world within three months. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus is recognized as the global pandemic COVID-19. China has made concerted efforts in the containment of the spread of the virus infection since the start of respiratory

disease that is later named as the COVID-19.

Especially, Hubei Province where the virus started has rapidly developed because it was placed on lockdown by Chinese authorities designing systematic strict measures. For the time being, the America and European countries are severely still encountering the fast infection of the COVID-19, but China has been in a state of capable of keeping the virus under control with

Encountering slow and halting progress

Actually just before the COVID-19 outbreak the global economy including China remained slow and halting due to the trade war between the US and China. Especially, in the first three months of 2020 following the start of COVID-19, China's economy shrank by 6.8 per cent and its export volume went down to 6.0 per cent.

Anyhow the devastated disaster is facing the world which brings about not only the health crisis of the humans but also economic and social one that can cause follow-up drawbacks.

the least infection rate.

Anyhow the devastated disaster is facing the world which brings about not only the health crisis of the humans but also economic and social one that can cause follow-up drawbacks. Since the initial stage of the virus, China had to suspend almost all its businesses. At the same time, such sudden suspension of all businesses resulted in great impacts on all the businesses related to China from all parts of the world.

Decrease in country's GDP

China has seen a downward trend in all aspects with regard to economy in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. The shutdown of the factories and businesses brought a giant loss to the country's GDP, thereby resulting in a rise in employment of the country. This worse situation can be said even the unprecedented level. Apart from this situation, there can have a series of serious consequences.

Especially, the foreign companies made investment in China will be likely to make changes in their investments following the crisis of global pandemic COVID-19 that got the world nations into trouble with their businesses. The foreign companies came to invest in China because of the advantage of larger market and effective labour cost. If they consider making changes in their investments, it will be a sign of enormous slam for China.

Moreover, most of foreign companies including the US would consider advantage and disadvantage resulting from too much reliance on production of spare parts by China in the course of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Nevertheless, in addition to the matters relating to ongoing COVID-19, further economic and social crisis will be likely on the agenda for the annual meeting of the third NPC to be scheduled on 22 May during which all stakeholders will get together and seek the solution.

How to seek the solution to the business objectives of the country affected by COVID-19 crisis relies on the opinions of the representatives who are going to attend the NPC. Anyhow the implementation of annual GDP expectation will be based on second mid-term of total GDP.

2000 Chinese yuan (USD 203) provided to every Chinese citizen as cash assistance

Establishment of all-round development social society in 2020, action to mitigate poverty beyond communicable disease, personal data security during health crisis of the people, action to lessen difficulties of the people, encouragement given to economic development, plan to provide yuan 2000 (USD 203) for every citizen as cash assistance of communicable disease are likely to be proposed during the annual NPC.

Some 3,000 representatives from various walks of life will attend the annual of NPC to be held in Beijing, the nation's capital of China on 22 May. The annual of NPC will emerge as a top political gathering for China. The NPC will be a showcase for highly-trusted meeting proving that China can keep ongoing COVID-19 crisis under control in a successful manner. Similarly the NPC will be seen as a meeting capable of reopening all businesses and socio-economic lives of the people because of enabling to keep the virus under control.

Translated by Htut Htut (Twantay)

MoSWRR distributes healthcare items at IDP camps in Kachin, Shan, Rakhine states

THE MINISTRY of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement has provided healthcare items to the camps of internally displaced persons in the battle against COVID-19 in Kachin, Shan and Rakhine states.

The two IDP camps in Bhamo Township of Kachin State received 1,278 bottles of hand sanitizer, 4,005 soaps, 20 bags of lime powder, a thermometer, 16 sets of hand washing basin, 8,010 cloth face masks, two hand speakers and two memory sticks with audio files of COVID-19 awareness campaign yesterday.

Similarly, one IDP camp in Kutkai Township of Shan State received 952 cloth face masks, 136 bottles of hand gel and two

vinyl sheets printed COVID-19 awareness campaign.

Similarly, 17 temporary IDP camps in Ponnagyun and Yathedaung townships of Rakhine State received 3,170 bottles of hand sanitizer, 130 bags of lime powder, 17 thermometers, 17 sets of hand washing basin, 4,524 surgical masks, 8,746 cloth face masks, 17 hand speakers and 17 memory sticks with audio files of COVID-19 awareness campaign.

The ministry is providing both material and immaterial supports in Nay Pyi Taw Council, regions and states to prevent and control of COVID-19 diseases. — MNA

(Translated by TTN)



Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement has provided healthcare items to internally displaced persons. **PHOTO: MNA**

2 gas-fired power plants produce more electricity for national grid

THE two gas-fired power plants in Yangon and Magway regions began generating electricity into national grid, as part of seven new projects with a total capacity of 1,166 MW.

The 151.54 MW project in Ahlon Township of Yangon and the 20.54 MW project in Kyunchaung of Pakokku Township, Magway Region are out of seven projects in Ahlon, Thanlyin, Thakayta, Magway, Kyunchaung, Shwetaung and Kyaukpyu townships.

The 66 MW power plant project in Magway has been generating electricity since 13 December 2019.

The Ministry of Electricity and Energy is working for completion of remaining projects. — MNA

(Translated by Aung Khin)



Two gas-fired power plants in Ahlon and Kyunchaung townships are part of the seven new projects with a total capacity of 1,166 MW for the national grid. PHOTO: MNA

E-Commerce Virtual Conference to be held on 28 May

TO relieve economic situation in Myanmar due to impact of COVID-19, to have better economic development and to introduce more new rice products, E-commerce Virtual Conference will be held on 28 May, according to the statement issued by the Ministry of Commerce.

During the conference, COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan (CERP) and collaboration plan between public and government will be discussed, according to the statement.

The conference will hold on an application and officials from governmental departments and organizations and businesspersons will attend the conference, according to officials.

Under the COVID-19 fighting programme of the government to relieve economic situation in Myanmar, officials is discussing about development of E-commerce system in time.

The aim of the conference is public to know governmental discussions and development of E-commerce programme are being undertaken by officials in corporation with respective ministries, organizations and business persons and related corporations.—MNA

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Lin)

18,553 civil service personnel sent abroad on scholarships

WITH the permission from the Education, Health and Human Resource Development Committee, and the Committee for Scrutinizing Foreign Scholarship, the following civil service personnel from Union-level organizations, ministries, and Nay Pyi Taw Council Area/ Region/State governments were sent to foreign countries on scholarships.

Education, Health and Human Resource Development Committee’s Table on annual scholarships

Sr.	Academic Year	Name of the courses				Total
		Undergraduate Course	Degree Diploma Course	Master’s Degree	Doctorate Course	
1	April to December 2016	2,563	39	202	181	2,985
2	January to December 2017	3,714	43	498	196	4,451
3	January to December 2018	4,212	51	398	173	4,834
4	January to December 2019	4,983	18	460	191	5,652
5	January to March 2020	606	-	16	9	630
	Total	16,078	151	1,574	750	18,553

During April 2016 to March 2020, a total of 18,553 government employees from 55 departments from Union-level organizations, ministries, and Nay Pyi Taw Council Area/ Region/State governments were sent to 75 foreign countries on scholarships.

Of them, 16,078 persons took undergraduate courses, 151 degree / diploma course, 1,574 master’s degree, and 750 doctorate course.

A total of 4, 032 persons were sent to India, 3,556 to the People’s Republic of China, 2,727 to Japan, 2,161 to Thailand, and 1,300 to the Republic of Korea. —MNA

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

Nantha Island and Mayyu Estuaries awarded Ramsar Site status

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(3) It supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.

(4) It regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.

(5) It is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.

The Nantha Island and Mayyu Estuaries is also included in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Site Network.

The slogan “Our solutions are in nature” of International Day for Biological Diversity 2020 emphasizes hope, solidarity and the importance of working together at all levels to build a future of life in harmony with nature.

The Nantha Island and Mayyu Estuaries became Myanmar’s sixth Ramsar site, preceded by Gulf of Mottama in 2020, Inle Lake in 2018, Meinmahla Kyun Wildlife Sanctuary in 2017, Indawgyi Wildlife Sanctuary in 2016, and Moeyungyi Wetland Wildlife Sanctuary in 2014.

The six Ramsar sites in Myanmar measure 278,669 hectares.

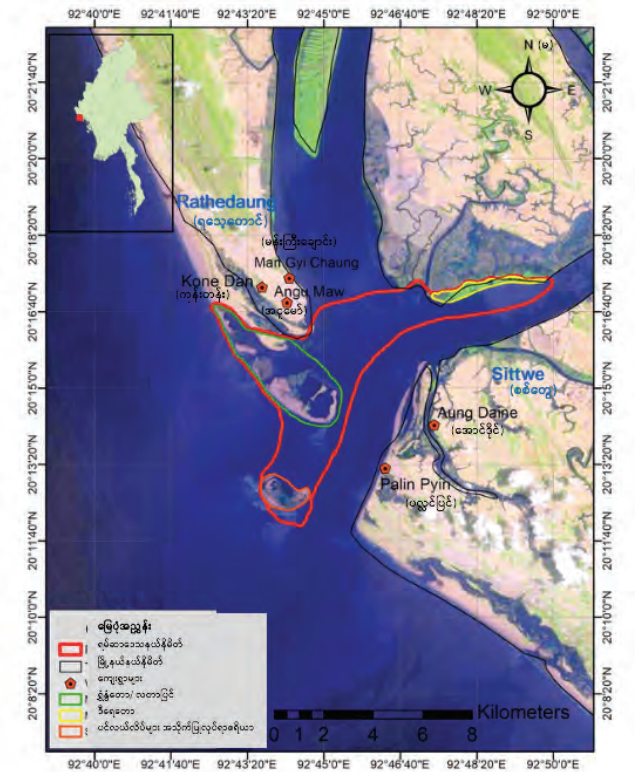
Since 2005, Myanmar has participated in the Ramsar Convention, and has been effectively

utilizing the wetlands to fulfill the basic needs of the locals in the areas and reduce the climate change.

They have also been implementing other programmes of the convention including the designation of the wetlands to be international importance under the Ramsar Convention, administration, and cooperation on jointly-owned water resources and species.

Myanmar has many wetlands that can be qualified as a Ramsar Site. Therefore, the proposals to list the remaining wetlands as a Ramsar site will be submitted to the Convention on Wetlands. — MNA

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)



Delivering COVID-19 loans to SMEs is key to preventing damage to communities

THE COVID-19 pandemic has left its impact on all sectors of the economy but nowhere is the hurt as much as the Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs).

To remedy the economic impacts caused by Coronavirus (COVID-19), CMP enterprises, hotels and tourism services, along with small and medium enterprises (SMEs), are designated as priority sectors that need assistance, and a COVID-19 Fund of Ks 100 billion has been set up by the Union Government to distribute loans to them.

Loans at an interest of 1 per cent for a one-year period have been granted to enterprises, most in Yangon Region, for three times so far during the COVID-19 crisis.

The fourth COVID-19 loan programme will focus on small and medium enterprises in regions and states.

It is critical to ensure that disbursing loans to enterprises comply with the COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan (CERP) of Myanmar as the loan programme was created to help businesses which are experiencing financial hardships during the pandemic.

Under the decision of the meeting 2/2020 of the Task Force to Remedy the Economic Impact that may be caused by Coronavirus (COVID-19), CMP enterprises, hotels and tourism services and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are designated as priority sectors that need remedy, and a COVID-19 Fund of Ks 100 billion has been set up

to disburse loans to them.

In this updated situation, the programme should also focus on other sectors which should be given priorities in terms of financial assistance.

It is important to get the COVID-19 loans into the hands of small and medium businesses in regions and states before they shut their doors permanently as it would have a damaging effect on the communities we serve and their residents.

Meanwhile, it is worth noting that Myanmar has been informed to get an IMF loan of \$300 million to \$700 million, and the CBM will coordinate with the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry after receiving the loan.

We are confident that the government's response in a timely manner to the current situation would help offset the impact of the coronavirus crisis on the small and medium enterprises.



By Khin Yadana

PHOTO: ZULY MOE

Q: Could you kindly elaborate on the policies pursued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of International Cooperation in serving the interests of the State and its peoples?

A: Foreign policy is formulated with a vision to protect and promote the interests of a nation and its people taking into account many factors including the prevailing domestic and international circumstances. In other words, the mission of our Ministry is to contribute towards achieving the national policies and objectives through conducting international relations and enhancing cooperation. As such, we have been supporting, through international relations, the Government's efforts to achieve its objectives, namely national reconciliation and peace, democratic transformation and socio-economic development of the people of Myanmar.

In my capacity as Union Minister for International Cooperation, I have been rendering assistance in handling matters pertaining to foreign relations and international cooperation, particularly to represent the Union Minister for Foreign Affairs at the regional and multilateral meetings.

Our government continues to pursue the "Independent, Active, and Non-aligned Foreign Policy" in line with the relevant provision of the 2008 Constitution. However, as the domestic policies and objectives have changed, the incumbent Government took a different approach in the practice of the said foreign policy. Our diplomats are not only to serve the national interests, but also to contribute to promoting regional interests as well as to promote peace and development not only for Myanmar but also for the world at large. We attach importance to promotion of democracy and human rights and take the approach of paying special emphasis on the domestic views while taking into consideration the international perceptions in addressing the challenges facing our country.

In the early days of its regaining independence, Myanmar has been able to maintain cordial relations with all major powers. Likewise, the present government has been striving for fostering friendly relations with all countries around the world in a balanced manner. We are trying to consolidate our



State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi holds talk with Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi at 35th ASEAN Summit in Thailand in November 2019.

bonds of friendship with our neighbours and, at the same time, exerting efforts to strengthen our ties with all countries far and near.

Our bilateral relations with immediate neighbours are more delicate than relations with countries from far away regions. As neighbours will have to live side-by-side so long as the world exists, we pay special attention and exert strenuous efforts to further consolidate the good neighbourly relations with all our neighbours based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. It has resulted in significant achievements during the past four years in consolidation of our relations with the neighbouring countries, the ASEAN member States and regional economic powers such as China, India, Japan and South Korea.

In addition, Myanmar has also focused on intensifying cooperation and engagements with the regional groupings such as ASEAN and BIMSTEC. Our cooperation with the United Nations, despite some challenges in certain areas, remains the major cornerstone of Myanmar's foreign policy. Therefore, we have been cooperating with the United Nations and other international organisations, based on our priority needs and prevailing realities on the ground, in our endeavours to realize the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development

goals.

People-to-people relations play a vital role in fostering an ever-lasting friendship and bilateral relations. As such, we have adopted a people-centred diplomacy and placed great emphasis not only on advancing government-to-government relations but also on promoting mutual trust and friendly ties between the peoples in promoting our bilateral relations.

In accordance with our people-centred policy, we attach priority to better protecting and promoting the interests of not only Myanmar nationals but also former Myanmar citizens living abroad. We are also trying to mobilize the strength of our nationals living abroad to enable them to contribute with their experience and expertise in our nation building endeavours.

Q: What were the priority tasks being implemented by the Ministry during the fourth year of the Government term?

A: The major obstacles in our efforts towards further advancing our international relations is the issue of mass displacement of people from Rakhine State that has caused misunderstanding on Myanmar and subsequently hurt the image of the country. Therefore, brightening up the image of our country has been the first and foremost priority assigned to all

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afore-mentioned objectives will be automatically fulfilled. Therefore, resolving the issue to overcome the challenges posed by Rakhine State has been set as one of the top priorities of our government.

Q: Could you explain more on the arrangements of State Visits with an aim of fostering the bilateral relations?

A: We are implementing the foreign policy through bilateral, regional and multilateral relations and cooperation. For the success of bilateral visits of our Leaders, our Ministry is responsible to make logistic arrangements for the visit, prepare points for discussions and negotiate the draft Joint Statements to be issued following the visits. During the fourth year of the current Government, our President paid a State Visit to Viet Nam and attended the UN Vesak Day Celebration during the visit. Moreover, he attended the Swearing-in Ceremony of the Indian Prime Minister Modi and also paid a State Visit to India at the

the Mekong-Korea Summit held in the Republic of Korea. During those visits, the State Counsellor met with the Leaders of the respective countries and discussed matters pertaining to the promotion of bilateral relations and cooperation.

Moreover, the State Counsellor paid official visits to Czech Republic and Hungary - the Central European countries which have



Union Minister for International Cooperation U Kyaw Tin

first-hand experience in democratic transitions. During the visits, she met with the leaders of those countries and exchanged views on strengthening bilateral relations and cooperation. She gave lectures on Myanmar's experiences in democratic transition, and also held business forums to meet with the entrepreneurs on promoting trade and investments in Myanmar. Following the COVID-19 breakout, some of the visits scheduled to take place this year had to be postponed and some cancelled.

We successfully facilitated the visit of the Vice-President (1) to the People's Republic of China to attend the ASEAN-China EXPO and the ASEAN-China Business and Investment Summit. We also arranged the visits of the Vice-President (2) to Indonesia to attend the Inauguration Ceremony of the Indonesian Government, and his visits to Cambodia and the Republic of Korea to attend the Summits on Peace, Security and Human Development.

Q: Please tell us about the State and other high-level incoming visits to Myanmar.

A: During the fourth year of the current administration, the President and First Lady of the Republic of Korea, the President of Nepal, the President of the People's Republic of China and the

Prime Minister of Vietnam paid State/ Goodwill Visits to Myanmar. Moreover, the Vice-President of the Republic of Seychelles, the Deputy Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Viet Nam and Serbia paid official visits to Myanmar.

Ministers and Deputy Foreign Ministers from Thailand, Norway, Poland, America, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Philippines, Timor Leste, Venezuela, Japan and China also paid official visits to Myanmar. Over the past year, we were able to arrange around 30 Heads of State, Ministerial and Deputy Ministerial level working visits from foreign countries.

Q: Since exchange of visits would result in enhancing bilateral cooperation as well as bringing in technical and development assistance to our country, could you please explain more about some of the benefits?

A: Every visit definitely contributes to the consolidation of the bilateral friendship and the promotion of mutual benefit to the countries and peoples. I would like to cite some examples on this.

During the visit of our President to India, a total of 10 MoUs and Agreements were signed which include the MoUs on the Indian assistance for Quick Impact Projects (QIP) and cooperation in the fields of health research, communication, petroleum products and human trafficking, etc. In addition, provision of Indian assistance for regional development projects under the Rakhine Development Programme and granting of import quota of up to 400,000 metric tons of pulses and beans from Myanmar were also agreed.

Thus, the President's visit to India has served as an impetus to the further enhancement of friendly ties and cooperation and set a historic milestone in our bilateral relations.

During the visit of the State Counsellor to China, a total of 3 instruments, namely, Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation, MoU on China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) Cooperation Plan (2019-2030), and MoU on the Formulation of the Five-year Development Programme for Economic and Trade Cooperation were signed. These instruments will be the major driving forces in accelerating the momentum of our bilateral cooperation.

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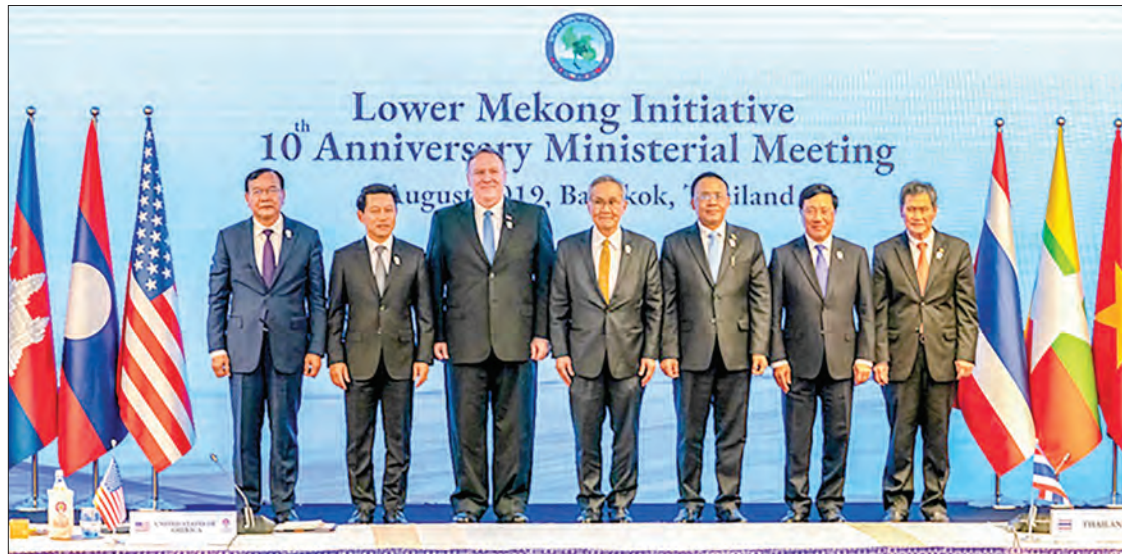
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Similarly, during the visit of the President of South Korea to Myanmar, a framework agreement concerning loans to support the economic development of Myanmar, and MoUs on trade and industrial cooperation, science and technological cooperation, and startups and innovation were signed. Furthermore, the Korean Government handed over 60 school buses donated to Myanmar, launched the Myanmar-Korea Industrial Complex and organized the Myanmar-Korea Business Forum during the visit. The Korean Government also agreed to take up to 7,000 Myanmar workers starting from this year 2020 at the request of the Myanmar side.

During the visit of the Vietnamese Prime Minister to Myanmar, the MoU on Cooperation in Agriculture and Rural Development, the MoU on Cooperation between the two Foreign Ministries, and the Action Plan on Implementation of the Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership (2019-2024) were signed. Besides, the diplomatic notes for the extension of stay for holders of ordinary passports from 14 to 30 days were exchanged, aiming to promote people-to-people exchanges.

The State Visit of the Chinese President to Myanmar this year was the first ever Head of State level visit from China to Myanmar in 19 years and it also coincides with the 70th Anniversary of the establishment of Myanmar-China diplomatic relations. During the visit, both sides agreed to further consolidate the traditional bonds of friendship between Myanmar and China, and to elevate from the comprehensive strategic cooperation to "Myanmar-China Community with a Shared Future" based on mutual benefits, equality and win-win cooperation.

With a total of 33 Agreements, MoUs and documents signed and exchanged during the visit, this State Visit has served as an impetus to further enhance bilateral ties and expand mutually beneficial multi-faceted cooperation between Myanmar and China. In addition, China announced its pledge to provide Yuan 4 billion worth of development assistance to Myanmar. China also reiterated its continued support for Myanmar's ongoing efforts for national reconciliation, peace process and the repatriation and resettlement of displaced per-



Union Minister U Kyaw Tin attends Lower Mekong Initiative 10th Anniversary Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, in August 2019.

sons from Rakhine State.

Q: May I know how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been fostering the bilateral relations through the Bilateral Joint Commission (JC), the Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) mechanisms and other fora?

A: We have been able to establish more foreign office consultation mechanisms in order to enhance bilateral relations and cooperation. We used to establish such mechanisms mostly with neighbouring countries, however, we have been able to further expand those mechanisms with Australia, New Zealand and some western countries such as Switzerland, Norway, Poland, and Lithuania during our Government's tenure.

Myanmar hosted the Myanmar-China Border Areas Management and Cooperation Meeting during the fourth year of our Government. In addition, we were able to hold Joint Commission Meetings for Bilateral Cooperation with Cambodia, Laos, Philippines and Vietnam which have been suspended for some time.

We also held the bilateral Foreign Office Consultations with India, Norway, Australia, South Africa, and Lithuania, participated in the Foreign Ministers' Meeting Ministerial and Senior Officials' Meetings of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

As we have expanded to establish such kind of consultation mechanisms, we were able to cordially discuss matters pertaining to fostering the existing friendly relations and bilateral cooperation as well as deepening of mutual understanding. In addition, we could thoroughly apprise them of the delicate and complex challenges faced by Myanmar during its democratic transition.

Q: Could you kindly share more about the expansion of

diplomatic relations with new partners in the realm of international relations?

A: With a view to promoting friendly relations with countries all over the world and extending mutual support to each other at the international arena, we are expanding diplomatic relations with new partners. We were able to establish diplomatic relations with the Republic of Benin and the Republic of Togo during the fourth year of our administration to promote the friendly relations with African nations. We have been able to establish diplomatic relations with 9 countries over the past four years, bringing the total to 123 countries out of 193 countries.

In terms of diplomatic representations, with the opening of two new diplomatic missions in Prague, the Czech Republic and in Havana, Cuba in 2019, we now have altogether 46 Myanmar Missions abroad - 37 Embassies, 3 Permanent Missions, and 6 Consulates-General.

Q: Could you kindly elaborate on Myanmar's active participation in ASEAN and other regional organisations?

A: With an aim of promoting its relations with countries in the region, Myanmar has also been actively participating in regional groupings and initiatives such as ASEAN, BIMSTEC and the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). We participated in a series of official meetings including the ASEAN Summits, ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meetings (AMM), ASEAN Senior Officials' Meetings (SOM), the ASEAN Dialogue Partners' Meetings and workshops over the past year.

The State Counsellor led the Myanmar Delegations to the ASEAN Summits and discussed matters pertaining to regional cooperation. She also attended

the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit and briefed on the economic reforms and investment opportunities in Myanmar to the entrepreneurs from the regional business circles. Myanmar is currently serving as the Country Coordinator for ASEAN-Canada relations. ASEAN is supporting Myanmar with 7 projects to create a conducive environment for the successful repatriation of the displaced persons in Rakhine State.

Moreover, the State Counsellor attended the ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit and the Mekong-ROK Summit held in the Republic of Korea. It has been a fruitful visit to accelerate the momentum of the multi-sectoral cooperation between Myanmar and Korea. Myanmar is also actively participating in the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism (LMC) and secured USD 6.8 million for the implementation of 22 development projects in Myanmar this year.

Q: May I know the Government's actions in protection of the interests of the Myanmar nationals living abroad and other consular services?

A: As an elected government, we have adopted a people-centred diplomacy with an aim of protecting and promoting people's interests and providing better service to the general public. Myanmar Missions abroad have been clearly instructed to place great emphasis on protecting the interests of not only Myanmar nationals, but also former Myanmar citizens living abroad, and to refrain from any forms of corruption in their services. With the relaxation of some rules and reforms in various sectors, we have been able to provide assistance to Myanmar nationals abroad who are in difficulty, to the extent as much as possible within our limited

human and financial resources. Myanmar Missions have made successful consular interventions for Myanmar workers abroad in claiming compensations in case of injuries or loss of lives.

With peace and stability restored in the border region, a Myanmar-Thailand joint working committee has been established since 2016 to facilitate repatriation of Myanmar nationals living in the camps along the border who wish to return to Myanmar of their own volition. To date, a total of 1,041 verified returnees have been received and necessary assistance were provided to them in coordination with relevant line government agencies.

The Myanmar Missions abroad are also contributing to earning revenue for the State through their consular services. We earned a total of Kyat 34,329 million (USD 22.26 million) for the State revenue within the previous year by collecting visa fees, income tax, passport fees and charges for other consular services.

Moreover, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinated with the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism to relax the visa regulations with a view to promoting tourism industry of Myanmar. Under this scheme, we have granted visa-free entry to tourists from Japan, South Korea, Macao and Hong Kong (Special Administrative Regions of the People's Republic of China), and Visa-on-Arrival (Tourist) for citizens of China, India, Italy, Spain, Australia, Switzerland, Germany, Russia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Austria, Luxemburg and New Zealand. These measures have resulted in a significant increase of foreign tourist arrivals to Myanmar before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q: Let me know about the invitation extended to the Myanmar nationals abroad for their contribution to the development endeavours of the State.

A: The strength and participation of the people are of paramount importance in achieving our national objectives, namely, peace, building a democratic federal union and national development endeavours. As such, the State Counsellor, during her visits abroad, has invited Myanmar nationals and former Myanmar citizens living abroad to contribute in nation building tasks with their acquired expertise and

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experiences. Should they wish to do so, they are invited to contact the nearest Myanmar Missions or to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for registration. We have already assigned a special unit to directly deal with this matter and to liaise with the line ministries depending on the sector they wish to contribute.

Q: With regard to the issue of Rakhine State, may I know the ongoing efforts of your Ministry to respond to the mounting challenges being faced at the international arena?

A: In fact, the conflicts between the two different communities in Rakhine State broke out and came to the fore once again in 2012. Since taking office, the government has attached top priority to finding a sustainable solution to the issue of Rakhine State in its Foreign Policy. A month after assuming office, the Government established the Central Committee on the Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development of the Rakhine State led by the State Counsellor and also set up the Advisory Commission on the Rakhine State chaired by Dr. Kofi Annan in September 2016. As a result of such positive developments, the international community has responded positively to Myanmar's efforts in promoting democracy, peace and development. The EU-sponsored resolution on situation of human rights in Myanmar, which have been tabled for the past 25 years, was discontinued at the UN General Assembly held in September 2016. At the same time, following the State Counsellor's official visit to Washington, D.C., the United States lifted all its remaining economic sanctions imposed on Myanmar. This was one of the remarkable diplomatic achievements of Myanmar.

At a time when Myanmar was witnessing positive developments, the ARSA terrorist group launched provocative coordinated attacks on several Border Police Outposts on 9 October 2016 and 25 August 2017 with an aim to attract the international attention back to the issue of Rakhine State. The ensuing massive displacement of people from Rakhine State has resulted in re-emergence of mounting criticism on Myanmar.

The Government has been taking measures to deflate international pressures through diplomatic engagements by

means of bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation. There were also instances where we have also approached some countries through dispatch of Special Envoys.

Moreover, we explain our positions regarding the Rakhine issue through bilateral human rights dialogues. We have conducted Myanmar-EU Human Rights Dialogue for 5 times, Myanmar-Japan Human Rights Dialogues for 7 times and Myanmar-US Human Rights Dialogues for 2 times. Furthermore,

Nations in many spheres despite challenges in certain areas. The Government has allowed the opening of the Office of the United Nations Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in Nay Pyi Taw and has been working closely with Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, the United Nations Special Envoy on Myanmar. Our Government is also cooperating with some thematic Special Representatives of the United Nations Secretary-General. We have also facilitated the visits of the Special Represent-

international pressure rather than resolving the issue in adherence to the agreed bilateral arrangements. In this regard, we are also cooperating with UNDP, UNHCR, ASEAN and other partner countries so as to create a conducive environment for the prospective returnees.

Moreover, in order to garner support from regional organisations in resolving the issue of Rakhine State, we have allowed the ASEAN and the AHA Centre to participate in the provision of humanitarian assistance and

Office of the Union Attorney General and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces for further investigation and legal proceedings.

Thanks to these multi-dimensional endeavours, we have been able to prevent the attempt to exert strong measures against Myanmar at the UN General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council. Under such circumstances, The Gambia has therefore filed a case against Myanmar on alleged violation of Genocide Convention at the ICJ as a clear step to mount pressure on Myanmar.

The State Counsellor, in her capacity as Union Minister for Foreign Affairs has led a delegation to attend the hearings of oral proceedings at the ICJ in The Hague in December 2019 to explain about the real ground situation of Rakhine State and the Government's efforts to address the issue. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been extending support to the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor in its efforts to submit a report on Provisional Measures adopted by ICJ and to face the lawsuit.

Q: May I know about the status and Myanmar's efforts on accession to International Treaties and active participation in the International Organisations.

A: The Myanmar Government has taken steps towards the accession to international treaties to promote its cooperation with the international community on the promotion of human rights. Myanmar's ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (CRC-OPAC) on 27 September 2019 has been one of the concrete steps forward to this end. Furthermore, we are reviewing the international instruments which have yet to be ratified including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and are organizing awareness raising workshops on ICCPR with an aim to have better understanding of it.

The successful inscription of Myanmar's Ancient Archaeological site of Bagan in the UNESCO's World Heritage List has been a true testament to the strenuous efforts of the Ministry and Myanmar Missions abroad in securing bilateral support of other countries towards Myanmar.

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Union Minister U Kyaw Tin attends the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Viet Nam on 17 January 2020.

we held discussions with the EU for four times to address the issue of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) and updated the Government's efforts in promotion and protection of human rights including the situation in Rakhine State.

Seizing every possible opportunity, our Myanmar diplomats stood up the mounting international pressure to explain their position to defend the national interests at the international frontline of the United Nations and regional meetings such as ASEAN Summits and ASEAN Ministerial Meetings. The Government has also dispatched high level delegations to the annual session of the United Nations General Assembly, Third Committee, the United Nations Security Council and the Human Rights Council to update the realities and complex situation of Myanmar and also to continue engagements with friendly countries as well as to approach the countries which do not have a clear understanding on the complex issue.

Myanmar has been cooperating actively with the United

States in many spheres despite challenges in certain areas. The Government has allowed the opening of the Office of the United Nations Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to Myanmar and are engaging with their offices in the areas of their respective mandates.

In addition to our diplomatic efforts to explain the complexities of the issue at the international arena, we are also coordinating with the relevant line Ministries at the domestic level to defuse communal tensions, to take actions against human rights violators in accordance with the domestic laws, to make progress in the repatriation process and to seek a sustainable solution for peace, stability and development in Rakhine State.

While implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, we are striving to resolve the issue bilaterally on the basis of the three agreements signed with Bangladesh on repatriation of displaced people. However, the repatriation process makes no head way so far, as the other party is focusing on exerting in-

livelihood opportunities there. The ASEAN-ERAT conducted Preliminary Needs Assessment (PNA) in Rakhine State and 7 prioritized projects are identified for the implementation of the recommendations of the report of the PNA. The National IDP Camp Closure Strategy was launched on 19 November 2019 for the systematic closure of IDP camps. As reconciliation and harmony among the communities are pivotal to achieve sustainable solution for peace and stability of Rakhine State, we have already launched projects designed to create unity and harmony among communities in Maungdaw Township.

The Government is committed to ensuring accountability should there be any human rights violation. An Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICoE) headed by Ambassador Manalo of the Philippines was established to conduct investigations. On 20 January 2020, the Chairperson of ICoE submitted the Commission's final report to the President. The President forwarded the full report with annexes to the

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Myanmar was also elected with 142 votes out of 180 votes as a member to the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), representing the Asia-Pacific Group (ASPAC), for the 2019-2023 term.

Q: Could you explain what have been achieved on matters related to the boundary issues?

A: We are given a clear guidance by the State Counsellor to address the outstanding issues of boundary demarcation which remained unsettled by the successive governments at a time when we are enjoying excellent relations with our neighbours, in order that we could pass on a good legacy to our next generation. We are also of the view that having a clearly demarcated boundary will prevent future boundary disputes between countries.

During our Government's tenure, technical experts from Myanmar and Thailand were able to undertake joint inspection of boundary pillars, maintenance and erection of additional pillars during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 field seasons in order to prevent illegal settlements in the border areas of Mai Sai - Mae Ruak River and to have clear line of demarcation between Myanmar and Thailand. With a view to early signing of an MoU on the Survey and Demarcation between Myanmar and Thailand, Senior Officials Meeting has been held and narrowed down the differences of opinions between the two sides.

In addition, we were able to erect 38 additional boundary pillars between BP 145 and BP

146 and 36 additional boundary pillars between BP 80 and BP 82 along Myanmar-India border. To address the pending issue of 9 boundary pillars in the Kabaw Valley, a joint field inspection of boundary pillars was conducted on 27 November 2019 as per the agreement reached at the Survey Director Level Meeting held in Moreh in August 2019.

Although the Myanmar-China boundary has been clearly demarcated, joint inspection of border posts has not been conducted for over 23 years. Therefore, in preparation for the Third Myanmar-China Joint Inspection, preliminary coordination meetings are held alternatively in Myanmar and China, and agreement has been reached to conduct a joint aerial photography along the border in 2020.

Q: I would like to know about the enhancement of capacities for the diplomats who are performing duties to realize the objectives of the Ministry.

A: Well-rounded diplomats are in great need in our efforts to achieve the Ministry's objectives by means of diplomacy. In this regard, our Ministry has placed much emphasis on making new recruitments, making arrangements for diplomats to attend domestic and overseas trainings for capacity building and providing necessary logistic support to the Myanmar Missions abroad. A total of 130 diplomats have been sent abroad to pursue overseas studies during our Government's tenure.

Furthermore, we have been conducting internal training courses on operational skills, international relations and diplomacy, English proficiency

and translation/ interpretation to better equip our diplomats before serving abroad. Courses on the Basic Diplomatic Skills are conducted at the Ministry for the personnel from the Ministry and other government agencies, entrepreneurs and young graduates. Two courses were conducted in the past year which were attended by 400 participants. Our Ministry is also convening courses on dress codes/ costumes and grooming, Myanmar culinary and hospitality classes for the spouses of the diplomats as well.

In promoting the image of the country, diplomats at the Myanmar Missions abroad are making efforts not only to impart information on the true situation of Myanmar to the people of host countries but also to harness soft power to make them aware of the positive developments of the country, such as richness in natural resources, culture, traditions, arts and beauty of the country and hospitality of its people. Making more tourists visit the country is also a good way to make them observe the true situation of the country.

Q: May I know what kind of support have been provided to Myanmar diplomats in order for them to perform their duties more efficiently and effectively?

A: The government has enhanced financial support for health and education of the diplomats and their families abroad to enable our diplomats to better concentrate on performing their duties in line with the guidance of the State Counsellor. During our Government's tenure, we have already permitted health

insurances for 24 missions out of 46 missions abroad.

Since the 2018-2019 fiscal year, we have been providing two-thirds of school fees to a total of 57 students from 5 to 18 years of age who are the children of our diplomats serving abroad in anticipation that they will be able to better contribute the country with the knowledge gained studying abroad. This is one of the significant arrangements by the government in support of smooth functioning of the diplomatic duties and responsibilities.

Moreover, for all Myanmar Missions to be on par with diplomatic standard and dignity, the renovation and reconstruction of new buildings of the Embassy premises have been made as one of the priorities. Those included construction of the Chancery, Residence of the Ambassador and housing for diplomats on state-owned land in Pretoria, South Africa, major renovation at the Consulate-General in Kunming, China, the Myanmar House of the Embassy in New Delhi, India and the Embassy buildings in Bangkok, Thailand and in Berlin, Germany.

Q: I would like to know whether you have any other additional points you wish to make as concluding remarks.

A: As I have mentioned earlier, our Ministry has been contributing towards the realisation of Government's objectives through the conduct of international relations and cooperation. Although immediate and tangible outcomes of the diplomatic manoeuvrings are invisible, improvements in international relations will bring benefits to

all the government agencies in terms of bilateral and multi-lateral support and assistance. We are enjoying the continued support of the international community in our endeavours for peace and democratization and all-inclusive socio-economic development of Myanmar.

We believe that positive developments at home play a pivotal role to achieve greater success in the diplomatic efforts at international arena. Our diplomats can hardly respond without tangible domestic progress. At present, we are doing our best to apprise the international community of the complexities of the ground situation that Myanmar is currently facing in addressing the issue of Rakhine State. At the same time, we need to work in unison with the people to reduce tensions among the different communities, to take actions against violations of human rights in accordance with our domestic laws, to successfully implement the repatriation process and to achieve a sustainable solution for the peace, stability and development of Rakhine State. Myanmar like any other country that has embarked on the path of transition is bound to face challenges. However, we have every confidence that with the collective strength of our people, we shall be able to overcome those challenges. Let me conclude by saying that the success of diplomatic efforts depends not merely on the diplomats but also on the participation and support of the people and all relevant institutions in bringing about on-ground improvements.

Translated by MOFA

WTO to open nominations for next director on 8 June

GENEVA — Candidates to succeed Roberto Azevedo as head of the WTO will have one month from 8 June to submit their nominations, the global trade body said following the Brazilian's surprise resignation. After 8 July, candidates will be invited to meet with WTO members, the World Trade Organization said in a statement Wednesday after a decision by its 164 members.

The Brazilian last week announced he will

step down on 31 August, a year before his term ends, despite the COVID-19 pandemic ravaging the global economy.

Azevedo said it had been a "personal decision" reached with his family, and stressed that he was not leaving to pursue "political opportunities".

His abrupt departure leaves WTO members with less than three months to appoint a successor, a process which usually takes nine months.

Many observers are betting on a candidate from Africa — and against a WTO insider.

Azevedo's departure comes at a bad time with the WTO already in crisis before the pandemic hit, dealing with raging trade wars and scathing criticism by the United States under President Donald Trump, who has pushed for reforms of the Geneva-based body.

The procedure for appointing the director-gen-

eral of the WTO is not an election but a process of elimination carried out in consultation with members. Azevedo, who in 2013 succeeded Frenchman Pascal Lamy, was selected after three elimination stages.

On Azevedo's watch, WTO members concluded their first-ever multilateral agreement when they reached a deal in Bali in late 2013 on overhauling global customs procedures. — AFP ■

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V OCEAN PROBE VOY. NO. (041N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V OCEAN PROBE VOY. NO. (041N/S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 22-5-2020 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of 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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**AGENT FOR: M/S CONTINENTAL SHIPPING
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Lufthansa confirms in talks with Berlin on \$10 bn rescue



Like many other airlines, most of Lufthansa's fleet is grounded due to the coronavirus pandemic. PHOTO: AFP

BERLIN — Lufthansa on Thursday confirmed it was in talks with the German government over a nine-billion-euro (\$10 billion) rescue that will see Berlin take a massive stake in the coronavirus-stricken airline.

“The concept, which has not yet been finalised, provides for stabilization measures in the amount of up to nine billion euros, of which three billion euros is in the form of a loan” from public investment bank KfW, the German aviation

giant said in a statement. Under the plans mooted with the federal government's economic stabilization fund (WSF), launched to cushion the impact of the virus pandemic, the WSF would acquire a stake of 20 per cent in the airline group, as well as a convertible bond worth “a further five per cent plus one share” in the company.

The bond “can be exchanged... in the event of a public takeover offer by a third party,” giving Berlin a blocking minority.

If agreed, the solution would close weeks of wrangling over Lufthansa between Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU conservatives and their centre-left junior partners the SPD.

Pro-business politicians among Merkel's ranks have long rejected excessive state involvement in Lufthansa, saying business decisions should be left up to managers.

But the SPD has held out for a bigger stake that would allow Berlin to influence bosses over potential job cuts or environmental targets. Some of the centre-left's goals will be met with two state-appointed seats on the Lufthansa supervisory board, as well as “expected conditions” specifying “the waiver of future dividend payments and restrictions on management remuneration”.

—AFP ■

Invitation for Prequalification – Engineering, Procurement and Construction for Power Generation Facility of Integrated LNG to Power Project in Mee Lin Gyaing, The Republic of The Union of Myanmar

1. Entrusted by Mee Lin Gyaing Electric Power Co. Ltd, Union Resources & Engineering Company Limited (UREC) now invites Applications for Prequalification for Engineering, Procurement and Construction for Power Generation Facility of Integrated LNG to Power Project in Mee Lin Gyaing, The Republic of The Union of Myanmar.
2. Prequalification will be conducted through the procedures in accordance with the applicable international practice for selection of the contractor on EPC basis.
3. Only eligible Applicants within the last ten (10) years with the following key qualifications should participate in the Prequalification:
 - Contracted amount involving gas turbine generator units not less than US\$300 million, and
 - At least four gas turbines equivalent to or higher than 9F family of gas turbines that have been successfully put into commercial operation, as the contractors for design and installation or on turnkey basis, or
 - At least one gas turbine generator unit with the installed capacity equal to or higher than 300MW that has been put into operation, as the contractor on EPC basis.The prequalification criteria are more completely described in the Prequalification Documents.
4. Please visit website www.urec.com.cn for details of the Integrated LNG to Power Project in Mee Lin Gyaing in The Republic of The Union of Myanmar and the Prequalification Documents.
5. A complete set of Prequalification Documents may be obtained free of charge by interested eligible applicants upon the submission of a written application to the Email Address: urec-mlg@urec.com.cn from 8:00, May 21st to 16:00 May 24th, 2020 (local time). The Prequalification Documents will be issued through email only.
6. Applications for prequalification should be submitted in sealed envelopes before 16:00 28th May, 2020.
7. Refer to the Prequalification Documents for details of the requirements for the Preparation and Submission of Applications for Prequalification together with Security.



Embassy of India, Yangon Tender Notice

Sealed tenders are invited for Cleaning Contract for India Centre of Embassy. Details of tender is available in the Embassy's website <https://embassyofindiayangon.gov.in/> Tender – Tender (Embassy's) and CPP Portal. The last date for bid submission is **11 June, 2020**.

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Dated 22nd May 2020
Imm@kcyangon.com

China urges US to commit to defeating COVID-19, not issue “ultimatum” to WHO

BEIJING—China on Wednesday urged the United States to commit to defeating the COVID-19 pandemic at an early date, instead of issuing an “ultimatum” to the international organization that leads the fight against the pandemic.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian made the remarks at a press conference when asked to comment on the response of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy at the European Commission and Russia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office in Geneva to the letter published on Twitter by US President Donald Trump.

“It is clear to see that the international community generally disagrees with the US



File: A TV grab taken from the World Health Organization website shows WHO Chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus via video link as he delivers a news briefing on COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) from the WHO headquarters in Geneva on 30 March, 2020. **PHOTO: AFP**

actions of distorting the facts, contradicting itself, blaming others and undermining international cooperation in fighting the pandemic,” Zhao said.

Zhao said China has clarified and refuted the fallacies listed in the letter many times.

The letter claimed “Taiwanese authorities had communicated information to the World Health Organization (WHO) indicating human-to-human transmission of a new virus.” The fact is the e-mail sent by the Taiwanese side to WHO on 31 December did not mention human-to-human transmission at all, mainly to get information from the WHO.

The so-called “Chinese leader on 21 January reportedly pressured WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus not to declare the coronavirus outbreak an emergency” is totally fabricated. Both China and the WHO have issued solemn statements. Chinese leader never talked with Director-General Tedros over the phone on 21 January. —Xinhua ■

Coronavirus vaccine unlikely to be developed this year: Japan expert

TOKYO — The development of a vaccine to prevent people from being infected with the novel coronavirus is unlikely to be completed by the end of this year, the head of a Japanese government panel of experts on the virus said Wednesday.

While governments and companies around the world are working to develop vaccines to contain the pandemic, Takaji Wakita said it will be vital to ensure their efficacy and safety, as well as to ascertain whether they have side effects.

“I think (development) will

go beyond the year end, and it is difficult to predict at this moment how soon a vaccine will become available,” said Wakita, director of the National Institute of Infectious Diseases, at a parliamentary session.

“I’m not sure which party — if it’s Japan or other countries — will reach the goal first,” he said.

As of Wednesday, the virus had infected over 4.8 million people worldwide and claimed more than 320,000 lives, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. — Kyodo News ■



Governments and companies around the world are working to develop vaccines to contain the pandemic. **PHOTO: AFP**

Cyclone toll hits 88 as Bangladesh and India start mopping up

SATKHIRA (Bangladesh) — India and Bangladesh began a massive clean-up Thursday after the fiercest cyclone since 1999 killed at least 88 people, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake.

Cyclone Amphan flattened houses, uprooted trees, blew off roofs and toppled electricity pylons, while a storm surge inundated coastal villages and wrecked shrimp farms vital to the local economy.

The United Nations office in Bangladesh estimates 10 million people were affected, and some 500,000 people may have

lost their homes.

But the death toll was far lower than the many thousands killed in previous cyclones — a result of improved weather forecasting and better response plans.

The disaster has raised fears, however, that overcrowding in storm shelters will exacerbate the spread of coronavirus.

India's West Bengal reported 72 deaths — including 15 in the capital Kolkata — with state premier Mamata Banerjee saying: “I haven’t seen a disaster of this magnitude.”

“This is the worst cyclone

to hit the state since the one in 1737 when thousands lost their lives,” she told reporters.

Sixteen people have died in Bangladesh, according to the official death toll.

Improved weather forecasting meant Bangladesh was able to move some 2.4 million people into shelters or out of the storm’s direct path, while India evacuated some 650,000.

At least 10 million people were still without power on Thursday afternoon in the worst-hit districts of Bangladesh, said rural electricity board chief Moinuddin.

The storm levelled more than 55,000 homes — most made of tin, mud and bamboo — across Bangladesh, junior disaster management minister Enamur Rahman told AFP.

Kolkata residents woke to flooded streets, with part of the city’s yellow taxi fleet up to their bonnets in water in one neighbourhood and many areas without power.

“Each second seemed like an hour,” bank manager Susanta De said of the storm.

“There were only howling winds and sounds of shattering window panes. All of it was very scary and we thought the end was nearing.” —AFP ■



Villagers salvage items from their houses damaged by Cyclone Amphan in the Indian state of West Bengal. **PHOTO: AFP**

Schools reopen in South Korea as virus fears ease

SEOUL — Hundreds of thousands of South Korean students returned to school on Wednesday as educational establishments started reopening after a coronavirus delay of more than two months.

Students lined up for temperature checks and were given sanitizers to wash their hands as they entered school premises while teachers greeted them with smiles and occasional elbow bumps.

“It’s really exciting to meet my friends and teachers face to face, but we have to strictly follow the disinfection guidelines,” said Oh Chang-hwa, student president of Kyungbock High School in Seoul. “I am very worried but it’s still nice to see them again,” Oh told AFP.

South Korea endured one of the worst early outbreaks of the virus — at one point the second-worst hit nation after mainland China — prompting officials to delay the reopening of schools in early March.

But it appears to have brought its outbreak under control thanks to an extensive “trace, test and treat” program.

Around 440,000 final-year students, who will in December take the university entrance exam that is crucial in the education-obsessed country, are the first to return to schools, with other years following in stages over the next several weeks.

Inside the school buildings, students are asked to wipe their desks and sit apart according to social distancing guidelines, with some classes setting up partitions between desks.

But 66 schools in Incheon, near Seoul, were closed soon after re-opening and their students sent back home after two pupils were diagnosed with the virus, a spokesman at the Incheon Metropolitan City Office of Education said. The episode illustrates the challenge of reopening schools while at the same time seeking to prevent transmission of the virus. —AFP ■

Venezuela says Iranian tankers will get military escort

CARACAS — Venezuela on Wednesday said its navy and air force would escort Iranian tankers arriving with much needed fuel, after Tehran warned of “consequences” if the US stopped the ships from reaching their destination.

“We’re ready for whatever, whenever,” President Nicolas Maduro told state-run media, thanking “all the support” from its Middle East ally in its confrontation with the United States.

Venezuela has the world’s largest proven oil reserves, but its capacity to refine crude into gasoline is limited.

US President Donald Trump’s administration has imposed unilateral sanctions aimed at ending oil exports from Iran

and Venezuela, both major crude producers. Washington has also sanctioned individual Venezuelans and Iranians.

In early April the US military said it was increasing its vigilance and deploying warships in the ocean near Venezuela, arguing that there was an increase in organized crime.

Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez said that when the Iranian ships enter the oceanic economic zone — 200 nautical miles from the coastline — “they will be welcomed” by Venezuelan naval ships and warplanes.

Neither Maduro nor Padrino said when the ships, which according to press reports number five and sailed from Iran in the past days, will arrive.—AFP ■



Venezuela said it would deploy naval vessels like these frigates - here on a 2019 exercise - to welcome Iranian tankers bringing much needed gasoline. **PHOTO: AFP**

Cyprus ends virus lockdown but airports stay shut

NICOSIA — The Cypriot government ended a strict coronavirus lockdown Thursday, reopening outdoor restaurants, barber shops and beaches, but keeping the Mediterranean resort island’s vital airports and hotels closed for now.

After two months of living in self-isolation, Cypriots are allowed to move around freely again.

Some 32,000 more people went back to work as part of the government’s second stage out of lockdown.

Thousands of children returned to the classroom as state-run schools resumed most classes.

Since mid-March people

could only go outside for exercise and essential trips which needed to be approved by text message while a curfew was enforced every night.

Cyprus activated the second stage of its draft timetable for ending the lockdown after the daily number of new infections remained in single figures throughout the first three weeks of May. Virologist Dr Leontios Kostrikis, who is a member of the health ministry’s epidemiological monitoring unit, said he was “very satisfied” with the figures so far.

Announcing four new infections in the previous 24 hours on Wednesday evening, Kostrikis said Cyprus was entering a

watershed moment in its fight against the coronavirus.

“The second stage is a make or break point for a full return to normalcy and for this reason we kindly ask you to keep up the good work with the same determination so that we are not forced to take backward steps,” Kostrikis told reporters.

Due to the better than expected figures, the government has also decided to allow Cypriots access to organised beaches from 23 May, rather than June 1 as planned. At present only swimming is allowed not sunbathing or any other leisure activity.

Parks and public spaces have also reopened but not children’s playgrounds.—AFP ■



A Cypriot schoolgirl undergoes a swab test for the coronavirus on her first day back at school in the capital Nicosia after the lifting of a two-month lockdown. **PHOTO: AFP**

Aussie sewers a frontline in bid to flush out coronavirus

MELBOURNE — Australia is getting down and dirty to combat the coronavirus pandemic — unrolling a vast programme of sewage testing this week in the hope of finding hidden clusters of the virus.

Melbourne has begun testing wastewater and excrement for traces of the virus in a bid to focus conventional testing and tracing strategies on problem suburbs or neighbourhoods.

Nicholas Crosbie of Melbourne Water said the utility hopes to monitor samples from 71 per cent of people in Victoria, one of Australia’s most populous states.

“So the whole point of this is to be vigilant and to find undetected cases or re-emergence,” he told AFP.

Sewage has also been tested in places like Paris, Tokyo, Amsterdam, Massachusetts and Valencia, Spain — although mostly on a small scale to prove detection can work.

As Australia takes tentative steps toward reopening after a two-month shutdown, health officials are betting on a massive programme of testing and contact tracing to help prevent a second wave of cases.

More than one million tests have been carried out across the country of 25 million people, but authorities say wastewater

is a cheap and effective way to monitor the disease.

Hydrographers lower buckets into sewer lines to collect samples, which are then taken to a laboratory where they are concentrated and tested for ultra-trace levels of the virus.

“We know that coronavirus is excreted in the faeces for up to six weeks after first symptoms appear,” Crosbie said, adding there were no concerns about contracting the virus from treated water as conventional wastewater treatments killed it off.

The process is similar to wastewater testing already carried out to detect diseases like polio and the presence of illicit drugs like cocaine.

“Compared to clinical testing it is very cost-effective. But by no means does it replace clinical surveillance,” he said.

“The whole point of this is to be able to target clinical surveillance more effectively.”

If the testing laboratory detects a positive result, it can be traced back to the suburb of origin but not narrowed down to a specific house.

“If there’s a suburb that hasn’t had a case identified but it is in the wastewater stream, then we realise we need to focus on that suburb to find the people,” Health Minister Greg Hunt told Channel 7.—AFP ■

Futsal stadium expected to be completed by early 2021

THE construction of a new international-standard futsal stadium in Yangon is expected to be completed by early 2021.

Although it was previously targeted to be completed in the end of 2020, its completion date moved a few months later due to coronavirus.

The Myanmar Football Federation constructed the futsal stadium to organize more local competitions and

host international competitions.

As there is no futsal stadium in Yangon, the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) helped MFF construct the futsal stadium with a capacity of more than 2,000 seats.

The construction of the stadium started in November 2019, and 45 per cent of the construction was already complet-

ed. The stadium is located next to the Thuwunna stadium in Thingangyun Township.

Myanmar futsal national team has competed in the international matches since 2016, and won a first runner-up and two second runner-ups.

MMF is also planning to appoint a foreign coach for the futsal team.—Shine Htet Zaw

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

2021 'last option' for Tokyo Games, says Olympics chief



Japan's New National Stadium in Tokyo, the main venue for the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics. **PHOTO: KYODO**

TOKYO—Olympics chief Thomas Bach said 2021 was the “last option” for holding the delayed Tokyo Games on Thursday, stressing that postponement cannot go on forever.

Bach told the BBC that he agreed with Japan's stance that the Games will have to be cancelled if the coronavirus pandemic isn't under control by next year.

In March, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics were postponed to

July 23, 2021 as the coronavirus spread across the globe, killing hundreds of thousands of people and making international sport impossible.

“Quite frankly, I have some understanding for (Japan's position) because you cannot forever employ 3,000, or 5,000, people in an organising committee,” the International Olympic Committee president said.

“You cannot every year change the entire sports

schedule worldwide for all the major federations.

“You cannot have the athletes being in uncertainty, you cannot have so much overlapping with a future Olympic Games.”

The Olympics have never been cancelled outside of the world wars, but Japanese officials have been clear that they have no intention of postponing the Games again beyond next year.—AFP ■



Chelsea have extended striker Olivier Giroud's contract till 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

Giroud, Caballero extend Chelsea deals to 2021

LONDON—Chelsea striker Olivier Giroud and goalkeeper Willy Caballero extended their contracts till the end of the 2020/21 season, the Premier League side announced on Wednesday.

Giroud, 33, forced himself back into Frank Lampard's plans just prior to the shutdown caused by the coronavirus pandemic and scored the Blues' last goal in a 4-0 win over Everton in March.

The French international's contract was due to expire at the end of this season, but Chelsea have exercised an option to extend that deal for another year.

“I am delighted to continue my journey and adventure at Chelsea,” said Giroud. “I can't wait to get back to playing and enjoying competitive football with my team-mates.”

The former Arsenal striker came close to leaving the club in January in a bid to further his case for a place in France's Euro 2020 squad after falling behind Tammy Abraham as Lampard's first-choice forward.

However, Giroud started Chelsea's last three Premier League games and also scored in a vital 2-1 win over Tottenham in February. “Since I have been back at Chelsea, Olivier has been brilliant as a professional and as a man in general,” said Lampard.

“He has great qualities to help the squad both on and off the pitch, not only with his talent but with the example he sets every day and the experience he brings to our young squad. I am very pleased that will continue next season.”—AFP ■

Spurs probe Aurier's third apparent lockdown breach

LONDON—Tottenham have launched an investigation after Ivory Coast defender Serge Aurier appeared to flout social-distancing rules for a third time by getting a haircut during the coronavirus lockdown.

Aurier posted an Instagram photo on Tuesday showing off his new haircut and tagged the barber Justin Carr in his post.

“Yes Sir @justcuts #LeCoiffeurEstBon?? (the hairdresser is good)” Aurier wrote next to the picture.

Hairdressers are closed in Britain in line with the government's rules on social distancing.

They are not expected to open again until at least Jul 4.

“We are investigating the circumstances and will deal with the incident appropriately,” a Tottenham statement said on Wednesday (May 20).

Aurier did not appear entirely repentant when he responded to criticism of his actions with a further Instagram post.

Writing “Bla-bla-bla” followed by several snoozing emojis, Aurier said: “My hairdresser is negative and me too so stop talking in a vacuum and put on masks and gloves when you come to take pictures at the training center its part of the rules too”.—AFP ■