Myanmar nationals abroad brought back home by relief flight

Collective donation for Childcare Centre for Orphans (Nay Pyi Taw)

Marle Nattaung Dam to irrigate over 800 acres in Singu Tsp in summer

A total of 865 acres of summer crops are to get irrigation water from the Marle Nattaung Dam this financial year.

PHOTO: MIN HTET AUNG

Min Htet Aung (Man Sub-Printing House)
(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

449 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 17 January, total figure rises to 134,318

MYANMAR’S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 134,318 after 449 new cases were reported on 17 January 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these 134,318 confirmed cases, 2,955 died, 117,663 have been discharged from hospitals. —MNA
Announcement on contribution of cash donation towards COVID Vaccination Fund

1. The people who want to contribute cash donation for the purchase of vaccines, can donate to the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund at Myanmar Currency Account No. OA 013753 of Myanmar Economic Bank (Nay Pyi Taw) by using the following methods:
   (a) Cash contribution can be made at Myanmar Economic Bank (Nay Pyi Taw), branches of State-owned banks and private banks.
   (b) Cash contribution can be made with the Account Transfer method from other saving accounts of State-owned banks and private banks.
   (c) The donation via Mobile Banking/ Mobile Wallet can be made through Mobile Apps of their respective service Provider/private banks.
   (d) The donation via MPU Card (ATM Card) can be made through MPU.
   (e) The further information will be announced later for the well-wishers to donate safely via Over-the-Counter which links with MPU Debit/Credit cards, local/foreign Visa/Master Credit cards at the Website of the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry.

2. The people who want to contribute cash donation for the purchase of vaccines can donate to the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund at Foreign Currency Account No. EDC 600012 of Myanmar Economic Bank (Nay Pyi Taw) by using the following methods:
   (a) Any type of foreign currency can be directly donated via all the branches of Myanmar Economic banks which received MC and AD licences.
   (b) Cash contribution can be made with the Account Transfer method from foreign currency accounts opened at the branches of Myanmar Economic Bank.
   (c) Cash contribution can be made via the private and foreign banks by using SWIFT Code-MYEBSMMMY together with the expression of Donation to COVID-19 Vaccination Fund (Account EDC 600012) Myanmar Economic Bank.
   (d) If there is no direct communication between Myanmar Economic Bank and the foreign banks for cash contribution by using the above — mentioned SWIFT Code and Donation to COVID-19 Vaccination Fund (Account EDC 600012) Myanmar Economic Bank, the cash contribution can be made via the following foreign bank partners of Myanmar Economic Bank:

   - UOB Bank (Singapore)
   - OCBC Bank (Singapore)
   - DHS Bank (Singapore)
   - May Bank (Singapore/Kuala Lumpur)

3. For the records, the donors should send their names, phone numbers and addresses in full and other pieces of evidence of cash contribution to the e-mail — treasury@365mopfi.gov.mm, treasury10@365mopfi.gov.mm (or) Viber-09-251182042 and 09-42078881.

4. Those who want to donate in person and in virtual system in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Mandalay can contact the following persons:

   - Nay Pyi Taw
     - Daw Si Si Pyone, Director-General, Treasury Department: 067 3410156
     - Daw Yi Yi Khang, Deputy Director-General, Treasury Department: 067 3410158

   - Yangon
     - U Min Thu, Managing Director, Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank: 01-8391342
     - U Min Thu Aung, Director, Internal Revenue Department: 02-4035916

   - Mandalay
     - Daw Si Si Pyone, Director-General, Treasury Department: 067 3410156
     - Daw Yi Yi Khang, Deputy Director-General, Treasury Department: 067 3410158

5. The cash donated to COVID-19 vaccination Fund is exempted from tax according to the Income Tax Law.

Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry

Announcement on fund establishment to purchase COVID-19 vaccines

1. The National-Level Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) on 30-12-2020 formed a Fund Management Sub-committee on the Purchase of COVID-19 Vaccines. The sub-committee has opened the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund (Myanmar Currency Account No. OA 013733) and can donate any type of foreign currency to the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund (Foreign Currency Account No. EDC 600012) at the Myanmar Economic Bank (Nay Pyi Taw),

   (a) Fund for purchase of COVID-19 vaccines (Foreign Currency Account No. EDC 600012): The bank account will be initially deposited with USD250 million, equivalent to about K338 billion from State-funding.
   (b) Fund for purchase of COVID-19 vaccines (Myanmar Currency Account No. OA. 013733): The bank account is initially deposited K1 billion (K1,000 million) from State-funding.

2. Therefore, organizations and people (local/foreign countries) who want to contribute cash donation for the purchase of vaccines, can donate any type of foreign currency to the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund (Foreign Currency Account No. EDC 600012) at the Myanmar Economic Bank (Nay Pyi Taw), and can donate Myanmar Kyat to the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund (Myanmar Currency Account No. OA. 013733).

3. The potential well-wishers can contact the following phone numbers:
   - Director-General: 067 3410156
   - Treasury Department: 067 3410158

Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry

Myanmar nationals abroad brought back home by relief flight

A total of 110 Myanmar citizens who were stranded in foreign countries—64 from the United States, 10 from Panama and 36 from the Republic of Korea— because of the suspension of commercial flights returned home by relief flight yesterday.

The relief flight of Myanmar Airways International organized by Myanmar Embassy in Washington and Myanmar Embassy in Seoul repatriating the Myanmar nationals from Incheon International Airport in South Korea landed at the Yangon International Airport in the evening.

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, the Ministry of Health and Sports and the Yangon Region government provided them with proper medical tests and arranged 14-day quarantine at specific places or designated hotels, followed by the 7-day home quarantine.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been working with Myanmar embassies in foreign countries and local ministries concerned to bring back citizens and seamen stranded abroad due to the suspension of international commercial flights, in accordance with the guidance of the National-Level Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment of COVID-19.

Until now a total of 11 relief flights were organized from the Incheon International Airport to repatriate the Myanmar citizens stranded in the United States. — MNA

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)
In efforts to speed up the prevention, containment and treatment of the COVID-19 disease, the call centre (phone number 2019) is established by four communications operators and the Blue Ocean Company with the coordination of the Medical Research Department of the Health and Sports Ministry and Post and Telecommunications Department from 9 am to 5 pm daily at the Medical Research Department in Yangon.

Over 43 staff from the Medical Research Department and 17 volunteers from the Myanmar Medical Association totally 60 workers have been working at the centre since 8th April.—MNA

Collective donation for Childcare Centre for Orphans (Nay Pyi Taw)

AN official ceremony marking a collective donation for the Childcare Centre for Orphans (Nay Pyi Taw) was held in the childcare centre, Wunna Theikdi ward in the city yesterday morning.

The ceremony, held in accordance with COVID-19 preventive guidelines, was attended by Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Dr Win Myat Aye, Deputy Minister U Soe Aung, Nay Pyi Taw Council member U Aung Myin Tun, the Association for Prevention, Care and Protection of Abandoned Children Chairperson Daw May Yin Tun, APCPAC members, the Permanent Secretary Directors General of the ministry, and other relevant officials.

During the ceremony, the Union Minister said that the government, charity organizations and civil society organizations have been working cooperatively to look after of orphans.

The Union Minister said that the ministry enacted the Child Rights Law in July 2019 in accordance with the situations of the modern period and the Early Childhood Development (Amendment) Law was enacted in 2018.

He continued that the Department of Social Welfare has established a total of seven childcare centres in Yangon, Mandalay Magway, Mawlamyine, Kengtung, Pathein and Sitway, and each of the child care centres can accommodate up to 100 children.

Now, financed by the APCPAC (Myanmar), a new childcare centre has been built in Nay Pyi Taw and it will be opened soon.

He also expressed thanks to other donors, officials and the Myanmar Women’s Committee for their contributions.

In the ceremony, the Union Minister gave the APCPAC (Myanmar) and other donors certificates of honor.

During the ceremony, individual donors, through the APCPAC (Myanmar), donated necessary materials (worth K5,381.94 billions) for the childcare centre; and the Diplomatic and International Golfers’ Association of Yangon (DIGAY), ambassadors, diplomats, Min Tun Company Limited, Daw Ama Wai (supporting member), APCPAC (Central), and Camera Baby World Company Limited collectively donated child accessories (worth K569.97 billions).—MNA

(Translated by Maung Maung Swe)

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Collective donation for Childcare Centre for Orphans (Nay Pyi Taw)
GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

18 JANUARY 2021
THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Demand for wooden sculptures in demand for decoration

An artist puts finishing touches on a sculpture. PHOTO: KHIN WIN PA

GREEN gram grown in Auk Kwin village tracts, Thaton Township, Mon State, are wary of poor returns despite good harvest

A man works in a farm. PHOTO: THET OO (THAISON)

Nearly K755 mln lost in 226 fires in Sagaing Region in 2020

SAGAING Region had 226 fires in 2020, incurring losses of nearly K755.46 million, U Than Htut Oo, head of regional Fire Service Department affirmed.

The main reason is incorrect and careless behaviours of residents, with 59 careless fires (K141.73 million), 51 stove fires (K65.08 million), 50 electrical fires (K58.67 million), 41 arson (K44.53 million), 17 forest fires (K9 million), six natural fire cases (K436.25 million) and two lightning strikes (K220,000).

Sagaying District had 25 fires while Monywa District was recorded 45 cases, Yinnarpsin District 28, Shwebo District 49, Kanbalu District 16, Kawlin District 10, Katha District 17, Kalay District eight, Tamu District 10, Kantbalu District 16, Kawlin District 29, Shwebo District 49, export and transport costs during the COVID-19 pandemic period, according to the green gram farmers. Green grams grown in Thaton Township are mostly exported to the commodity warehouses in Bago.

Green grams and summer paddy are grown in Thaton Township, and this year there are 16,989 acres of green gram, according to the township Department of Agriculture.—ThetOo (Thaison) (Translated by Kyaw Zin Lin)
Onion warehouse owners in Minbu facing loss as price plummeted

THOSE farmers who store the onions in high hopes of price gain are now experiencing financial hardships as the price plunged to K400 per viss (a viss equals 1.6 kg) in the Minbu market of Magway Region, an onion grower said.

“We are expecting foreign demand. Earlier, the onion fetched K1,200-1,300 per viss. Now, the price drastically fell, and the growers face losses,” said U Tun, a grower.

The prevailing prices of onions are K400-500 per viss in the retail market. The lower demand brings down the price,” said U Thar Paw, a warehouse owner. The growers are hoping for the resumption of trade when the transportation difficulties are eased. At present, we are burdened by high input cost,” said U Myint Shwe, a grower from Minbu Township.

The prices of onions sharply dropped owing to the bulk supply and the closure of the western border amid the coronavirus imp-
A few COVID-19 vaccine recipients show adverse effects in India

Some human bodies do show adverse effects after receiving a vaccine. Once injected into the human body, a vaccine tends to develop immunity against a particular virus, thereby triggering some reactions. These reactions might be in the form of fever or body aches,” he explained.

The doctor, on the condition of anonymity, further said that such adverse effects should not deter the people from taking the vaccine.

“Vaccination is the only cure against this pandemic which has shaken the whole world. The adverse effects will surely go in a day or two, but vaccination will protect us against this deadly COVID-19 virus,” added the doctor.

Cases of adverse effects are reported in Indian media. According to a report by the India Today, one health worker was admitted in the Intensive Care following the vaccination jab. A nurse posted at AIIMS told Xinhua over phone that one security guard who also suffered from some adverse effects like an increased heartbeat and skin rashes, but is stable now.

UK TRAVEL CORRIDORS

UK mulls enforced hotel quarantine for all travellers

Britain’s government said on Sunday it is looking at requiring all incoming travellers to isolate in hotels, expanding on new coronavirus restrictions entering into force in the coming hours. PHOTO: AFP

BRITAIN’S government said on Sunday it is looking at requiring all incoming travellers to isolate in hotels, expanding on new coronavirus restrictions entering into force in the coming hours.

All arrivals to the UK will have to quarantine and show negative tests for COVID-19 from Monday at 0400 GMT after the government scrapped “travel corridors” from countries with lower case loads following the emergence of new strains.

The Sunday Times said the government planned to go further, emulating countries such as Australia and New Zealand in requiring travellers to self-isolate in hotels at their own expense, using GPS and facial-recognition technology to check they are staying put.

“There is a challenge of its workability, its deliverability, but we need to look at that very carefully based on the experience of other countries,” Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab told BBC television. “There will be checks at home, there will be checks at the border. I think that is the most effective measure that we can take at this point in time,” he said. “Obviously we’ll keep other potential measures under review. But they’ve got to be workable.”

SOURCE: AFP

Restrictions

Europe seeks to ease vaccine concerns as virus curbs intensify

Officials sought to ease concerns in Europe on Sunday about deliveries of coronavirus vaccines as nations across the world doubled down on restrictions to fight the rampaging pandemic. The contagion is showing no signs of slowing down, with infections surging past 94 million and more than two million deaths, and Europe among the hardest-hit parts of the world.

Worries have grown that delays in the delivery of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine could hamper a European rollout that has already come under heavy fire for being too slow.

US drugmaker Pfizer, which developed the jab in collaboration with Germany’s BioNTech, said it was working to “significantly” scale up production at its plant in Belgium in the second quarter.

After a short delay, deliveries should be back to the original schedule to the EU from January 25.

“There’s a dip,” said France’s Europe minister Clement Beaune. “But it’s better that it happens now when we have stockpiles than when the wider vaccination campaign starts.”

He told Franceinfo that a limited delay should not present a huge problem.

‘Unacceptable’

Nevertheless, several Nordic and Baltic countries have described the situation as “unacceptable”, and Belgium’s vaccination strategy task force condemned Pfizer for failing to consult them.

France, which saw its death toll rise past 70,000 at the weekend, is set to begin a campaign to inoculate people over 75 from Monday. Russia plans to begin mass vaccinations the same day.

The long process of vaccine rollouts mean countries still have few options but to rely on lockdowns, curfews and social distancing to control the spread of the virus.

Switzerland and Italy are tightening their restrictions from Monday and Britain will require all arrivals to quarantine and show negative tests.

Newspaper reports suggested the UK could try to emulate countries such as Australia and New Zealand in requiring travellers to self-isolate in hotels at their own expense.

Foreign minister Dominic Raab said such a system could be difficult to manage but “we need to look at that very carefully based on the experience of other countries”.

SOURCE: AFP

Until vaccines are fully rolled out, countries have few options but to rely on lockdown restrictions to curb the spread of the virus. PHOTO: SAM PANTHAKY AFP/FILE
### Near the US Capitol

**Heavily armed man arrested at Washington security checkpoint**

A heavily armed man has been arrested in Washington at a security checkpoint near the US Capitol, where he tried to use a phony credential to access the restricted area where President-elect Joe Biden will be inaugurated next week, authorities said.

Wesley Allen Beeler, of Virginia, had driven to a checkpoint near the US Capitol, where the Secret Service has declared off-limits at the request of the Secret Service, which enforces the security of the president.

As officers checked it against the authorized access list, one noticed decals on the back of Beeler's pick-up truck that said 'Assault Life,' with an image of a rifle, and another with the message: "If they come for your guns, give 'em your bullets first."

Under questioning, Beeler told officers he had a Glock handgun in the vehicle. A search uncovered a loaded handgun, more than 500 rounds of ammunition, shotgun shells and a magazine for the gun, the court document said.

Beeler was arrested on charges including possession of an unregistered firearm and unlawful possession of ammunition, a police report said.

Washington is under a high state of alert ahead of Biden's Wednesday inauguration, after a mob of President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol on January 6.

Five people died in the assault, including a police officer. Security officials have warned that armed pro-Trump extremists, possibly carrying explosives, pose a threat to Washington as well as state capitals over the coming week.

Thousands of National Guard troops have been deployed in Washington and streets have been blocked off downtown with concrete barriers.

The National Mall, which is normally packed with people every four years for presidential inaugurations, has been declared off-limits at the request of the Secret Service, which enforces the security of the president.

### At the Town Hall

**Five shot dead in rare Mexico City attack**

Five people were shot dead in central Mexico City, the local security secretariat said Saturday, a rare attack in the capital and likely linked to organized crime. PHOTO: AFP

Five people were shot dead in central Mexico City; the local security secretariat said Saturday, a rare attack in the capital and likely linked to organized crime, according to local media.

The attack occurred late Friday at the town hall in Miguel Hidalgo, one of the most prosperous districts of Mexico City.

Police responding to an alert found “five people on the ground with gunshot wounds,” according to a statement.

Local media report said one of the victims was a member of the local Union Tepito cartel but city authorities have not confirmed this.

Despite growing drug cartel violence in Mexico over the last decade, shootings and multiple killings are rare in the capital compared to other areas of the country.

However, the city was shocked by an attack in June last year on its security chief, Omar Garcia Harfuch, by heavily armed gunmen who killed two of his bodyguards and a passerby. Garcia Harfuch, who was wounded, blamed the attack on the powerful Jalisco New Generation drug cartel. — SOURCE: AFP

### Extreme Wintry Weather

**Mongolians place hay near habitats to protect wildlife from harsh winter**

Bayankhongor, a southwestern Mongolian province, has been providing hay near wildlife habitats to help animals survive the extreme wintry weather, a local official said Sunday.

"It can be said that our province did not see summer in 2020. There was no grass last summer," Jalbair Enkhbat, deputy governor of the province's Bayanlkh soum, told Xinhua.

"A hundred bales of hay have been allocated to our soum. Just yesterday, we put some hay in an area called 'Aarin Usnii 7aikhin,' which is a habitat of the Siberian ibex," he said. "We also plan to put out hay and feed for other wild animals such as gazelles and roe-deer."

This harsh winter has become a big challenge not only for wild animals, but for herders, the official said, adding that there are about 800 herder households in the soum, around 40 percent of whom have migrated with livestock for better grasslands elsewhere. At least six of all 21 Mongolian provinces are likely to experience a dzud or near-dzud this winter, according to the country's Food and Agriculture Ministry.

SOURCE: Xinhua

### Hospitalized, severe COVID-19 cases at record high in Japan

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SOURCE: Xinhua

**A Challenging Task**

The number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients with serious symptoms topped 970 to mark a record high in Japan, authorities said on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the number of patients recovering at home reached 10,208 this week, according to the health ministry. The number of homebound patients as of Wednesday was 1.7 times that of the previous week amid a third wave of COVID-19 infections across the country.

On Sunday, 5,759 new COVID-19 cases and 49 deaths were reported across Japan. Tokyo confirmed an additional 1,592 infections with five new deaths, the metropolitan government said.

Currently, 19 prefectures have reached the bed occupancy situation at Stage 4, the worst level on the government's four-level scale, up eight from last week.

Tokyo has the highest number of homebound patients of 8,518, up over 3,000 compared to a week earlier.

SOURCE: Xinhua
The world is failing short of promises made under the Paris climate deal to help the most vulnerable nations deal with the deepening impacts of climate change, according to the United Nations.

The UN Environment Programme’s Adaptation Gap report found that the current finance levels of around $10 billion annually for adaptation will fall short for full adoption of new coping strategies.

It said the true cost of adapting to climate impacts in these nations could be as high as $300 billion every year by the end of the decade and $100 billion by mid-century.

The report found that many countries are not doing enough to adapt to climate change. There is no clear evidence that they are on track to meet their commitments.

The report also found that emerging markets and economies in transition are spending the least on adaptation in relation to their GDP.

The report said that adaptation is essential to help vulnerable communities cope with the impacts of climate change and to prevent or limit the adverse effects.

The report also highlighted the need for more robust risk assessment and management, especially in low-income countries. It said that the current approach to risk management is not sufficient to protect people and communities from the impacts of climate change.

The report also called for more investment in research and development, as well as for greater collaboration between governments, the private sector, and civil society.

The report concluded that the world needs to urgently address the issue of climate change and its impacts, and that this requires more investment, innovation, and political will.

Source: UN Environment Programme Adaptation Gap report

**What We Know About South Africa’s COVID Variant**

A new coronavirus variant discovered by South African scientists is fueling a surge of infections nationwide and raising global concern.

**What’s Next?**

The variant, known as 501Y.V2, has been found to be more transmissible and more likely to cause severe disease. The variant has also been found in other countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, and Brazil.

**What’s the Severity of the Variant?**

The severity of the variant dubbed 501Y.V2...

**Adaptation—Reducing the Impact of Climate Change**

The report emphasized the need for a rapid and massive increase in climate finance to help vulnerable countries cope with the impacts of climate change.

The report called for richer countries to fulfill their financial commitments, particularly the least developed countries.

The report also called for more research and development to better understand and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The report concluded that a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach is needed to address the impacts of climate change, including policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support vulnerable communities.

Source: UN Environment Programme Adaptation Gap report
Cyprus cats out in the cold as pandemic bites

AT a cat sanctuary set in picturesque hills near Paphos, on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, volunteers are grappling with a surge in abandonments they blame on the coronavirus pandemic.

“There has been an increase of about 30 percent of previously owned, loved (and) looked-after cats that have been left behind” as people depart the island, lamented Dawn Foote, 48, who runs the Tala Cats rescue centre.

Some among Cyprus’s large expatriate and dual resident communities have retreated home as the economic squeeze has tightened, she noted.

“People, at the moment, have just got no money, and it’s expensive to get a cat to another country – you’ve got passports to pay for, you’ve got transport carriers to pay,” Foote said.

“It’s heartbreaking,” she told AFP; saying abandonments were rising island-wide, in part also due to locals no longer being able to afford pet food or vet bills.

Evidence of cats’ domestication in Cyprus dates back further than anywhere else, including Pharaonic Egypt.

In 2004, archaeologists announced they had unearthed the remains of a cat and a human deliberately buried together 9,500 years ago at the Neolithic village of Shillourokambos. That’s some 1,500 years earlier than the previous record find – also in Cyprus – in the form of a feline jawbone.

Prowling for food, owners
Abandoned cats just “don’t know how to survive,” Foote said.

“A lot of them want to give up.” The government imposed a nationwide lockdown from January 10, Cyprus’s second since the pandemic began, after Covid-19 infections surged.

The closure of restaurants – choice locations for feline scavengers – has further compounded the misery for many of the island’s feline residents, whose numbers dwarf the human population, according to at least one animal welfare organisation.

SOURCE: AFP

THE CAT’S WHISKERS

Deliveroo targets $7 billion valuation for IPO

BRITISH meals delivery company Deliveroo, boosted by demand during the coronavirus pandemic, said Sunday it was targeting a stock market listing after a fund-raising round valued the company at more than $7.0 billion.

“Investment comes ahead of a potential initial public offering and reflects strong consumer adoption is accelerating,” it said.

No date was set for the IPO, but Bloomberg News said it was expected in or around April.

London-based Deliveroo works with 140,000 restaurants in 800 cities to deliver meals to customers’ homes, and has seen demand soar in line with other home-delivery companies as much of the world has been subject to lockdowns to tackle the pandemic.

But its business has come under scrutiny, including in France and Spain, as its free-lance delivery riders complain of exploitative practices.

SOURCE: AFP

Boosted by demand


Africa’s confirmed COVID-19 cases pass 3.23 mln: Africa CDC

COVID-19 cases on the African continent amounted to 3,235,198 as of Sunday, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) said.

According to the continental disease control and prevention agency’s Africa COVID-19 dashboard, the death toll related to the pandemic stood at 78,313 as of Sunday with 2,649,520 recoveries.

The Southern African region is the hardest-hit area in Africa in terms of the number of cases, followed by the Northern African region, according to the Africa CDC.

The five highly-affected African countries include South Africa with 1,235,659 cases, Morocco with 458,865 cases, Tunisia with 177,231 cases, Egypt with 155,597 cases, as well as Ethiopia with 139,772 cases.

South Africa is also the highest-affected African country in terms of COVID-19-inflicted deaths, with 36,851 deaths.

SOURCE: AFP

Hardest-hit area

Africa’s confirmed COVID-19 cases pass 3.23mln: Africa CDC

Serbia becomes one of the first European countries to receive a Chinese-made Covid-19 vaccine when one million doses of a jab produced by Sinopharm arrives at Belgrade airport.

After Pfizer-BioNTech and Russia’s Sputnik V, Sinopharm’s is the third coronavirus vaccine to be used by the Balkan nation.

Once it gets a final approval by Serbia’s medicines agency, vaccination could start on Sunday or Monday, say health officials. – SOURCE: AFP

Demonstrations

Anti-masking

The worldwide surge in cases, fuelled in part by new virus variants, have forced the reimposition of deeply unpopular restrictions on populations tiring of social distancing and the economic pain.

In some nations, that resistance has sparked protests. Roughly 10,000 people marched in Australia’s capital, as strict new measures are enforced.

Most of them refused to wear masks or respect social distancing rules, and their rally was condemned as “anti-mask lunacy” by a much smaller counter-protest.

SOURCE: AFP

Sylvester Turner

U.S. Houston mayor criticizes “loophole” allowing clubs to open as restaurants

U.S. Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner on Saturday called for the state of Texas to close a loophole that allows bars and nightclubs to reclassify as restaurants when he visited a mega COVID-19 vaccination center.

Turner made a tour at a vaccination mega site at Minute Maid Park in Houston when he held a briefing about the city’s pandemic concerns and response.

SOURCE: XINHUA

Deliveroo targets $7 billion valuation for IPO

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According to the continental disease control and prevention agency’s Africa COVID-19 dashboard, the death toll related to the pandemic stood at 78,313 as of Sunday with 2,649,520 recoveries.

The Southern African region is the hardest-hit area in Africa in terms of the number of cases, followed by the Northern African region, according to the Africa CDC.

The five highly-affected African countries include South Africa with 1,235,659 cases, Morocco with 458,865 cases, Tunisia with 177,231 cases, Egypt with 155,597 cases, as well as Ethiopia with 139,772 cases.

South Africa is also the highest-affected African country in terms of COVID-19-inflicted deaths, with 36,851 deaths.

SOURCE: AFP
The inauguration is on Wednesday

Biden to sign Inauguration Day orders on pandemic, economy, other crises

President-elect Joe Biden will sign executive orders on Inauguration Day to address the pandemic, the ailing US economy, climate change and racial injustice in America, a senior aide said.

“All of these crises demand urgent action,” his incoming chief of staff Ron Klain said in a memo to the new White House senior staff, adding that Biden will sign “roughly a dozen” orders after he is sworn in on Wednesday.

“In his first ten days in office, President-elect Biden will take decisive action to address these four crises, prevent other urgent and irreversible harms, and restore America’s place in the world,” Klain said.

As he inherits the White House from Donald Trump, Biden’s plate is overflowing with acute challenges.

The US is fast approaching 400,000 deaths from the Covid-19 crisis and logging well over a million new cases a week as the coronavirus spreads out of control.

The economy is ailing, with 10 million fewer jobs available compared to the start of the pandemic and American consumers and businesses are struggling to stay afloat.

Biden this week unveiled plans to seek $1.9 trillion to revive the economy through new stimulus payments and other aid, and plans a blitz to accelerate America’s stumbling Covid vaccine rollout effort.

On Inauguration Day Biden, as previously promised, will sign orders including ones for the US to rejoin the Paris climate accord and reverse Trump’s ban on entry of people from certain Muslim-majority countries, the Klain statement said.

“President-elect Biden will take action—just not to reverse the gravest damages of the Trump administration—but also to start moving our country forward,” Klain said.

Source: AFP

WAVE OF ASSASSINATIONS CONTINUES

Gunmen assassinate two Afghan women judges in Kabul ambush

Gunmen shot dead two Afghan women judges working for the Supreme Court in an ambush in the country’s capital Sunday, officials said, an attack the top US envoy in Kabul blamed on the Taliban.

Violence has surged across Afghanistan in recent months despite ongoing peace talks between the Taliban and government—especially in Kabul, where a new trend of targeted killings aimed at high-profile figures has sown fear in the restive city.

The latest attack, which US Charge D’Affaires Ross Wilson blamed on the Taliban, comes just two days after the Pentagon announced it had cut troop levels in Afghanistan to 2,500, the lowest in nearly two decades.

The attack on the judges happened as they were driving to their office in a court vehicle, said Ahmad Fahim Qaweem, a spokesman for the Supreme Court.

Source: AFP

DISPUTED ELECTION

Uganda’s Bobi Wine still under ‘house arrest’ after poll; party

Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine remains under “house arrest”, his party said on Sunday, after a disputed election returned President Yoweri Museveni to office for a sixth term.

The former ragga singer turned lawmaker came second in national polls has prompted appeals to the polls as their chancellor Angela Merkel in the top job.

Merkel ally Laschet was elected as head of the Christian Democratic Union on Saturday in a run-off against right-wing Friedrich Merz, nine months ahead of a general election that will mark the end of the chancellor’s 16-year reign.

The head of the CDU would normally lead the party and its Bavarian sister party, the CSU, to the polls as their chancellor candidate in a general election.

But Laschet’s poor standing in national polls has prompted speculation that someone other than the CDU leader could be a better choice to lead the conservatives into the election race.

In the run-up to the September 26 vote, with the coronavirus pandemic still wreaking havoc in Europe’s top economy and around the world, it will not only be Laschet whose every move is under close scrutiny.

Two other men, CSU leader Markus Soeder and Health Minister Jens Spahn, could also be in the running to be the conservative “chancellor candidate”.

Source: AFP

WORLD

18 JANUARY 2021
THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

11

REMAINS ON ALERT

UN troops recapture C. African city from rebels

UN peacekeeping troops said they have retaken control of a city in the Central African Republic captured two weeks ago by armed groups waging an offensive against the government of President Faustin Archange Touadera.

Rebels abandoned their positions in Bangassou, 750 kilometres (470 miles) east of the capital Bangui, and fled the city following an ultimatum on Friday from the UN peacekeeping force MINUSCA, the mission’s spokesman Vladimir Monteiro said late Saturday.

The city of Bangassou is under the complete control of MINUSCA,” Monteiro said, though he added that the UN force “remains on alert” to prevent any rebel return or other actions against civilians, the state authority and UN troops.

Armed groups waging a nationwide offensive captured the city on January 3, forcing many residents to flee across the border to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

“It’s a great joy,” Juan Jose Aguirre, the bishop of Bangassou, told AFP following the UN operation to regain control of the city.

“Afeter 13 days sleeping outdoors, doors will be able to return to their homes,” he added. Lieutenant Colonel Abdoulaizi Fall, spokesman for MINUSCA’s military component, said the UN force intervened to stop attempts at looting overnight Friday to Saturday.

“The situation is calm and under control and positions that had been occupied by armed groups are no longer,” Fall said.

“The looting of the city of Bangassou by the rebels...before their retreat on the arrival of the reinforcements made up of elements of the Rwandan contingent of MINUSCA, shows up one of the aims of these foreign mercenaries: loot our riches and the property of our people,” Prime Minister Firmin Ngbehah said in a Facebook post.

Source: AFP

Race to succeed Merkel in top job thrown wide open

Moderate Armin Laschet may have won a key vote this weekend to become the new leader of Germany’s conservative CDU party, but his victory has thrown wide open the question of who will succeed Chancellor Angela Merkel in the top job.

Merkel ally Laschet was elected as head of the Christian Democratic Union on Saturday in a run-off against right-wing Friedrich Merz, nine months ahead of a general election that will mark the end of the chancellor’s 16-year reign.

The head of the CDU would normally lead the party and its Bavarian sister party, the CSU, to the polls as their chancellor candidate in a general election.

But Laschet’s poor standing in national polls has prompted speculation that someone other than the CDU leader could be a better choice to lead the conservatives into the election race.

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Two other men, CSU leader Markus Soeder and Health Minister Jens Spahn, could also be in the running to be the conservative “chancellor candidate”.

Source: AFP

A Twitter update under Wine’s account, written by an admin in his party’s Facebook account, said: “Our leader... is effectively under house arrest."

National Unity Opposition leader Bobi Wine remains under “house arrest”, a Ugandan opposition party said on Sunday, after a disputed election returned President Yoweri Museveni to office for a sixth term.

The former ragga singer turned lawmaker came second in national polls has prompted fresh calls to the polls as their chancellor Angela Merkel in the top job.

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Source: AFP

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Source: AFP
**BUSINESS MODEL THREATENED**

**Trump brand tarnished after bruising presidency and Capitol attack**

DONALD Trump shot to prominence with a business empire that bears his name, but after four years of political tumult capped by his supporters' violent attack on the Capitol, the US president's brand stands tarnished, threatening his businesses, experts say.

Companies that stuck with Trump throughout his term are cutting ties in an 11th-hour stampede, including Signature Bank which closed Trump's personal accounts and the PGA of America which scotched a plan to hold its 2022 championship at Trump's New Jersey golf course.

Such announcements not only reflect the business community's skittishness to proximity with a widely-condemned figure, but further him in his company, already hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic and the looming loss of US taxpayer revenue tied to Trump's visits.

The president's role in the Capitol calamity that killed five people and drew international shock has generated withering criticism from diverse groups ranging from the Business Roundtable to the AFL-CIO labor federation.

Trump's "name is really an albatross," said Michael D'Antonio, who authored a 2015 biography of Trump, adding that January 6 was a game-changer for the president's brand.

"He is the most disgraced president in history. This is a person who's synonymous with a mob attacking the US Capitol," he said. "I just think this went a step too far."

Tim Calkins, a marketing professor at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, said Trump's brand will suffer long-term damage due to the chaos.

"Before his term, Trump stood for wealth, success and over-the-top luxury," he said. "Now the brand has associations with anti-government views, racism and extremism. This makes the brand fairly toxic."

**PAKISTANI SIDE OF THE HIMALAYAN RANGE**

**Nepalese mountaineers become world's 1st to scale K2 in winter**

A team of Nepalese mountaineers on Saturday became the world's first to scale K2, the world's second-highest mountain, in winter, a Pakistani alpine group said.

Of the 14 mountains in the world that rise above 8,000 meters, only 8,611-meter K2 had not been scaled in winter.

The peak in northern Pakistan near China is known for its unforgiving conditions and is often referred to as the Savage Mountain.

A group of 10 Nepali climbers reached the summit Saturday, the Alpine Club of Pakistan confirmed.

"The impossible is made possible!" Nirmal Purja, one of the climbers, tweeted. "History made for mankind, History made for Nepal!"

**WEST COAST**

**Out-of-control Australian bushfire threatens Perth homes**

AUSTRALIAN firefighters said they expect to battle an out-of-control bushfire well into the night on Saturday, as the blaze threatens lives and homes in the west coast city of Perth.

Residents were told "to act immediately to survive" as the flames approached homes near Oakford, about 35 kilometres (22 miles) south of Perth's city centre, in an emergency warning issued by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES).

Locals were told to evacuate if the way was clear or to take shelter, as the fire spewed thick smoke over the area.

Around 130 firefighters were expected to work overnight into Sunday to bring the 80-100 hectare (200-250 acre) blaze under control, DFES District Officer Russell Wells told media.

"There are some really challenging conditions ahead," Wells said.

Although temperatures were expected to dip overnight from their high of 33 degrees Celsius (91 Fahrenheit), strong gusty winds were forecast.

And crews were expecting even hotter temperatures on Sunday amid concerns the windy conditions could cause the fire to double in size.

"What we're really trying to do at the moment is bring this fire under control today and have a really strong presence tomorrow so it doesn't flare up," said Wells.

Aerial footage showed at least one structure ablaze in the area as water bombing aircraft repeatedly tried to douse the fire.

Several roads have been closed and evacuation centres set up.

There were also several other wildfires burning around the edges of the city.

**NEWS IN BRIEF**

**6.2 MAGNITUDE EARTHquake**

Death toll in Indonesian quake rises to 73 as search continues

The death toll from Friday's 6.2 magnitude earthquake on Indonesia's Sulawesi Island has risen to 73 with over 700 others injured, authorities said Sunday as search and rescue efforts continued.

More bodies were recovered in Mamuju, the capital of West Sulawesi Province that was hard hit by the quake early on Friday, according to the National Disaster Mitigation Agency. Bodies have also been recovered in the nearby Majene district.

The quake destroyed more than 1,100 homes and saw roughly 28,000 people evacuated, the agency said, adding that searches for people trapped under buildings and rubble were continuing.

Relief supplies were distributed to those displaced by the quake, including tents, food, blankets and power generators, as well as face masks to protect against coronavirus infections.—SOURCE: KYODO

**MORE TO BE DONE**

Super fast 5G in the US still a work in progress

Marketing pitches in the US are bullish on superfast 5G telecom networks, but they remain more of a promise than reality.

Promoters of the technology say it will bring such innovations as fast-thinking self-driving cars and rapid-fire video downloads.

And nationwide coverage with 5G could add $1.5 trillion to GDP in the next five years. But actually deploying it here is "very fragmented" given the maze of local regulations and agencies that telecom companies have to navigate across 50 states, said Jefferson Wang, head of 5G strategy at Accenture. Approvals need to be sought and, typically, hearings held when it comes to where on streets, buildings, or other structures antennas can be mounted to relay telecom signals.—SOURCE: AFP
what's bitcoin really worth?

After dizzying gyrations, other crypto coins such as ethereum had rocketed to a market cap of $670 billion with myriad institutional demand, the rates, bloated by a surge in software, bitcoin was promptly sliding some 20 over the past year, before rising more than 400 percent since 2009.

A much-stirred idea, bitcoin was setDash.com, notes that密码, Apple or Tesla. Although deep-pock- eted investors have recently become enthua- siasts, crypto was in its early days the preserve of geeky amateur investors. SOURCE: AFP

France suggests pause on US-EU trade standoff

THE European Union and the US should “pause” a long-running tariff dispute to allow the issue to be resolved, France’s foreign minister suggested Sunday.

A 16-year spat over aircraft subsidies turned increasingly sour under the Donald Trump administration, expand- ing to other products and sectors, and France’s suggestion comes ahead of President-elect Joe Biden’s inauguration in the coming week.

“The issue that poisons our trade relations is price increases and taxes on steel, digital technology, Airbus and particularly our wine sector,” said French minister Jean-Yves Le Dri- nn in an interview with the Journal du Dimanche.

“If we could quickly find a method to settle this dispute with Europe and France, that would be a step forward,” he said. “It may take time but, in the meantime, we can always order a pause.”

At the end of the year, Washington announced new tariffs on aircraft parts, wine, cognac and brandies from France and Germany, adding to a long list of EU products subject to 25 percent duties since 2019.

The US said the move was in retaliation for tar-iffs the EU imposed in No- vember, which it considers unfair. France is deemed less attractive than other Asian rivals as an international financial hub.

SOURCE: KYODO

FSA to assist foreign financial firms entering Japan in English

The Financial Services Agency (FSA) has launched an office to help foreign financial firms enter Japan — from pre-application consulta- tion to supervision and inspec- tion after registration — with all communication available in English.

The launch of the Financial Market Entry Office is intended to ex- pand Japan’s role as an international financial center, the FSA said in a news release.

In coordination with local finance bureaus across Japan, the office, and the more than 10 FSA officials, started op- erations on Jan. 12 for “all types of foreign business operators” including asset management firms and funds.

In an effort to emu- late other Asian financial centers such as Hong Kong and Singapore, on- line communication and video conference will be available in English.

“We aim to make Japan a financial center open to the world by making its financial ad- ministration available in English and offering a one-stop service,” Financial Services Minister Taro Aso told reporters last week.

The office will also serve as a contact point for any inquiry on proce- dures regarding financial laws and regulations in connection with the es- tablishment of a business base in Japan by foreign business operators, ac- cording to the FSA.

Together with the new one-stop office, Japan will try to attract more foreign businesses by offering in- come and inheritance tax breaks for highly-skilled foreign professionals in a tax reform blueprint for fiscal 2021 starting April.

Higher taxes and lan- guage barriers are often cited as the reason Japan, the world’s third-largest economy, is generally deemed less attractive than other Asian rivals as an international financial hub.

SOURCE: KYODO
Plan to shape Khuepra Hill (Shwe mountain range) area as new tourist destination in Kayah State

By Swe Oo Wai
(Translated by Than Tun Aung)

GLOBAL countries are encountering the declines of tourism industries respectively during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Although Myanmar faces impacts of the pandemic in tourism sector, efforts are being made to create new tourist attractions so as to improve tourism services in the post-COVID-19 period. Myanmar possesses various kinds of natural environment and natural resources as well as ancient cultural heritages in all areas. Based on natural scenes given as gifts by the nature, new tourist destinations are created across the nation. In this regard, preparations are being made to shape Khuepra Hill (Shwe mountain range) in Kayah State as an ecotourism site.

Strenuous efforts are being made to upgrade the area of Khuepra Hill (Shwe mountain range) as a tourist destination near Khuepra Village of Khuepra Village-tract in Dimawhso Township from Loikaw District of Kayah State. To do so, members of the Kayah State Tourism Committee and the Destination Management Organization made field trips together to Khuepra Hill (Shwe mountain range) area on 9 January 2021. Moreover, officials from Kayah State government also paid visits to the aforesaid area for observation.

Actually, Khuepra Hill (Shwe mountain range) area is a virgin land with non-deteriorated natural environment including wildlife such as birds and animals, which are attractive to the visitors. Khuepra Hill is at an altitude of more than 5,800 feet. As such, it is the best site in Dimawhso Township of Loikaw District to enjoy the most beautiful scenes.

Khuepra Hill (Shwe mountain range) and Khuepra Village are in a distance of about a two-hour drive by motorcycle or car from Loikaw, the capital of Kayah State. It is seemed that the driving time is very long to the hill and village, but preparations are being made to pave asphalt on the road. The route between Loikaw and Khuepra Village is 35 miles long. So, if the facility has been fulfilled, the road will be better than now.

Various sizes of hillocks and thriving trees and flowery plants on Khuepra Hill
Tourism

The new tourist destination (Shwe mountain range) will help visitors be fresh their minds as soon as they arrive there. Visitors will have the chances to enjoy trekking routes and hilly roads while observing rare species of flowery plants and trees.

Moreover, those visitors will have opportunities to closely observe local ethnics, agricultural tasks in various areas, lifestyle of local ethnic people, traditional foods and customs and traditional festivals as well as their daily lives in Khuepra Village and nearby areas. The travellers can grasp the chances to overcome challenges on simple lives of local ethnic people from the hilly area while viewing round the habitats of birds and wildlife from around Khuepra Hill.

It is expected to emerge a new destination for local and foreign travellers to visit the area from Khuepra Hill (Shwe mountain range) of Dimawhso Township of Kayah State to Thandaunggyi Township of Kayin State. In fact, Dimawhso Township is home to Kayah, Shan, Bamar, Kayin, Hakine, Chin and Mon ethnics. Dimawhso Township is located at 2,982 feet higher than the sea level, and it is on the 177.46 square miles of land. As rural development projects are being implemented in Dimawhso Township, Hsintaung, Nganyoe, Dawtaung, Dawtadah and Dawpoesi villages are enjoying fruitful results of the project.

At a time when the new tourist destination has been created, travellers can pay visits to the project villages. Such project is being implemented in 22 villages of Kayah State from 2015-16 financial year to 2019-2020 financial year. Such development project will be implemented in further years.

In fact, Kayah State takes a position in the eastern part of Myanmar, sharing border with Shan State in the north, Thailand in the east and Kayin State in the south. As such, it is expected to extend the new tourist destination from Khuepra Hill (Shw mountain range) to Thandaunggyi of Kayah State and the areas adjacent to Shan State.

Currently, some parts of the inter-village road linking Khuepra Village and Lobakhu Village in Dimawhso Township are being facilitated as an asphalt road. In the future, the whole road would be upgraded to the asphalt one. Such road passes nine villages. Upon completion, the road will link Dimawhso and Loikaw townships. Consequently, local people from Khuepra Hill (Shwe mountain range) area will make trips to Loikaw, the capital of Kayah State, in all seasons. Moreover, such facility will help travellers have smooth transportation.

There are many significant tourist attractive areas in Kayah State. These are Taungkwe Pagoda, Lawpita waterfall, seven series of lakes, Htipwint lake, Kyet Cave and Ngwetawung dam. These destinations are regular travel sites for visitors. As such, Khuepra Hill (Shwe mountain range) is being shaped as a new destination for the travellers.

Everybody can enjoy significant and chilling scenes of the region. They have chance to pass the routes in the jungles and on the hills and observe agricultural tasks of ethnic people from the hilly areas, location of villages and daily lifestyle of ethnic people.

As the modern tourism service creates chances for the travellers to take a relaxation while enjoying natural environment, Khuepra Hill (Shwe mountain range) area in Dimawhso Township of Kayah State will become a new destination to attract travellers in the post-COVID-19 period.
SPORT

18 JANUARY 2021

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

American Steele fires 61 to swipe lead at PGA Sony Open

HAWAII — Brendan Steele birdied three of the last four holes on the front and back nines to shoot a nine-under par 61 and seize a two-stroke lead after Saturday’s third round of the PGA Sony Open.

The 37-year-old American, last year’s Sony Open runner-up, finished 54 holes at Waialae Country Club in Honolulu on 18-under 192 after a bogey-free round. “I feel like I’m swinging really well,” Steele said. “Course management is great. I feel like I’m doing well all around.”

World number 114 Steele said he wants to play just as well in last year’s final round even though he lost to Australian Cameron Smith. “I’d like to do the exact same thing again tomorrow and hopefully it’s good enough,” he said.

South Korean-born American Kevin Na matched the low round of his career with a 61 to share second on 194 with Chile’s Joaquin Niemann, who eagled the par-5 18th to leap over Americans Peter Malnati, Russell Henley, Chris Kirk, Stewart Cink and Charley Hoffman on 195.

Steele seeks his fourth career PGA title after the 2011 Texas Open and the 2016 and 2017 Safeway Opens.

Steele opened with a 19-foot birdie, birdied six and reeled off three in a row ending with an 11-footer at the par-4 10th. He sank a 15-foot birdie putt at 12, his longest birdie putt of the day from 17 feet at the par-3 17th and an eight-foot-er for birdie at the par-5 18th.

—AFP

Tennis: No delay to Australian Open despite fourth positive Covid case

MELBOURNE — Australian Open chief Craig Tiley insisted Sunday (Jan 17) the Grand Slam would begin as scheduled next month, while admitting it was “not a great situation” for the 47 players who have been confined to their hotel rooms.

The tournament was thrown into disarray on Saturday when three people tested positive for Covid-19 on two of the 17 charter flights bringing players and their entourages to Melbourne and Adelaide. A fourth person, a member of a broadcast team on one of the same flights, from Los Angeles, tested positive on Sunday. None were players, although one was Sylvain Brueneau, coach of Canada’s 2019 US Open winner Bianca Andreescu. Another was also a coach, although they were not identified.

Everyone on board was considered to be close contact and ordered not to leave their hotel rooms for the 14-day mandatory quarantine period.

—AFP

Star player Than Paing joins Shan United Football Club

YANGON United Striker Than Paing recently signed a two-year contract with Myanmar National League back-to-back champions Shan United, according to the statement with the football club.

The 24-year-old forward player started his football career in the junior team of Yango United in 2015 and then he was selected in the U-19 Myanmar National team thanks to his performances.

Than Paing scored a single goal in the 2014 AFC U-19 Championship quarter-final and the remarkable goal sent Myanmar U-19 team to the 2015 FIFA U-20 World Cup for the first time in the Myanmar football history.

“I’m grateful to coaches, my teammates and everybody out there in Yangon United. I was treated like a family member of their own. I owe them a debt of lifelong gratitude,” Than Paing said.

“I was born and bred in Shan State. My dreams of playing in the team that represents my own native state are now fulfilled. My mom is a Shan ethnic and she really wants me to represent Shan State. Now, she’s feeling pleased. I myself want to take new challenges. I do believe that I can carve out a better future playing in the Shan United,” said the Shan State born player.

“I’ve always been struck with awe by the scene of Shan United home stadium in Taunggyi – with supporters to full capacity whenever football matches hold here. We ethnic people are so simple. They show their heartfelt support when they love somebody. Now, I’ve signed for Shan United. I’m looking forward to playing in front of home supporters, wearing Shan United jersey,” Than Paing added.

Myanmar National League defending champions Shan United have already signed defender Kyaw Zin Lwin, Midfielder Tha Aung and Forward player Soe Lwin within this month. —Lynn Thit (Tgi)

Koeman hopeful on Messi fitness for Super Cup final

SEVILLE (Spain) — Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman says he is optimistic Lionel Messi will be fit for Sunday’s Spanish Super Cup final against Athletic Bilbao after injury forced him to miss the semi-final.

The Argentina forward was left out of the squad for Wednesday’s penalty shootout victory over Real Sociedad after complaining of discomfort during last week’s 4-0 La Liga win over Granada.

“He trained on his own yesterday (Friday). We have a session this evening, he wants to train, so we’ll see how he feels afterwards and if he wants to play or not,” Koeman told a news conference on Saturday in Seville.

“Tomorrow morning we’ll see how his body reacts to the session, but we have high hopes that he’ll be there for the match.”

Messi was pictured with strapping on his left thigh as he watched the semi-final from the stands in Cordoba. Barca won 3-2 on penalties following a 1-1 draw after extra time.

“Every player needs to be 100% to start the game, it’s not the last game of the season, we still have a lot of games after this one,” said Koeman. “The final decision will be the player’s.”

Messi is the club’s leading scorer this season with 14 goals in all competitions, his return to form of late coinciding with Barca’s nine-game unbeaten run after a poor start under the Dutchman.

“It’s always important to win things to prove that you are on the right track,” said Koeman. “It’s not the most important title as a player but it’s a title.

“Each title you win, it’s another line on your list of honours. It’s important for the players and for the club.” —AFP

Star player Than Paing receives the Shan United jersey after signing two-year contract with the team  PHOTO: SUFC

Striker Than Paing said he wants to play just as well as he did in last year’s final round even though he lost to Australian Cameron Smith. “I’d like to do the exact same thing again tomorrow and hopefully it’s good enough,” he said.

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—AFP

Lionel Messi (R) watched the Spanish Super Cup semi-final against Real Sociedad from the stands  PHOTO: CRISTINA QUICLER/AFP