

NATIONAL

Myanmar nationals abroad brought back home by relief flight

PAGE-2

NATIONAL

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

PAGE-3

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Monday, 18 January 2021

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

SINGU Township’s Marle Nattaung Dam will supply water to more than 800 acres of summer crops in the first week of February as the maintenance works at the reservoir was completed, according to U San Min Tun, Assistant Director of Mandalay Region Irrigation and Water Utilization Management Department.

The present volume of water in the reservoir is 17,080 acre-feet – 7,410 acre-feet of fixed water and 9,670 acre-feet of available

water for distribution. One acre-foot of water equals about 326,000 gallons.

A total of 865 acres of summer crops — 765 acres of paddy and 100 acres of sesame — will be irrigated from the dam this financial year, and monsoon crops in 2021-2022 financial year will also be supplied water from the water source.

“Upgrading works were conducted at the Marle Nattaung Dam to supply water for farmers. Sufficiency of irrigation water depends on the rain. The irrigation water will be supplied to summer crops”, he said.

“Farmers need to use the irrigation water effectively so that the water is helpful for them. Water will be irrigated not only for summer crops but also for monsoon crops”, he added.

A total of 6,500 acres farmland in the catchment area of the dam will get sufficient irrigation from the dam. The villages of Marle, Nattaung, Letpan Hla, Waryonegon, Shaukpinyoe, Kyule, Kuko, Singu (2), Ngwe Taung and Minywa will also get sufficient water from the dam.

Marle Nattaung dam is located near Marle Village in Singu Township, PyinOoLwin District in Mandalay Region. Seldawgyi Dam in Madaya Township will also supply water to 67,053 acres of summer paddy and 295 acres of sesame in Mandalay this financial year. —Min Htet Aung (Man Sub-Printing House) (Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

Marle Nattaung dam is located near Marle Village in Singu Township, PyinOoLwin District in Mandalay Region.

Seldawgyi Dam in Madaya Township will also supply water to 67,053 acres of summer paddy and 295 acres of sesame in Mandalay this financial year. —Min Htet Aung (Man Sub-Printing House) (Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

INSIDE TODAY

LOCAL NEWS

Demand for wooden sculptures surges for decoration

PAGE-4

LOCAL NEWS

Green gram farmers in Thaton wary of poor returns despite good harvest

PAGE-4

LOCAL BUSINESS

Onion warehouse owners in Minbu facing loss as price plummets

PAGE-5

LOCAL BUSINESS

CMP garment exports drop by 25 per cent in Q1

PAGE-5

TOURISM

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

PAGE-14, 15

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

Updated at 8 pm, 17 January 2021

Total Cases

134,318

New Cases

449

Total Death Tally

2,955

Discharged from Hospital

117,663

Daily death toll until 8 pm 17-1-2021

13

Ministry of Health and Sports

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 013733 of Myanma Economic Bank (Nay Pyi Taw) by using the following methods:
- (a) Cash contribution can be made at Myanma 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 Myanma 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 Myanma 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 Myanma Economic Bank.

(c) Cash contribution can be made via the private and foreign banks by using SWIFT Code-MYEBMMMY together with the expression of Donation to COVID-19 Vaccination Fund (Account EDC 600012) Myanma Economic Bank.

(d) If there is no direct communication between Myanma 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) Myanma Economic Bank, the cash contribution can be made via the following foreign bank partners of Myanma Economic Bank:

UOB Bank (Singapore)	OCBC Bank (Singapore)
DBS Bank (Singapore)	May Bank (Singapore/Kuala Lumpur)

Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp (Tokyo)	Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi UFJ (Tokyo)
Mizuho Bank (Tokyo)	Bangkok Bank (Bangkok)
Siam Commercial Bank (Bangkok)	Krung Thai Bank (Bangkok)
Thanachart Bank (Bangkok)	ICBC Bank (China)
OCBC Wing Hang Bank (Shanghai)	China Construction Bank (China)
Sonali Bank (Bangladesh)	AB Bank (Bangladesh)

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 — treasury05@365mopfi.gov.mm, treasury10@365mopfi.gov.mm (or) Viber-09-251182042 and 09-420788851.
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	Yangon	Mandalay
Daw Si Si Pyone Director-General Treasury Department 067-3410156 09-450455237	U Min Thu Managing Director Myanma Agricultural Development Bank 01-8391342 01-8391072	U Tun Tun Aung Director Internal Revenue Department 02-4035916
Daw Yi Yi Khaing Deputy Director-General Treasury Department 067-3410158 09-254558424		

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 at the Myanma Economic Bank in Nay Pyi Taw as follows:
- (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 Myanma 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 land-

ed 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)



Myanmar returnees are seen at the Yangon International Airport on 17 January 2021. PHOTO: MNA

“People are the key”

We have never lost sight of our ultimate goal



I also wish to thank the people for showing their confidence for our government with their votes. We have made a very firm resolve to continue striving hard to be worthy of the people's trust and confidence. Ever since our government took over responsibility in 2016, we have never lost sight of our ultimate goal, which is to establish a peaceful and developed Democratic Federal Union, on a solid and firm foundation. We have made continuous efforts cognizant of the fact that in marching towards this goal, peace and sustainable development, healthy growth of democracy and peaceful development, healthy growth of democracy and amendment of the constitution, amendment of the constitution and peace; all these things are interrelated in a circular fashion with backward and forward linkages.

(Excerpt from Chairperson of National Reconciliation and Peace Centre and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's speech on New Year, on 2 January 2021)

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 Sit-tway, 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 as the eighth childcare centre in Myanmar, according to the Union Minister.

The childcare centres accept orphans from 3 months to 8 years old. When the children become over 8 years old, they can continue their education in three youth training schools and two women's training schools in Yangon, two youth training schools and one women's training school in Mandalay, and a youth training school in each of Mawlamyine, Labutta and Lashio.

Childcare and protection standards for these childcare centres and youth training

schools have been set since 2017, said the Union Minister who expressed thanks to the APCPAC (Myanmar) for financing to build the Childcare Centre for Orphans (Nay Pyi Taw), which 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' Affil-

iation 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)



Union Minister Dr Win Myat Aye presents certificate of honour to a donor in Nay Pyi Taw on 17 January 2021. PHOTO: MNA

COVID-19
Call Centre
opens daily

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

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Demand for wooden sculptures in demand for decoration



An artist puts finishing touches an a sculpture. **PHOTO : KHUN WIN PA**

MYANMAR traditional wood carvings and sculptures have gained attraction amidst COVID-19 pandemic as relaxing al-

ternatives in living rooms, restaurants and homes, according to the craft wood carvers from Thuwanawaddy Township, Mon

State.
Craft wood carvers travel to places where employers hire them, and working for their liv-

ing, local people said.
“I make specific types of wood and shapes that customers like. I get paid per inch. If I calculate wages and costs, I get very little profit. It may or may not be convenient to get the type of wood I need. It is difficult to say whether the Myanmar sculpture world has improved.
There are also fewer young people who will pass on the art of sculpting,” said Ko Shein Lhu who is working as a craft wood carver in Thuwanawaddy.
“Wood carvings are available locally. We collected various kinds of wood to make tables, chairs and sculptures for sale and decoration in my restaurant. I’m interested in sculpting and wanted to encourage young generations. Sadly, raw wood may be scarce in the future”, said U Kyaw Wai, who runs a furniture store in Thuwanawaddy, Thaton Township, Mon State.
—Khun Win Pa

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Lin)

Green gram farmers in Thaton wary of poor returns despite good harvest

GREEN gram grown in Auk Kwin village tracts, Thaton Township, Mon State, are wary of poor returns from their thriving plantations this year as they faced huge losses last year due to untimely rain which hit their plantations.

“We saw good price last year despite low yield due to rain. But, fortune smiles on us and brings good weather, and we will have a good harvest,” said said U Tin Aye, a farmer from the ThaungGyi village.
“The output will be good. It would be nice to get a good price at harvest time.I’m worried about the price go-



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

ing down. I won’t lose even if I get a regular price,” U Tin Aye added.
Green grams were de-

stroyed in previous year, and this year pulses have become scarce and expensive to buy, and the cost of farming has

risen due to difficulties in purchasing 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 (Thathon)
(Translated by Kyaw Zin Lin)

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 mil-

lion) and two lightning strikes (K200,000).
Sagaing District had 25 fires while Monywa District was recorded 45 cases, Yinmarpin District 29, Shwebo District 49, Kantbalu District 16, Kawlin District 10, Katha District 17, Kalay District eight, Tamu District 10, Mawlaik District one, and Khamti 16, the department stated.—Win Oo (Zeyartine)
(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)



Firefighters extinguish fire. **PHOTO : WIN OO (ZEYARTINE)**

Onion warehouse owners in Minbu facing loss as price plummets

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 market recovery 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 im-



Onion price declines because of the bulk supply and the closure of the western border. PHOTO: ZEYA HTET

pacts.

“Earlier, onions were highly demanded by Bangladesh, India

and China. Now, the trade with Bangladesh and India has halted to contain the spread of the coro-

navirus. Therefore, the price is on the decline,” said a wholesale onion dealer from Mandalay.

“This year, the onion growers and traders are experiencing market fallouts due to the surging COVID-19 cases. As a result of this, workers engaged in onion depots are suffering financial hardship,” said a depot owner from Mandalay.

According to the Mandalay, last year, Bangladesh’s demand for Myanmar’s onions coupled with high demand in the local market hiked up prices, soaring up to K4,000 per viss on 15 November 2019 commodity depot.

The high demand by foreign markets and a remarkable price rise prompted the growers to expand the onion cultivation this year.

The prices of domestic onions exceeded K3,000 per viss in 2015, 2018, and 2019.

The onions are primarily grown in Mandalay, Magway and Yangon regions, Nay Pyi Taw and Shan State.—Zeya Htet, Ko Htet

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

CMP garment exports drop by 25 per cent in Q1

MYANMAR’S garment export has dropped by 25 per cent as of the first quarter of the current financial year 2020-2021 compared with a year-ago period on the back of a slump in demand by European Union market, the Ministry of Commerce stated.

Exports of garments manufactured under the cut-make-pack (CMP) system were valued US\$870 million in the past three months (Oct-Dec) in the current FY, according to the Ministry of Commerce’s data.

The figures plunged from \$1.2 billion in the corresponding period of the last FY2019-2020.

Myanmar’s garment industry faces challenges such as raw material supply disruption and cancellation of orders, CMP garment exporters said.

At present, over 100 CMP garment factories temporarily shut down on the reason for the lack of raw materials and slump in demand due to the coronavirus negative impacts, leaving thousands

of workers unemployed. Sixty-four factories have been permanently closed down during the pandemic, compensating about 25,000 workers. The data does not include those factories that have not resolved worker payments, stated the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population.

The Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association (MGMA) and EuroCham Myanmar held virtual meetings on 7 January 2021, along with representatives from EU brands. They highlighted efforts to increase job creations in the garment factories, keep garment factory order from European buyers, improve skilled workers’ capacity, and upgrade the Myanmar Garment Human Resource Development Centre (MGHRDC) and strengthen relationships between employers and workers.

Additionally, MGMA also proposed leading a working group including government officials, European Brands’ representatives and the related institutions, to transform

CMP into the free-on-board (FoB) system.

Myanmar mainly exports the garments to Japan and European countries, especially Germany. The US has also purchased the garments made in Myanmar. Some western countries cancelled orders amid the pandemic. According to the Ministry of Commerce data, exports of garments manufactured under the cut-make-pack (CMP) system were valued US\$4.798 billion in the last financial year 2019-2020.

The export value of CMP garments was only \$850 million in the 2015-2016FY, but it has tripled over the past two FYs. In the 2016-2017FY, about \$2 billion was earned from exports of CMP garments. The figure increased to an estimated \$2.5 billion in the 2017-2018FY and \$2.2 billion in the 2018 mini-budget period (from April to September). It tremendously grew to \$4.6 billion in the 2018-2019FY, according to the Commerce Ministry. —Ko Htet

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Singapore tops FDI list in Myanmar in Q1

SINGAPORE is the top source of foreign direct investments into Myanmar in the first quarter of the current financial year 2020-2021, according to the data released by the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA).

The six Singapore-listed enterprises brought in US\$161 million into Myanmar between October and December 2020. Singapore companies mainly put investments into urban development, real estate, power and manufacturing sectors.

China stood as the second-largest investors this FY with an estimated capital of \$133.53 million from eight enterprises, followed by Thailand investing \$24 million in Myanmar.

Those enterprises listed from Hong Kong (SAR), India, Japan, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, UK, Viet Nam, Marshall Island and China (Taipei) also made investments in the Q1.

Myanmar has attracted foreign direct investments of more than US\$348.8 million in Oct-Dec of current FY, including the expansion of capital by existing enterprises and investments in the Special Economic Zones, DICA’s statistics indicated.

Of 23 foreign enterprises

permitted and endorsed by Myanmar Investment Commission and the respective investment committees between 1 October and 31 December of current FY, 13 enterprises pumped FDI into the manufacturing sector. Livestock and Fisheries sector attracted three projects while agriculture, power and other service sector pulled two projects each and one foreign enterprise entered the hotel and tourism sector.

MIC intends to reach the FDI target of \$5.8 billion for the current FY2020-2021.

Singapore has stood as the largest foreign investor in Myanmar since 2012, pulling in the FDI of \$1.85 billion in the FY2019-2020, \$2.4 billion in the FY2018-2019, \$724.4 million in the mini-budget period (April-September, 2018), \$2.16 billion in the 2017-2018FY, \$3.8 billion in the 2016-2017FY, \$4.25 billion in the 2015-2016FY, \$4.29 billion in the 2014-2015FY, \$2.3 billion in the 2013-2014FY and \$418 million in the 2012-2013FY respectively.

Additionally, Singapore emerged as the second-largest foreign investor in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone, after top investor Japan. —GNLM

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

OVER 3,000 CENTERS ACROSS INDIA

A few COVID-19 vaccine recipients show adverse effects in India

A few of the COVID-19 vaccine recipients from several parts in India, who took the vaccination doses on Saturday, have complained of adverse effects over the past 24 hours.

The adverse effects include headache, fever, and body aches.

Nearly 200,000 people were administered COVID-19 vaccines in over 3,000 centers across India. A total of 300,000 people were enrolled for vaccination, but a large number of them chose not to show up to take the jab.

Speaking to Xinhua over phone, a doctor posted at Sawai Man Singh (SMS) Hospital in Jaipur, who was among those who received the vaccination dose, said he was suffering from mild fever and body-ache ever since he took the vaccine jab on Saturday.

“But this is quite normal.

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



Doctors from the Rajawadi Hospital pose for a selfie as a television broadcasts a live address by Prime Minister Modi before the start of the Covid-19 vaccination drive in Mumbai on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

Unit of the Delhi-based premier institute - the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), after her condition deteriorated

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. SOURCE: XINHUA

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 caseloads 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 charge, 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 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 on Friday evening and presented officers with a fake inauguration credential, according to a document filed in Washington, DC Superior Court.

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



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. **PHOTO: AFP**

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, af-

ter 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 ensures the security of the president.

SOURCE: AFP

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.

Medical services certified three men dead at the scene while the other two were transferred to a nearby hospital where they later died due to the seriousness of their injuries, the security secretariat said.

Local media reports 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," Jالبuu Enkhbat, deputy governor of the province's Bayanlig soum, told Xinhua.

"A hundred bales of hay have been allocated to our soum. Just yesterday, we put some hay in an area called 'Ariin Usnii Tsakhir,' 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



Red Cross respond as Mongolian herders struggle to survive winter Dzud amidst rising livestock deaths. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

A CHALLENGING TASK

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

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 recuperating at home reached 30,208 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

Be prepared before catastrophic earthquake strikes

EARTHQUAKES are unpredictable and are among the most damaging of disasters.

Myanmar is exposed to all kinds of hazards such as earthquakes, floods, cyclones, windstorms, landslides, tsunamis etc. As per INFORM index, Myanmar is the 12th most risk prone country to natural disasters in the world. Myanmar also takes third place in the list of countries impacted by climate extreme events in the last 2 decades (Global Climate Risk Index 2018).

Over 200 earthquakes with moderate and weak Richter scales shocked Myanmar in 2020. The strongest quakes were recorded with magnitude 6.

The earthquakes are expected to become stronger, according to the Myanmar Earthquake Committee.

Yangon, Mandalay, and Nay Pyi Taw should enforce extensive earthquake preparedness measures, including drills, as the three populated cities are at risk for quakes.

In our country, there are five faults which can cause quakes with over 6 magnitude and about 40 fault lines which can cause quakes of 2 to 5 magnitudes.

Among them, the Sagaing Fault is a major tectonic structure that cuts through Myanmar, dividing the country into two halves. The western half moves north with the Indian plate, and the eastern half is attached to the Eurasian plate. The Sagaing Fault produced a major earthquake in November, 2012, in the Thabeikkyin area, 100 km north of Mandalay.

A 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck Bagan on August 24, 2016, and damaged almost 400 of the area's 3,252 pagodas.

The over 200 moderate and weak earthquakes in 2020 has shown that the fault lines are active and pose seismic hazards, which could be triggered any time.

gered any time.

Earthquakes are unpredictable forces of nature and can strike anytime without warning.

People, especially those living along the fault lines, must be alerted to the risks of earthquakes although quakes are rare, unlike other natural disasters such as fires, floods, and storms, as experts have predicted that Myanmar is more likely to suffer from earthquakes than from other natural disasters.

It is not enough to simply educate people and spread awareness about earthquakes.

Local governments will have to take into consideration drills and scrutinize the seismic safety of buildings to limit the damage to infrastructure and buildings.

Besides, local governments are urged to take a holistic and multi-sectoral approach to build resilient infrastructure with a risk informed approach in order to avoid creation of new risks and future losses after disasters.

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ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME ADAPTATION GAP

Nations failing to fund climate adaptation: UN

The world is falling short of promises made under the Paris climate deal to help the most vulnerable nations deal with the increasingly devastating impacts of climate change, according to the United Nations.

ADAPTATION— reducing the fallout among communities and increasing their capacity to deal with climate-related disasters such as floods and drought – is a pillar of the landmark 2015 accord, which aims to chart a path away from catastrophic warming.

The deal requires signatories to implement adaptation measures through national planning, but also through funding to at-risk countries.

The UN Environment Programme Adaptation Gap report found that the current finance levels of around \$30 billion annually for adaptation fell far short of the annual cost in developing nations of \$70 billion.

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 \$500 billion by mid-century.

"The hard truth is that climate change is upon us," said Inger Andersen, UNEP executive director.

"Its impacts will intensify and hit vulnerable countries and communities the hardest – even if we meet the Paris Agreement goals of holding global warming this century to well below 2C."

UNEP called for a drastic scale-up of public and private finance for adaptation, as well as increased investment in nature-based solutions such as protecting and sustainably restoring ecosystems.

Limit losses

With just over 1C of warming



Adaptation – reducing the fall out among communities and increasing their capacity to deal with climate-related disasters such as floods and drought – is a key pillar of the landmark 2015 accord. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

since the start of the industrial era, Earth is already experiencing more intense and frequent extreme weather such as droughts and flooding, as well as storms

supercharged by rising seas.

Much of the devastation wrought by climate-linked disasters falls on developing nations, and despite promises to help out

financially, richer countries still aren't hitting their adaptation funding targets.

UNEP said funding for adaptation currently represented just five percent of all climate finance.

With the cost of natural disasters set to skyrocket this century, hard-hit nations are finding it difficult to secure the finance to rebuild after extreme events.

Mozambique, which was battered by twin cyclones in early 2019, said that one year since the disasters it had received less than a quarter of the estimated \$3 billion it needed to recover.

The UN report found that cutting greenhouse gas emissions will provide a long-term economic benefit by reducing the costs associated with climate change.

Achieving the 2C Paris Agree-

ment temperature rise limit could curb losses in annual growth to 1.6 percent, compared with 2.2 percent for 3C of warming –the current trajectory if nations' current Paris pledges are upheld.

Under the deal's "ratchet" mechanism, countries are supposed to file new emissions reduction plans – known as nationally determined contributions, or NDCs – every five years.

The deadline for the first round of new NDC submissions was December 31, 2020. However just 71 countries representing under a third of global emissions have done so. UNEP says global emissions must fall 7.6 percent annually this decade to keep the more ambitious Paris temperature target of 1.5C in play.

SOURCE: AFP

The severity of the variant dubbed 501Y.V2

What We Know About South Africa's COVID Variant

A new coronavirus variant discovered by South African scientists is fuelling a surge of infections nationwide and raising global concern. Here is what we know about the variant, dubbed 501Y.V2:

When Was It Discovered?

South African Health Minister Zweli Mkhize announced on 18 December that the government had advised the United Nation's World Health Organization (WHO) of a new variant.

It was found by scientists led by the Kwazulu-Natal Research Innovation and Sequencing Platform (KRISP), which discovered that it had been dominating samples collected over the past two months.

The South African scientists also shared their findings with authorities in Britain, where a similar variant was spreading.

Where Did It Come From?

Scientists stress that mutation in virus strains is an expected phenomenon - the microbe evolves in order to survive.

In an interview, KRISP bio-informatician Houriiyah Tegally said the variant may have come "from immunocompromised patients, whose immune system has a harder time suppressing infection."

"The virus replicates many more times in these patients and...



A South African Police Service (SAPS) officer asks travellers to respect social distance at the South African side of the Beitbridge border between South Africa and Zimbabwe near Musina. **PHOTO: AFP**

that's how such a case of escape (to another human) can happen," she said, recalling the high numbers of immunocompromised patients in South Africa, with HIV or TB.

Peter Horby, professor of emerging infectious diseases at the University of Oxford, has also suggested immunosuppressed patients as a potential source for new mutations.

What Makes The Variant Different?

The 501Y.V2 variant "has a

The WHO has said that while the South African variant shares the 501Y mutation with the strain spreading in Britain, the two are distinct.

Is It More Dangerous?

On 31 December, the WHO said it saw no clear evidence that the new variant by itself led to more severe disease or death.

On the other hand, as more people become infected by a more transmissible virus, more risk becoming seriously ill.

"Increased transmissibility eventually translates to a far higher incidence rate, and even with the same mortality, this means significant pressure on health systems," said Bruno Coignard, head of infectious diseases at France's health authority.

Tegally also warned: "This new lineage could also present a higher risk of reinfection... we are still waiting to see the data but it is a very real concern."

How Widespread Is It In South Africa?

To date, South Africa has reported a total of almost 33,600

deaths from more than 1.2 million cases.

In the past week, 133,294 new infections have been detected.

When the KRISP researchers first spotted the variant in October, "we saw it in 20 percent (of samples)," Tegally said, mounting as high as 80 percent more recently.

"We are waiting to sequence more of the January cases (and) would not be surprised if those samples are close to 90 percent or even more," Tegally said.

Will Vaccines Work Against It?

German vaccine maker BioNTech said last week that antibodies from people who have received the jab "effectively neutralise" virus with the key mutation found in Britain and South Africa.

Tegally cautioned about the limitations of this work, which was conducted in a laboratory.

The study "did not test... one of the mutations we have been worried about, so does not actually say whether its vaccine will work or not," she said.

"We are hopeful as vaccines are meant to be broad-ranged,

but for now we just have to wait and see."

Should Other Countries Be Concerned?

The South African variant has also been detected in Britain, Finland, France and Israel. Switzerland, Denmark and Britain have banned incoming travellers from South Africa.

But Health Minister Mkhize said last month that there was "no evidence" the South African variant was more dangerous than the British one, which has also spread abroad.

The WHO advocates a "risk-based approach" to international travel and countries should "regularly re-consider" bans and other measures.

"The response from the international community has been quite stigmatising. It is understandable, people are scared... but we should not fear," Tegally said, stressing the need for research.

More mutations may be occurring elsewhere in the world without people knowing, she noted.

SOURCE: AFP



Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Sunday 17 January, 2021)

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL AFTERNOON OF THE 18 January, 2021: Rain will be isolated in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin State. Degree of certainty is (80%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Taninthayi Region and Shan, Chin States and generally fair in the remaining Regions and States.

STATE OF THE SEA: Strong easterly winds with moderate to rough seas are likely at times Gulf of Mottama, off and along Mon-Taninthayi Coasts. Surface wind speed in strong easterly winds may reach (30-35) m.p.h. Sea will be slight to moderate elsewhere in Myanmar waters. Wave height will be about (5-9) feet in Gulf of Mottama, off and along Mon-Taninthayi Coasts and about (4-6) feet Deltaic, off and along Rakhine Coast.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of isolated light rain in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin, Shan States.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 18 January, 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 18 January, 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 18 January, 2021: Generally fair weather

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HARDEST-HIT AREA

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 1,325,659 cases, Morocco with 458,865 cases, Tunisia with 177,231 cases, Egypt with 155,507 cases, as well as Ethiopia with 130,772 cases.

South Africa is also the high-



A young man walks among cars selling hand sanitizers amid the outbreak of COVID-19, in Johannesburg, South Africa, 11 March 2020. **PHOTO: GUILLEM SARTORIO/AFP**

est-affected African country in terms of COVID-19-inflicted deaths, with 36,851 deaths.

SOURCE: AFP

BOOSTED BY DEMAND

Deliveroo targets \$7 billion valuation for IPO



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. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

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.

Deliveroo said in a statement that it had raised more than \$180 million from its existing investors, "valuing the business at over \$7 billion".

"This investment comes ahead of a potential initial public offering and reflects strong demand... given the significant growth potential in the online food delivery sector in which consumer adoption is accelerat-

ing," 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 freelance delivery riders complain of exploitative practices.

SOURCE: AFP

THE CAT'S WHISKERS

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' domestica-

tion 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



Here's looking at you: three cats who fell on hard times but were lucky enough to find sanctuary at the Tala Cats rescue centre near Paphos in Cyprus. **PHOTO: AFP**

NEWS IN BRIEF

SERBIA

Chinese-made vaccine received

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 resentment has sparked protests.

Roughly 10,000 people marched in Austria's capital Vienna against coronavirus restrictions on Saturday, calling on the government to resign.

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

THE INAUGURATION IS ON WEDNESDAY

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



A National Guard stands at the US Capitol before the inauguration in Washington, DC. **PHOTO: LIZ LYNCH/AFP**

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 added.

As he inherits the White

House from Donald Trump, Biden’s plate is overflowing with acute challenges.

The US is fast approaching 400,000 dead 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 -- not just to reverse the gravest damages of the Trump administration -- but also to start moving our country forward,” Klain said.

SOURCE: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

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 fewest 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 the presidential election, and has said the process was marred by widespread fraud and violence.

He has not left his home since he went out to vote in the election on Thursday, and on Friday said he was under “siege” as soldiers and police surrounded his home, preventing anyone from entering or leaving.

“Our leader ... is effectively under house arrest,” National Unity Platform spokesman Joel Ssenyonyi told a press conference, adding no one was being allowed access.

“His home is not a detention facility. We are very concerned about the state in which he is in, and his wife.”

A Twitter update under Wine’s account, written by an administrator as Uganda remains under an internet blackout for a fifth day, said the couple had “run out of food supplies.”

The party said prominent MP, Francis Zaake, who had been arrested during an attempted visit to Wine’s house on Friday, had been admitted to hospital “badly beaten and brutalised” by security forces.—SOURCE: AFP

16-YEAR REIGN

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-winger 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



Armin Laschet speaks during a CDU party virtual party congress in Berlin. **PHOTO: AFP**

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

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.

“After 13 days sleeping outdoors, people will be able to return to their homes,” he added.

Lieutenant Colonel Abdoulaziz Fall, spokesman for MINUS-

CA’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 MINSUCA, shows up one of the aims of these foreign mercenaries: loot our riches and the property of our people,” Prime Minister Firmin Ngrebada said in a Facebook post.

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 hem 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 Uni-



Trump Tower in Chicago is emblazoned with President Donald Trump's name, but many companies are cutting ties with the leader in an 11th-hour stampede. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

versity'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."

SOURCE: AFP

PAKISTANI SIDE OF THE HIMALAYAN RANGE



K2, the world's second-highest mountain, is pictured in 2003 in Pakistan. PHOTO: KYODO

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!"

SOURCE: KYODO

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 150 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 certainly some 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.

SOURCE: AFP



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. PHOTO: AFP

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 antennae can be mounted to relay telecom signals.— SOURCE: AFP

THE FINANCIAL MARKET ENTRY OFFICE



File photo shows the building that houses the Financial Services Agency in Tokyo. **PHOTO: KYODO**

FSA to assist foreign financial firms entering Japan in English

THE Financial Services Agency has launched an office to help foreign financial firms with all the regulatory processes needed to enter Japan -- from pre-application consultation to supervision and inspection after registration -- with all communication available in English.

The launch of the Financial Market Entry Office is intended to expand 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 operations on Jan. 12 for "all types of foreign business operators" including asset management firms and funds.

In an effort to emulate other Asian financial

centers such as Hong Kong and Singapore, online 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 administration 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 procedures regarding financial laws and regulations in connection with the establishment of a business base in Japan by foreign business operators, according to the FSA.

Together with the new one-stop office, Japan will try to attract more foreign businesses by offering income and inheritance tax

breaks for highly-skilled foreign professionals in a tax reform blueprint for fiscal 2021 starting April.

Higher taxes and language 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

DIGITAL CLOUT

After dizzying gyrations, what's bitcoin really worth?

AFTER the latest wild ride took the poster child of cryptocurrencies above \$40,000 before a stomach-churning plunge, the million dollar question won't go away: how much is bitcoin actually worth?

The virtual currency barrelled to new highs to rise more than 400 percent over the past year, before promptly sliding some 20 percent and then settling around \$36,000.

When it started life in 2009 as open-source software, bitcoin was essentially worth zero -- though within a year it had reached the heady heights of eight cents.

At today's market rates, bloated by a surge in institutional demand, the digital unit's market capitalisation is worth some \$670 billion with myriad other crypto coins such

as ethereum lifting the sector nominally close to the trillion mark.

Although that's small potatoes compared to the \$68 trillion or so swelling around world stock markets, it is nonetheless the sort of financial territory staked out by Wall Street tech royalty such as Google, Apple or Tesla.

One tech site, AssetDash.com, notes that bitcoin is currently worth around as much as Facebook and a little more than Chinese e-retail giant Alibaba.

Curse of the forgotten password

Although deep-pocketed investors have recently become enthusiasts, crypto was in its early days the preserve of geeky amateur investors.

SOURCE: AFP

A 16-YEAR SPAT

France suggests pause on US-EU trade standoff

THE European Union and the US should "pause" a long-running tariff disagreement to allow the issue to be resolved, France's foreign minister suggested Sunday.

A 16-year spat over aircraft subsidies has turned increasingly sour under the Donald Trump administration, expanding 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 everyone is that of the price increases and taxes on steel, digital technology, Airbus and particularly our wine sector," said foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian in an interview with the Journal du Dimanche.

"If we could quickly find a method to settle this dispute with Europe and



A long-running US-EU spat over aircraft subsidies turned increasingly sour under the Trump administration. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

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 tariffs the EU imposed in November, which it considers unjustified and calculated unfairly.

The latest tariffs go into effect some days after the end of Trump's term.

SOURCE: AFP

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
M.V CTP FORTUNE VOY. NO. (210N)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V CTP FORTUNE VOY. NO. (210N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **18-1-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **HPT** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA SHIPPING

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
M.V MATHU BHUM VOY. NO. (271W)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V MATHU BHUM VOY. NO. (271W)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **18-1-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **MITT/MIP** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S REGIONAL CONTAINER LINES

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
M.V SAN GIORGIO VOY. NO. (101N)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V SAN GIORGIO VOY. NO. (101N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **18-1-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **MITT/MIP** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S SEALAND MAERSK ASIA PTE LTD



PHOTO: KO SAI (LOIKAW)

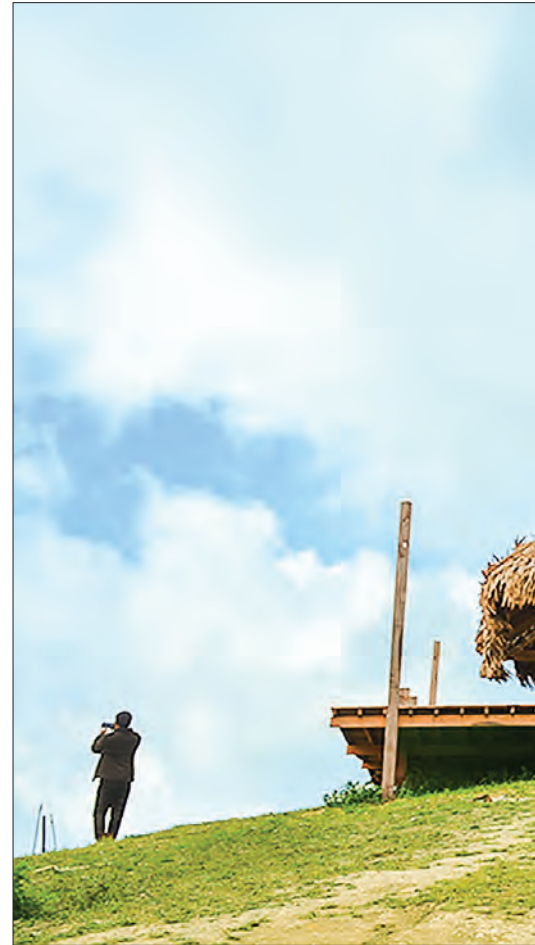


PHOTO: KO SAI (LOIKAW)

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





(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 habitations 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, Rakhine, 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 develop-

ment projects are being implemented in Dimawhso Township, Hsintaung, Nganyoe, Dawtanngu, Dawtadah and Dawpoei 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



PHOTO: KO SAI (LOIKAW)



PHOTO: KO SAI (LOIKAW)



PHOTO: KO SAI (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 Ngwetaung 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.



Star player Than Paing joins Shan United Football Club



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

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-years-old forward player started his football career in the junior team of Yangon 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 Thiha Zaw and Forward player Soe Lwin Lwin within this month. —Lynn Thit (Tgi)

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 Bruneau, 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 ■

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



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

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 ■



PHOTO COURTESY: AUSTRALIAN OPEN/ FACEBOOK

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 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.

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-footer for birdie at the par-5 18th. —AFP ■