Republic of the Union of Myanmar
State Administration Council Chairman
Senior General Min Aung Hlaing makes speech to public

Esteemed national people in the Union,

The Tatmadaw is an organization that holds the high opinion “People are the parents” while following the leading role in national politics steadfastly and adhering to the provisions of the 2008 Constitution. First, I would like to say that the Tatmadaw could implement the “multiparty democracy system” expected by the people in successive eras through some forms of political cultures such as negotiation, law and regulations.

Free and fair elections are fundamental to strengthen the democratic system. In my 2020 New Year Message to the country, I said that ‘the Year 2020 is an important year for the country. It is important to strengthen the multiparty democracy system this year through some forms of political cultures such as negotiation, law and regulations.

Free and fair elections are fundamental to strengthen the democratic system. In my 2020 New Year Message to the country, I said that ‘the Year 2020 is an important year for the country. It is important to strengthen the multiparty democracy system this year through some forms of political cultures such as negotiation, law and regulations.

During the 3rd anniversary of Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement on 15 October 2018 that ‘Nothing is as important as the ethnic affairs and the national interests, and only the politics with sincerity and fairness’.

During the 4th meeting of Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong, held on 20 August 2020, I also said that the concept ‘no one is above the law’ in establishing the democratic system as a fundamental rule in laying the democratic foundation, and ‘no one or no organization is above the national interest in state-building and nation-building’. These concepts of the Tatmadaw are aimed to foster the multiparty democracy expected by the people.

On the way to the multiparty democracy, our country has organized the elections and by-elections four times in 2010, 2012, 2015 and 2020. Despite some common controversies in the polls, the Union Election Commission could solve the arguments in free and fair manners, pleasing both sides involving in the arguments and leading to the democratic way. In 2020 General Election, the UEC censored policy speech of political parties before being broadcast on the MRTV, a wide range of announcement for advance voting with the reason for COVID-19 outbreak and the lack of fair canvassing for votes. Such situations were controversial manners before the elections. Meanwhile, the Tatmadaw managed to ensure correct voter lists of Tatmadaw personnel at the front lines and in duties outside the respective military depots and units for more than 90 days. The UEC announced voting of Tatmadaw members and their families at the polling stations outside the military depots and units. The Tatmadaw followed this announcement, and we all cast votes at the respective polling stations together with the people.

A series of controversies happened after the general elections. There were 84 political parties contested in the 2020 General Elections. A total of 217 letters of complaint were submitted. The UEC failed to take the complaints into consideration for many times. Political parties sought the assistance of the Tatmadaw, which is taking part in the leading role of national politics. The Tatmadaw then checked the voter lists and found 10,482,116 (over 10.4 million) fraud votes with overlapping in different townships, regions and states and some forms of possible irregularities.

See Page-2

4 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 8 February, total figure rises to 141,427

MYANMAR’S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 141,427 after 4 new cases were reported on 8 February 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these 141,427 confirmed cases, 3,177 died, 127,975 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Updated at 8 pm, 8 February 2021

| Total Cases | 141,427 |
| Total Deaths | 3,177 |
| New Cases | 4 |
| Discharged from Hospital | 127,975 |

Daily death toll until 8 pm 8-2-2021

Ministry of Health and Sports
Republic of the Union of Myanmar
State Administration Council Chairman
Senior General Min Aung Hlaing makes speech to public

FROM PAGE-1

I urged the eligible voters to cast their votes in the General Election because a free and fair election is the lifeblood of the multiparty democracy system. Authorities concerned for voting fraud are under investigation now. Incorrect voting results are coming out from the statistics, which can be forged, can bring obstacles for the strengthening of a democratic system inspired by the people.

The Tatmadaw, in accordance with the 2008 Constitution, has demanded the Union Election Commission, Hluttaw and the President to settle the voting fraud issue. However, they all failed to carry out their responsibilities. Until the last minute, the Tatmadaw upheld the negotiation process in line with the law. The situation was also reported to the people and the world through the press conferences of the Tatmadaw. Authorities concerned failed to take their responsibility and accountability. Therefore, we announced the state of emergency and have taken the responsibility of the State in accordance with the 2008 Constitution.

After the formation of the State Administration Council, we have already announced the five-point Road Map on 1 February. Let me report the five points and our undertakings to the ethnic people.

1. To carry out necessary measures, including reformation of the Union Election Commission and inspecting the voting lists in accordance with the law. A new UEC has been formed, and the voting lists are being inspected. We will release the findings as soon as possible. What a terrible point is that UEC said it announced the third voting list. But, when we inspected the third list practically, still we did not find it. If we find it, we can approve it. We have found that the third voting list is the reproduction of the second voting list.

2. To continue the preventive measures against the COVID-19 pandemic with added speed and effective ways. We are doing it practically. The second vaccination has been successfully conducted. Whichever challenges we face; we will tackle them together with the people. We systematically continue to manage the COVID-19 fund donated by the people. I also invite further donors. We will spend the fund in fighting the disease beneficially and effectively. We will speed up the efforts for prevention and treatment on the disease. We will continue to get further vaccines. We will continue vaccination, without leaving anyone, including people in the rural areas and camps. I would like to request the entire people to cooperate and participate in this drive.

3. To remedy the economy damaged by the COVID-19 pandemic with possible ways as soon as possible. Forty-eight hours after I took the responsibility of a chairman of the State Administration Council, I, together with the members of the council, met with the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and chairmen of private banks and discussed for recovery of our country’s economy. We welcome and invite domestic and foreign investments. I would like to say that we welcome cooperation from our country’s partner countries and interested countries. We will follow the existing system.

4. The 2008 Constitution was formed with 16 members – eight senior military officers, including me, and eight nationalities’ and political parties’ leaders. Union ministers have also been appointed with their competencies in the respective sectors. The states/regions, districts and townships administration councils have been set up with local elders relevant administrative personnel. That is different from the previous 1962 and 1988 Tatmadaw governments. We are taking the State responsibility based on unavoidable reasons. We shall perform the duties in accordance with the provisions stipulated for the state of emergency in the Constitution. We shall carry the same path as the Tatmadaw Peace Negotiating Committee was extended on 1 February. We shall perform our responsibility to achieve eternal peace in as many ways as possible while taking over the State. We invite collaborative participation of the EAOs and all nationalities in this practical implementation.

5. State power will be handed over to a winning party according to the democratic norms after the state of emergency proceedings have been carried out to hold a free and fair multiparty democracy general election. The State Administration Council was formed with 16 members – eight senior military officers, including me, and eight nationalities’ and political parties’ leaders. Union ministers have also been appointed with their competencies in the respective sectors. The states/regions, districts and townships administration councils have been set up with local elders relevant administrative personnel. That is different from the previous 1962 and 1988 Tatmadaw governments. We are taking the State responsibility based on unavoidable reasons. We shall perform the duties in accordance with the provisions stipulated for the state of emergency in the Constitution. We shall carry the same path as the Tatmadaw Peace Negotiating Committee was extended on 1 February. We shall perform our responsibility to achieve eternal peace in as many ways as possible while taking over the State. We invite collaborative participation of the EAOs and all nationalities in this practical implementation.

There will be no change in the foreign policy, government policy and economic policy of the country during the periods we are temporarily taking the State responsibility.
State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets Council Members

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing holds meeting with members of his State Administration Council on 8 February.

PHOTO: MNA

Request to Public

1. Democracy practices have granted the public for freedom of speech, practices and living. Such freedoms should not harm others. Diverse views of others should be understood, should not be disturbed or harassed. However, with the reason of human rights, some persons are now under pressured, harassed and threatened in breaching the laws. Undisciplined acts could lead to tarnish the image of democracy.

2. For preventing destructive actions against stability of the state, safety of the public and rule of law, it is also required to proper actions in line with the law.

3. All the people who favour justice, freedom, equality and safety are requested to oppose breaching the laws and prevent such actions for the benefit of country and people.

State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing will be announced. It would not just be a rough figure; all the relevant committees will be informed about the signed list of results.

The second is that Covid-19 is so powerful. A meeting was held with the relevant ministers before the appointment of all the committee members. Strenuous efforts are needed as the Covid-19 is the most troublesome virus in the world.

The world has over 100 million positive cases and there are also deaths. But it is controllable. What we need is efforts and discipline. So, preventive measures will be carried with the participation of the people. There are local and foreign donations for Covid-19 prevention, and they are kept systematically. The way to spend the donations must be reviewed. In some cases funds were allotted for regions and states from the State budget, and the amounts are in a billion. People will be invited to partake in the fight against the virus. The virus prevention will be carried effectively and transparently. Prevention and treatment will be carried out with greater momentum. Not a single person of the country will be left behind by the vaccination programme. Police members who are dealing with people of all walks of life will also be vaccinated. Vaccination programme will reach the grass-roots and rural people including farmers who represent 70% of the population soonest.

The third is the assistance to remedy the business that is hit by Covid-19. Means will be sought to provide financial assistance through loans. Experienced persons have been appointed and assigned at the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry and Central Bank of Myanmar. All should work for the resurgence of economy, and local and foreign investments are invited. We give green light to the ongoing and approved projects. Some projects are approved in principle, but not yet permitted. Permits will be...
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, in his capacity as Chairman of the State Administration Council, delivered a speech at the management meeting held in his office yesterday.

At the meeting, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing explained the works of his council to return back to normality, maintaining the regular works during the state of emergency, appointment of the Union Ministers who were believed to have suitable qualifications to perform their duties successfully, the duty of government to serve for the public, adopting policies of the council and the roles of ministries in implementing the works effectively and efficiently.

He added that the previous government which took office from 2016 to 2021 could not finalize some works for various reasons and the present administration will implement some remaining works which could benefit the public in accordance with the existing rules and regulations of the relevant ministries without hesitation.

The Senior General said that the ongoing situations were resulted from the electoral problems such as voter lists, many weaknesses during the election period; as an interim organization, the State Administration Council will work for both long and short-term projects to help the next government with paving a way.

He also advised to help in livelihood of the public for their satisfaction, to operate appropriate businesses for the public for peace, stability and security of the country to strengthen the power of each citizen.

The Senior General added the ministries not to hesitate in implementing their works and to coordinate with other ministries.

The Union Ministers and officials from the Union-level organizations reported on the ongoing situations and plans of the relevant organizations, including COVID-19 vaccination programme, trade, ethnic affairs and legal affairs.

Regarding the discussions, the Chairman of State Administration Council gave guidance to serve for the public in their benefits, to narrow the gaps between the rich and the poor, between the rural and urban developments and between the states and regions in terms of development.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing also said to finalize the enactment of pending laws and called for the civil service staff to refrain from party politics, and to perform their duties without political bias regardless of their favourable votes in the elections.

He finally said that the Tatmadaw will never deviate from the multiparty democracy path selected by the people, and that is managing to ensure the correct way; officials from the relevant ministries are advised to work for the country and people, for the development in transportation and development programmes in the regions and states and to try for ensuring a reliable government for the public.—MNA

HEAD OF THE STATE ADMINISTRATION COUNCIL Senior General Min Aung Hlaing presides over the management meeting on 8 February. PHOTO: MNA

State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets Council Members

Next, Council Members U Thein Nyunt, Jung Phang Naung Taung, Mahn Nyein Maung, Daw Aye Nu Sein, U Mouang Har, U Khin Maung Swe discussed the matters pertaining to the provisions stipulated in the Constitution for the political parties, immediate and systematic formations and duty assignments of the administration bodies at the townships, wards, village-tracts-level, promotion of the State security-related laws, State pardon for the political prisoners, implementation of the peace processes, the extension of members for the states/regions administration councils, holding of election in some areas of Rakhine State, stability, tranquillity and the rule of law in Rakhine State, the establishment of the ministries for ethnic affairs at States/Regions-level, and Hluttaw, political parties and elections laws.

State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing added coordination and instruction for State pardon for the political prisoners and the rule of law.—MNA
Republic of the Union of Myanmar  
State Administration Council  
Order No 37/2021  
12th Waning of Pyatho 1382 ME  
8 February 2021  
Appointment and Duty Assignment of  
Union Minister  

U Aung Than Oo is appointed as Union Minister for Electricity and Energy in accordance with the right to exercise the powers under Article 419 of the State Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.  

By order  
Sd/ Aung Lin Dway  
Lieutenant-General  
Secretary  
State Administration Council

Republic of the Union of Myanmar  
State Administration Council  
Order No 38/2021  
12th Waning of Pyatho 1382 ME  
8 February 2021  
Appointment and Assignment of  
Chairman and members of Constitutional Tribunal of the Union  

The following persons are appointed by the State Administration Council as the Chairman and members of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union in accordance with Article 419 of the State Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar:  

1. U Than Kyaw  
   Chairman  
2. U Nyan Tun  
   Member  
3. U Khin Maung Oo  
   Member  
4. U Saw San Lin  
   Member  
5. U Myo Chit  
   Member  
6. U Kyaw Hsan  
   Member  
7. U Kyaw Min  
   Member  
8. Dr Mar Lar Aung  
   Member  
9. Daw Nan Sander San  
   Member  

By order  
Sd/ Aung Lin Dway  
Lieutenant-General  
Secretary  
State Administration Council

Republic of the Union of Myanmar  
State Administration Council  
Order No 39/2021  
12th Waning of Pyatho 1382 ME  
8 February 2021  
Appointment and Duty Assignment of  
Union Civil Service Board members  

The following persons are appointed and assigned as members of Union Civil Service Board, in accordance with the right to exercise the powers under Article 419 of the State Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar:  

1. U Sit Aye  
2. U Tin Oo  
3. U Hsan Myint  
4. Daw Khin Myo Myint  
5. U Ye Naing  

By order  
Sd/ Aung Lin Dway  
Lieutenant-General  
Secretary  
State Administration Council

Republic of the Union of Myanmar  
State Administration Council  
Order No 40/2021  
12th Waning of Pyatho 1382 ME  
8 February 2021  
Appointment and Duty Assignment of Region Administration Council  
Chairmen  

The following persons are appointed and assigned as chairmen of Region Administration Council shown against each of their Region, in accordance with the right to exercise the powers under Article 419 of the State Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar:  

1. U Hla Soe  
   Yangon Region  
2. U Ye Myint  
   Ayeyawady Region  

By order  
Sd/ Aung Lin Dway  
Lieutenant-General  
Secretary  
State Administration Council

Public Announcement  
8 February 2021  

Local banks are providing daily services with helps in livelihoods and businesses of the people. Regular banking services are fundamental to economy of the country. The Central Bank of Myanmar is supervising the systematic operation of banking services in the country. People are requested to take part in this process for ensuring economic stability of the country.  

Central Bank of Myanmar

Section 144 of Criminal Procedure imposed in some townships  

The Section 144 of Criminal Procedure have been imposed in some townships of Yangon, Mandalay, Sagaing Regions and Kayah State on 8 February.  
The areas for Section 144 has covered Sanchaung and Kamayut townships in Yangon Region; Chinnathazi, Pyuhtaytan, Mahasunghmyae, Chanaazha, Ungmyathazan, Patheinyy, Myingany and Amarapura townships in Mandalay Region; Magway and Pankoko townships in Magway Region; Sagaing, Shwebo, Monywa and Kalay townships in Sagaing Region; Wainaw, Bawaw, Moekaung, Swe, Mohin, Pawkant Townships in Kachin State; Loikaw township in Kayah State; Mawlamyine, Thanbyuzayat, Ye and Kyawhto townships in Mon State; Kengtung, Taungyi, Tachileik, Nawngklo, Lashio, Kalaw, Haikaw, Muse and Kyaukme townships of Shan State.  

Under this section, it is prohibited unlawful assembly, talks, using vehicles or in persons in marching around, protests, destroying and violent acts. The assembly of five or more than five persons are banned at the public areas and the curfew is also imposed from 8 pm to 4 am in the above-mentioned townships. —MNA
Request to health workers

1. It is appreciated for the strenuous efforts of the medical doctors, nurses, medical experts and other health workers at the respective departments under the Ministry of Health and Sports at the front-line in the fight against prevention, containment and treatment of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

2. As the vaccination programme of COVID-19 is being conducted for the public and the real-time healthcare services are required for the people, all the staff members at the respective departments under the Ministry of Health and Sports are strongly urged to return to their duties with taking the well-being of patients into consideration.

Ministry of Health and Sports
8 February 2021

Consecration, recitation of Maha Pathana ceremonies held at Shwedagon pagoda

UNION MINISTER for Religious Affairs and Culture U Ko Ko attended the ceremonies of Buddha consecration and recitation of Maha Pathana at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon yesterday.

Senior monks of State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee led by Dr Bhaddanta Candimma Bhivumma, the patron of Thanlyin Minkyaung monastery, and the senior members of Shwedagon Pagoda board of trustees.

Offerteries were donated to the members of Sangha, who then recited Maha Pathana Pali verses.

In the afternoon, the Union Minister held a meeting at the office of Religious Affairs and Culture in Yangon with the leaders of religious organizations from Christian, Islam and Hindu.

The Union Minister explained possible supports to the religious organizations in line with the State Constitution, and the leaders of organizations made the discussions.—MNA

MoALI minister inspects rural development projects

UNION MINISTER for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation U Tin Htut Oo, accompanied by his Permanent Secretary U Kyaw Min Oo and the directors-general, inspected the GAP model farms in Pyinmana Township, poverty reduction model project at Ayechantha village in Tatkon Township, poultry farm in Paytaw village and irrigation system of Nga-leik dam.

During the inspection tour, the Union Minister discussed rural development programmes, capacity building for self-management, creation of livelihoods for income, employment opportunities for the local young people and production of quality products.

He also talked about modern agricultural practices such as GAP, GAqP and GAHP, food safety, cultivation of alternative crops for more profits, and products for foreign markets by establishing modern agricultural and livestock farming with the participation of state departments, private sectors, financial organizations, and farmers.

The Union Minister also explained popularity of GAP and organic farming among the farmers and higher demand of markets for the produce from it.

He stressed that the model farms could yield information about investment, benefits, quality crops, and market situations for the farmers.

He also discussed preventing the waste of irrigation water, the formation of water utilizer groups to prevent, safety measures for old dams, the maintenance of water canal and participation of rural people in developing income sources.—MNA

MoEA Union Minister meets with departmental officials

UNION MINISTER for Ethnic Affairs U Saw Tun Aung Myint organized a meeting with the staff members at the ministry’s headquarters yesterday afternoon.

He talked about his previous experiences in ethnic affairs as a member of Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee and his ambition to the development of ethnic people. The Union Minister also said that the civil service staff need to stay away from politics in line with the rules, following disciplines and rules and self-confidence in identity of civil service staff.

The Union Minister coordinated the discussion of officials before concluding the meeting.—MNA
UNION MINISTER for Commerce Dr Pwint San held a meeting on the works of Department of Trade yesterday.

At the meeting, the Union Minister discussed trade promotion, the role of commercial attaches in foreign countries in expanding new markets, support in e-commerce, economic development and welfare of the staff members.

Deputy Director-General U Myint Thura from the Trade Department reported on the ongoing situations and future plans, and Permanent Secretary U Min Min made additional discussions. The meeting was also attended by the permanent secretary, the directors-general, deputy permanent secretary, deputy directors-general and the directors.—MNA

MoC discusses works of trade department

MoSRR holds coordination meeting on work plans

CBM holds coordination meeting with its branches in Yangon, Mandalay

137 courses for diploma, postgraduate in medical education to be conducted

A total of 2,082 trainees will be allowed for 137 courses of diploma and postgraduate at medical universities and related universities under the Ministry of Health and Sports in 2021 academic year.

The applications for these courses shall be submitted commencing 2nd week of February.

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**Act now to find strategies for helping farmers sustainable**

As the weather is uncontrollable, we must identify and manage yield-limiting factors in the field, and this will help us improve the overall resilience of crops to the vagaries of Mother Nature.

Although Mother Nature doesn’t always follow the rules, the weather in Southeast Asia is somewhat predictable. As the weather is uncontrollable, we must identify and manage yield-limiting factors in the field, and this will help us improve the overall resilience of crops to the vagaries of Mother Nature.

Farmers are closer to the weather and they have been hit with extreme weather events. The extreme weather events have signaled an openness to strategies that help make individual farmers more sustainable while also addressing the climate crisis.

There’s no argument here. The peoples of the 21st century are facing harsh impacts from the climate change. It’s obvious — we must find ways or implement systems to relieve from the extreme weather patterns and disasters.

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**Container shipping sector navigates Covid pandemic**

LONDON: Maritime container freight shipping is steaming through the Covid-19 pandemic, boosted by strong demand for Chinese exports and a shortage of vessels according to industry experts.

The Freightos Baltic Global Container Index (FBX), which tracks the price of container shipping, has nearly quadrupled for the China-Europe route since early November to face $1,827 on Friday. The FBX studying for containers from China certain for the next month of the United States has practically tripled since late May to $4,236 on Friday.

"The costs of shipping goods from China to Europe by water have hit unprecedented highs recently," mentioned Unicredit Bank economist Andrew Rees.

That is because of rampant demand for China’s manufactured merchandise, notably for medical gear in the course of the international well-being emergency — but additionaly for key items from lockdown-bound populations.

"Exponential" demand improve

"First, demand of medical goods produced in China have been strongly rising, Second, and probably more important, consumers have been re-acquainting their demand," mentioned Rees.

"Instead of going to restaurants and travelling, they have been demanding more durable goods such as electronic equipment, furniture, etc, to have a nice home. And many of these goods are produced in China."

That has had a knock-on impact on demand for the large container ships that transport huge quantities of products from the Asian powerhouse.

"Container shipping costs are soaring from Asia, not just to the UK but to most destinations for shipments out of China and Asia," Brazier anonyt-m-Jonathan Beach advised AFP. "With increased durable demand, container demand has increased exponentially."

Nevertheless, the pandemic did additionally spark a general 4.4 per-cent decline in world maritime commerce final 12 months, based on latest estimates from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Bottlenecks have nevertheless been created throughout the sector because of strict Covid-19 hygiene and sanitisation measures in ports, logistics centres and storage depots worldwide.

The turnaround time between unloading a container ship and returning has subsequntly elevated considerably, based on Beach. That additional limits the obtainable pool of vessels.

"When there is a delay in shipping empty back to loading hubs and the same time as a cargo surge, availability of empty container equipment will tighten," Beach added.

"We expect this imbalance between supply and demand to continue while strict Covid-19 restrictions remain in place."

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**Seoul launches Covid tests for pets**

SEOUL— Pet cats and dogs with a fever, cough or breathing difficulties will be offered coronavirus tests if they have been exposed to carriers, the Seoul metropolitan government said Monday.

The programme in the sprawling South Korean capital comes weeks after the country reported its first case of Covid-19 infection in an animal, involving a kitten.

"Tests will be limited to pets that show symptoms — including fever, coughing, breathing difficulties and runny noses — after coming into contact with humans who have tested positive, she added."

The test will be conducted near the animals home by a team of health workers including a veterinarian, Park said.

Animals that test positive will be required to be kept isolated at home for 14 days, but where owners have the virus their pets will be sent to separate kennels or cateries — human patients in South Korea are generally confined in central quarantine facilities if they do not need hospital treatment.

Around the world several animals — including dogs and cats — have tested positive for the coronavirus, which has killed more than two million people worldwide.

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**Union Day Objectives**

Union Day – 2021

1. To work on the Union Peace Conference – 27th Century Panglong, till the success of the internal peace process is achieved.
2. Development of the socio-economic life of the ethnic nationals.
3. To work for the emergence of a constitution that is in alignment and harmony with the Democratic Federal Union.
4. All ethnic nations to work for the preservation and protection of non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national unity, and perpetuation of national sovereignty.
5. To nurture and develop new generations endowed with high skills and capabilities imbued with strong Union spirit.
Cleaning works done at pagodas, temples before reopening

CLEANING works were done at the pagodas and temples which were opened to the public on 8 February. Platforms and buildings of the pagodas were cleaned by the Tatmadaw personnel and their family members, members of Myanmar Police Force and fire brigade departments.

Commanders of northern command, northeast command, east command, central east command, southeast command, coastal region command, southwest command, northern command, northeast command, central command, southern command and their families recited paritta and Pathana Pali verses, according to the report of Office of Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services.—MNA

Pagodas reopened to public under COVID-19 rules

SHWEDAGON pagoda in Yangon, Maha Muni Buddha Image in Mandalay and Up-pattananti Pagoda in Pubbathiri Township of Nay Pyi Taw were reopened for the public yesterday. Buddhist monks, nuns and laypersons visited these pagodas in line with the COVID-19 rules after the cleaning works of Tatmadaw members, police and firemen at these pagodas.—MNA

Military hospitals provide medical services to people

MILITARY hospitals in the townships of regions and states are providing medical treatments to the people to solve their difficulties in healthcare services. A total of 1,200 outpatients and 616 inpatients reached these hospitals from 5 February to date.

Senior medical experts, medics and nurses conducted 40 major operations and 20 minor operations, and the serious cases are treated by the senior doctors.

These hospitals managed for the birth of 70 babies, while 120 pregnant women were taken to the respective military hospitals.

Officials from the respective commands also provided the patients with foods, according to the report Office of Commander in Chief of Defence Services.—MNA

CBM issues announcement on public rumours about monetary issue

THE Central Bank of Myanmar released an announcement on 3 February to wipe out rumours among the public about the monetary issue and possible closure of banks.

The announcement said, ‘‘There were base rumours that K5,000 and K10,000 banknotes would be demonetized and banks would close in relation to the current situations in the country. It was also learnt that some people were worried because of the rumours and were reportedly withdrawing their money from the banks.

The Central Bank of Myanmar has been working hard to stabilize the financial system, and the banks have been providing proper services in accordance with the rules and regulations. The general public can continue using the banknotes and banking services without any worries, and all the banks have been instructed to provide regular banking services.’’—MNA

Tatmadaw True News Information Team: Healthcare services offered at military hospitals

THE Tatmadaw True News Information Team released a statement on 4 February 2021 that healthcare services are offered to all the national people at the military hospitals. The statement said that some persons who are creating disturbances, aiming to destabilize the administrative mechanism and stability of the State, have incited Civil Disobedience Campaign through social networks, causing failure to perform duties among the health workers.

Doctors have vowed during their convocation that ‘‘Health and well-being of the patients will be our own issues as the first priority; I will practice my profession with conscience and dignity and in accordance with a good medical practice; I will serve my medical profession regardless of nationality, race and social status; and I will maintain the utmost respect for human life.’’

It is also advised all the health workers not to follow the incitement that can jeopardize the interest of country and people, and keep their professional vows to the public.

The Tatmadaw has received the permission of the State Administration Council to solve the current healthcare problems of people across the nation by the military medics. Therefore, people can get proper medical treatments at the nearest military hospitals.—MNA
First sitting US congressman dies after Covid diagnosis

A Republican congressman from Texas who was being treated for Covid-19 has died, his office said Monday, the first sitting member to lose his life after battling the coronavirus.

House of Representatives lawmaker Ron Wright, 67, who had also suffered from cancer in recent years, died Sunday in a Dallas hospital, where he and his wife were taken after catching the virus. His death comes after House member-elect Luke Letlow lost his life on 29 December to the disease, just days before the 41-year-old Republican was to be sworn in.

Wright announced on 21 January that he had tested positive for the Covid-19 but was “experiencing minor symptoms”. “I feel okay and will continue working for the people of the 6th District from home this week,” his statement said at the time. But his condition took a turn for the worse and for the past two weeks, he and his wife Susan were hospitalized for treatment. He died with his wife at his side, according to a statement from his office.

Republican congresswoman Liz Cheney expressed her condolences in a statement for her “friend & colleague.” “Ron’s commitment to public service, his tremendous work ethic & his commitment to conservative values inspired us all,” she wrote. The United States has battled the world’s largest outbreak of the virus, with 463,000 people succumbing to the disease.—AFP

Hyundai, Kia deny Apple car talks, sending shares tumbling

SOUTH KOREAN automaker Hyundai and its affiliate Kia on Monday denied news reports they were in talks with Apple for a joint project to make autonomous vehicles, sending their shares tumbling. The announcement came about a month after the country’s cable broadcaster Korea Economic TV said the iPhone maker had approached Hyundai to discuss a potential partnership to develop electric vehicles and batteries, sending the car maker’s shares soaring.Reports last week suggested they could produce cars in the US state of Georgia.

But on Monday Hyundai and Kia said in regulatory filings they were “not discussing autonomous electric car development with Apple”. Kia shares slumped 14.98 per cent at the close in Seoul on Monday, while Hyundai fell 6.21 per cent. Both automakers added that they had talked with multiple firms about such projects, but no decision had been made. Hyundai said those talks were in their “early stages”. The company, South Korea’s biggest automaker, has already rolled out fully electric cars, including the Ioniq and the Kona Electric, as it seeks to win a slice of the market.—AFP

Sanctions hurt Venezuela economy, US government study says

US sanctions have likely contributed to Venezuela’s economic deterioration and have caused obstacles for humanitarian workers, a study by a US government watchdog said Monday.

The assessment by the Government Accountability Office, requested by Democratic lawmakers, comes as President Joe Biden looks set to fine-tune Venezuela policy do more to track complaints from humanitarian workers to address recurrent problems.

Representative Andy Levin, one of the lawmakers who requested the report, said it “makes clear that sanctions imposed by the United States made a dire situation worse”.

With this new administration, we have an opportunity to pursue foreign policy guided by our values,” he said. “Let us take the lessons of this report to heart and use them to craft a more thoughtful, humane and effective approach moving forward.”

The Biden administration plans one key shift by shielding Venezuelans in the United States from deportation — a step refused by the anti-immigration Trump despite his tough talk against Maduro.—AFP

Japan to draw up guidelines on how to transport COVID-19 vaccines

THE Japanese government will draw up guidelines on how to safely transport COVID-19 vaccines, health minister Norihisa Tamura said Monday, as it steps up preparations to distribute shots to the country’s population of 126 million. Vaccines developed by various pharmaceutical firms have different characteristics and logistical challenges. The vaccine distributed by Pfizer Inc., for example, is believed to be highly effective but must be stored at about minus 73C. The one developed by Pfizer Inc., for example, is believed to be highly effective but must be stored at about minus 73C.

“We aim to quickly communicate information to local governments, including how to transport and handle (the vaccines),” Tamura said during a meet of the House of Representatives Budget Committee.

The first batch of the Pfizer vaccine could arrive in Japan from Belgium as early as Sunday, a day before its use is expected to be approved by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

The government plans to begin inoculating 10,000 health workers this week before extending the pool to other health workers, people aged 65 and older, and those with pre-existing conditions. Japan is hoping to contain the spread of the virus, which has hit among the state of virus emergency over 10 prefectures including Tokyo, the hardest hit among Japan’s 47 prefectures, beyond the initial 7 February end date. The current emergency will last until 7 March. A research team of the health ministry plans to verify the safety of the Pfizer vaccine by collecting weekly data on symptoms that appear in medical workers after they are inoculated, government sources said Monday.

Around 20,000 doctors and nurses from 100 hospitals across the country are to participate in the study, which aims to track potential symptoms and the frequency in which the symptoms occur regardless of whether the vaccine is the cause. The government plans to administer the Pfizer vaccine to participants in two doses 21 days apart, with their physical condition recorded every day from the first shot to four weeks after the second shot. The researchers will work on a weekly basis on the symptoms and serious reactions that are expected to occur in one in every several thousand people.

“Vaccines are the key to our coronavirus measures,” Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said during the committee session. “The government will work with prefectures and municipalities to ensure all of the people will be safely vaccinated.”

The government has agreements in place to receive enough doses for 157 million people, 72 million of which are to come from Pfizer. The remaining doses will be provided by AstraZeneca Plc and Moderna Inc.

About 20,000 ultra-cold freezers are slated to be set up at medical facilities across Japan to store the vaccines, which was 95 per cent effective in clinical trials. The AstraZeneca vaccine can be stored at 2 to 8C, making it easier to handle, but is only around 70 per cent effective.—Kyodo
Germany, Poland, Sweden expel Russian diplomats in tit-for-tat move

GERMANY, Sweden and Poland on Monday each threw out a Russian diplomat in retaliation for Moscow’s expulsion last week of their diplomats for allegedly taking part in protests in support of Navalny.

The three European countries announced the tit-for-tat moves in coordinated statements, drawing an angry response from Russia which accused them of meddling in its internal affairs.

The diplomatic spat comes at a time of heightened tensions between the European Union and Russia, exacerbated by the arrest and jailing of leading opposition figure Navalny.

Russia humiliating the European Union on Friday by announcing the expulsions during a rare meeting in Moscow between EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

European governments strongly condemned the shock expulsions, with Berlin warning that it would respond in kind.

Moscow’s decision to expel the three diplomats “was in no way justified”, the German foreign ministry said Monday, adding that the German staff member had been doing his job of “observing developments in Russia by lawful means”.

Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde said Stockholm had “informed the Russian ambassador that a person from the Russian embassy is asked to leave Sweden”. “This is a clear response to the unacceptable decision to expel a Swedish diplomat who was only performing his duties,” she wrote on Twitter.

The Polish foreign ministry likewise condemned the “groundless expulsion” of a Polish diplomat from Saint Petersburg and said it had declared “persona non grata” a Russian consular official in Poznan, western Poland.

The Russian foreign ministry immediately hit back.

“Today’s decisions by Poland, Germany and Sweden are unfounded, unfriendly and are a continuation of the very serious of actions that the West is taking with regard to our country and which we qualify as interference in our internal affairs,” spokesman Maria Zakharova said on state channel Rossiya 1.

“Reviving relations”

The Kremlin earlier on Monday defended the expulsion of the EU diplomats during Borrell’s high-profile visit, and insisted it remained interested in reviving relations with Brussels. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the declaration of the three foreign diplomats as personae non gratae was a “consequence of the actions of some diplomatic missions in Moscow against the backdrop of illegal riots”.

Peskov added that Moscow did not initiate “the collapse” of the relationship with the EU.

“Russia has been and remains interested in reviving diplomatic relations between Moscow and Brussels,” he told reporters.

Navalny, a fierce critic of President Vladimir Putin, was arrested upon arrival in Moscow on January 17 after spending several months in Germany recovering from a poisoning attack the West believes was ordered by the Kremlin.

“The Kremlin earlier on Monday defended the expulsion of the EU diplomats during Borrell’s high-profile visit, and insisted it remained interested in reviving relations with Brussels.”

The European Commission chief said on Monday she had called on EU member states to donate some of their coronavirus jabs to Ukraine, which is trying to launch a vaccination campaign.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has faced criticism at home for failing to secure Western-made jabs and has called on the EU to help Ukraine source vaccines.

Zelensky said on Monday that Ukraine, one of the poorest countries in Europe, would begin the first phase of the vaccination campaign later this month.

The country of some 40 million is awaiting delivery of eight million doses promised under the United Nations Covax programme and up to five million doses of the Chinese CoronaVac jab.

“On top of Covax, Ukraine’s doctors and nurses will receive the first vaccines already this month,” she said, adding that “millions of other doses will reach Ukraine by the summer”.

Prime Minister Mark Rutte has said ice skating will be allowed if the canals freeze for the first time since 1997 and warned Dutch people to observe social distancing and to try not to fall over and end up in already overstretched hospitals.

Hopes that a 204-kilometre (125-mile) ice-skating marathon through 11 cities called the Eistendocht could be held for the first time since 1997 are however on ice because of coronavirus restrictions.

All four football matches in the Dutch top-flight Eredivisie on Sunday were cancelled, as was a German Bundesliga game.

In Germany, snowfall caused major disruption to trains and cancellations of services between cities including Hamburg and Hanover.

Thick snow of up to 30 centimetres meanwhile disrupted road traffic, with hundreds of accidents and part of a motorway in North Rhine-Westphalia closed by police after it turned into an ice rink.

“A Deutsche Bahn train (L) is seen in a depot close to Berlin’s Ost Bahnhof railway station during snowfall on February 8, 2021.”

“Most parts of the country had up to five and 10 centimetres (two and four inches) of snow but some areas received 30 centimetres, public broadcaster NOS said.”

“The conditions were so severe that the Dutch government had closed all coronavirus testing centres for several days.”

Up to 10 days of sub-zero day-time temperatures are expected in the Netherlands, raising hopes in the skating-obsessed country that canals will freeze over.

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A new rule is in place that requires people to wear face masks on public transport, unless they have a medical exemption.

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Ukrainian President Zelensky has faced criticism at home for failing to secure Western-made jabs and has called on the EU to help Ukraine source vaccines.

“We are working today to launch a vaccination campaign later this month,” Zelensky said on Monday.

The country of some 40 million is awaiting delivery of eight million doses promised under the United Nations Covax programme and up to five million doses of the Chinese CoronaVac jab.

The total amount of the already secured doses is not enough to meet the needs of the country, however.

Speaking at the same conference on Monday, Zelensky also pointed to Ukrainians’ “mistrust” of vaccines, saying a “large part of the population” did not want to get vaccinated.

According to a recent poll conducted by the non-governmental Rating Group, more than half of Ukrainians said they were not ready to get inoculated, even for free.
Tokyo stocks end at 30-yr high on global economic recovery hopes

TOKYO — Tokyo stocks rose sharply Monday, with the key indexes closing at 30-year highs, as hopes for a global economic recovery grew after the United States made progress in preparing a massive stimulus package to deal with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average ended up 698.31 points, or 2.12 per cent, from Friday at 29,388.50, its highest close since 3 August, 1990. The broader Nikkei 400 index, which includes First Section issues on the Tokyo Stock Exchange was up 33 points, or 1.75 per cent, at 1,923.95, the highest since 5 June, 1991.

The total market capitalization of companies listed on the First Section reached a record 7.12 trillion yen (67.6 trillion). Gainers were led by iron and steel, mining and marine transportation issues.

But the robustness in the market also stoked fears that share prices have risen without at a pace that does not reflect the fundamentals of the economy, which is still struggling with the fallout from the pandemic. Analysts have warned that ample liquidity provided by major central banks under their massive monetary easing campaigns has triggered such an excessive rise in the market.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year Japanese government bond hit the highest level in over 10 months at 0.865 per cent, up 0.010 percentage point from Friday’s close, as the safe-haven debt was sold on a sharp rise in Tokyo stocks.

The US dollar fluctuated narrowly in the mid-105 yen range throughout the day as Friday’s disappointing US jobs data for January pressured market players to await further developments on the stimulus package. At 5 pm, the dollar fetched 105.48-49 yen compared with 105.32-34 yen in New York and 105.49-50 yen in Tokyo at 5 pm Friday.

The euro was quoted at $1.2040-41 and 126.20-24 yen in Tokyo, up 0.010 percentage point from Friday’s close, as the safe-haven debt was sold on a sharp rise in Tokyo stocks.

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The Nikkei topped the psychologically important 29,000 level threshold early in the morning, accelerating the pace of increase toward the end of the session. Investor sentiment also improved on gains in U.S. stock futures in after-hours trading and solid Asian stock markets.

“Market players are growing optimistic that the US stimulus plan would be enacted in the next two to three weeks,” said Yutaka Miura, senior technical analyst at Mizuho Securities Co.

But he also said, “It was an uncomfortable rise in stocks, given the recent rapid increase in stock prices.”

On Friday, US lawmakers approved a budget outline that will allow President Joe Biden and his Democratic allies in Congress to move forward on the economic relief plan without Republican support, beginning the process of turning the proposal into legislation.

Brokers project that the upward trend will continue for a while, underpinned by positive earnings in Japan and overseas, with many companies upgrading their profit estimates.

“Now it is well within our sight that the Nikkei will reach the 30,000 level,” said Masahiro Ichikawa, chief market strategist at Sumitomo Mitsui DS Asset Management Co.

On the First Section, advancing issues outnumbered decliners 1,710 to 429, while 52 ended unchanged.

Steelmakers and shippers climbed on expectations of recovering demand amid the improving global economic outlook.

Kobe Steel soared 94 yen, or 17.3 per cent, to 632 yen, while its rival JFE Holdings jumped 74 yen, or 7.4 per cent, to 1,078 yen.

Among shipping firms, Nippon Yusen climbed 164 yen, or 5.9 per cent, to 2,960 yen and Kawasaki Kisen gained 83 yen, or 4.4 per cent, to 1,960 yen.— Kyodo

On Friday, BP itself is targeting “net zero” carbon emissions by 2050 as part of broader plans to offset declining oil and gas production with greater output from sustainable energy sources, such as electricity and wind.

Monday’s announcement was confirmed by the Crown Estate, which manages Queen Elizabeth II’s property. —AFP

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WHO experts discuss AstraZeneca Covid vaccine

THE World Health Organization’s vaccine experts were deciding Monday on their usage recommendations for the AstraZeneca-Oxford Covid-19 vaccine — including for older adults.

The 15-member Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) was spending the day in a virtual extraordinary meeting discussing the two-shot vaccine.

The WHO said the recommendations on who it should and should not be used for would be made public later this week.

The regulatory authorities in several European nations have not authorised the vaccine for use among the over-65s — by far the most vulnerable age group for serious Covid-19 disease.

According to the SAGE meeting’s agenda, “assessment of the critical evidence, including data and draft recommendations related to vaccine use in older adults” will form a key part of Monday’s talks.

The meeting will also discuss recent evidence on new coronavirus variants of concern.

South Africa said Sunday it would suspend the start of its Covid-19 vaccinations with the AstraZeneca jab after a study showed the drug failed to prevent mild and moderate cases of the variant that has appeared in the country.

In a separate process, the UK-Swedish pharmaceutical giant was also to discuss risk management plans and other implementation considerations, before facing questions.

The meeting was also to get an outline of ongoing and planned studies.

The SAGE working group was then to present evidence including data and draft recommendations relating to the vaccine’s use in older adults.

The four-and-a-half-hour meeting was due to wrap up with a presentation of the remaining draft recommendations.

In a separate process, the UN health agency is also set to decide on February 15 whether to give the vaccine emergency use listing for the versions produced in India and South Korea.

If granted, doses from those sites could start to be distributed to some of the world’s poorest countries via Covax, the global vaccine procurement and distribution pool.

Many low-income countries are relying entirely on the AstraZeneca jab to start immunising their most vulnerable populations, but cannot receive their first doses until the WHO grants emergency authorisation.

SAGE advice

SAGE advises the WHO on global policies and strategies, ranging from vaccines and technology, research and development, to delivery of immunisation and its links with other health interventions.

Chaired by Mexican doctor Alejandro Cravioto, the group is comprised of 15 experts from around the world representing a broad range of expertise.

SAGE has already issued advice on the usage of the Pfizer-BioNTech and the Moderna vaccines.

So far, the WHO has only given emergency use listing to the Pfizer jab, though several other manufacturers have started the evaluation process, including AstraZeneca and Moderna.

Covax is almost entirely dependent on the AstraZeneca jab in its first wave of distribution.

Some 145 countries are set to receive 337.2 million doses — enough to immunise 5.3 per cent of their collective population by mid-2021. Of those, 336 million are AstraZeneca vials.

The first Covax deliveries are expected to take place in late February.

However, the AstraZeneca vaccine cannot start being shipped until the WHO signs them off. — AFP

French health minister encourages use of AstraZeneca jab

FRENCH Health Minister Olivier Veran sought to boost confidence in the AstraZeneca vaccine on Monday as he received a dose in front of TV cameras and reporters at a hospital southwest of Paris.

South Africa has delayed the start of its inoculation programme using the jab from the British-Swedish pharmaceutical group over concerns it does not work on a new variant of Covid-19 that originated in the country.

Veran said that the South African variant had not been widely detected in France.

“I continue to rec-

ommend vaccination by the AstraZeneca vaccine, which protects against 99 per cent of the viruses that are present in our country,” Veran said from a hospital in the town of Melun.

France received 270,000 doses of the jab on Saturday and would take delivery of another 300,000 in the next few days, he added.

The vaccine is to be used as a priority for all care workers, including hospital and nursing home staff, as well as domestic workers.

“I encourage all care workers to get themselves vaccinated in their hospitals, health centres and all available places in order to protect themselves as fast as possible,” Veran said.

The jab distributed by AstraZeneca and developed by the University of Oxford is set to be discussed by WHO experts on Monday amid doubts about its efficacy against the South African variant and against disease in the over-65s.

French President Emmanuel Macron said at the end of January that the shot was “quasi-ineffective for people over 65.” — AFP

Coronavirus: Latest global developments

HERE are the latest developments in the coronavirus crisis:

WHO verdict on AstraZeneca

World Health Organization experts are deciding who the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine should best be given to, as doubts are raised about its usefulness for older people and against the South African strain.

It will deliver its verdict later this week.

But S.Africa halts rollout

South Africa is suspending vaccinations with the jab after a study showed it failed to prevent mild and moderate cases of the variant that has appeared in the country.

But the Anglo-Swedish drug company insists that its shot could stop people getting severely ill and says it’s working on a version to combat the new strain.

Tanzania on a prayer

Dissent in the east African country mounts after President John Magufuli claimed the virus had been chased from the country by the power of prayer.

With more and more deaths being put down to “pneumonia”, official denial is wearing thin as politicians begin to fall ill.

Magufuli said God had eliminated the virus but the Catholic Church, to which he belongs, begs to differ. “We are not an island,” it said.

The president, who is also against vaccinations, had earlier claimed that Covid tests were not to be trusted.

He said a goat and a papaya fruit had tested positive in secret tests of the kits he ordered.

5.S.Korea tests sneezy pets

Dogs and cats in Seoul with a cough or a fever are to be tested.

The move comes after a kitten became the country’s first animal case of the virus.

Pets that test positive will be kept isolated for 14 days or sent to kennels or catteries if their owners come down with Covid.

Experts say the chances of a pet giving a human the virus are low.

More than 2.3 million dead

The virus has killed at least 2,316,812 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP Monday.

The United States is the worst-affected country with 653,470 deaths followed by Brazil with 311,534, Mexico with 166,200, India with 155,080, and the UK with 122,465. — AFP

9 FEBRUARY 2021
THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR
Japan submarine collides with private ship off Shikoku, 3 injured

TOKYO — A Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force submarine collided Monday with a commercial vessel in the Pacific Ocean off the western main island of Shikoku, but no major damage was reported, government officials said.

The 84-metre-long Souryu scraped the hull of the vessel as it was surfacing, the Defense Ministry said, adding three crew members on the submarine were slightly injured.

Top government spokesman Katsunobu Kato said at a press conference that a ship believed to be the commercial vessel, when contacted by the Japan Coast Guard, reported that no impact was felt and it does not appear to have sustained any damage.

The collision occurred at around 10:58 am off Cape Ashizuri in Kochi Prefecture. The ministry said the submarine’s antenna mast and other upper parts were slightly damaged but it was able to continue sailing.

Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said the submarine, which was undergoing routine training, saw the commercial vessel through its periscope as it rose but was unable to avoid it in time. The submarine’s communications equipment was damaged in the accident, causing an hours-long delay in reporting the incident by mobile phone, he said.

Kishi told reporters he had been instructed by Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga to confirm the safety of the commercial vessel and provide rescue if necessary, but that the MSDF was unable to confirm the details regarding the ship because it left the scene soon afterward.

The collision, which came on the heels of an MSDF destroyer hitting a Chinese fishing boat in March last year, was “truly regrettable,” he said.

The Japan Transport Safety Board said it has launched an investigation into the collision.

The Souryu is a diesel-electric submarine with a standard displacement of 2,950 tonnes and a crew of about 65. It entered service in 2009 as the first of its class.

—— Kyodo

Israel’s Netanyahu denies corruption charges as trial resumes

ISRAELIS Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied corruption charges against him in a brief court appearance Monday, as his graft trial resumed weeks before the hearing ended.

Netanyahu, the first Israeli premier to be indicted in office, was formally charged last year over allegations that he accepted improper gifts and sought to trade regulatory favour with media moguls in exchange for positive coverage.

He had been compelled to appear to deliver an in-person response to the charges, after last month formally submitting his innocent plea in writing.

“Confirm the written answer submitted in my name,” Israel’s longest-serving premier said, after Jerusalem court judge Ittivak Feldman Friedman read out the charges against him.

Netanyahu was referring to a January 18 court filing from his defense team which said “the prime minister denies all charges” in each of the three separate cases against him.

The combative 71-year-old premier, who has previously blasted the charges as “fabricated and ludicrous”, spent just 20 minutes inside the courtroom on Monday, entering and exiting amid a heavy security deployment and dozens of protesters.

The hearing continued in his absence for several hours, with Netanyahu’s lawyers Bezalel Ben-Zur and Amit Hadad accusing Israel’s Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit — a Netanyahu appointee — of mishandling the case.

They argued that elements of the investigation into the premier were opened without required authorizations.

Election meddling? Netanyahu has repeatedly charged that he is the victim of a witch-hunt, with the allegations against him trumped-up.

The trial schedule has not yet been set but it may force the prime minister to appear in court multiple times a week, as he campaigns ahead of Israel’s 23 March elections.

His lawyers asked for a delay of several months saying they needed more time to prepare due to the complexity of the case, but judges did not rule on that request before the hearing ended.

When Netanyahu last appeared in court nine months ago, he had just won a political victory by forming a coalition government with election rival Benny Gantz, following three inconclusive national polls.

But that fraught coalition proved short-lived and collapsed in December, with Gantz branding Netanyahu as serially dishonest. It is unclear whether the cloud of the trial will hurt the premier’s re-election chances in March.

Israel’s parliament speaker Yariv Levin, loyalist of Netanyahu’s right-wing Likud party, insisted the court must “postpone” the trial’s upcoming phase. — AFP

Glacier break in India leaves at least 20 dead, more than 170 missing

At least 20 people have died and more than 170 are missing after a Himalayan glacier broke in the northern state of Uttarakhand on Sunday, causing massive flooding, local police reported Monday.

The natural disaster, which took place in the Chamoli district of the state, caused massive flooding in the Dhauli-ganga and Alaknanda rivers, damaging the nearby Rishi-ganga and NTPC power plant projects.

According to local media, most of the missing are labourers who were working on projects when the incident occurred, while many villagers living downstream of the rivers are also missing. — Kyodo

At least 24 dead in Morocco underground factory flood: media

At least 24 people died after heavy rain flooded an illegal underground textile workshop in a private house in Morocco’s port of Tangiers, the state news agency reported Monday.

Rescue workers recovered 24 bodies from the property and rescued 10 survivors who were taken to hospital, the MAP agency said citing local authorities. A search of the premises was still ongoing.

Local media outlets indicated at least some of the victims may have been electrocuted as the incoming water interfered with power facilities, but there was no immediate confirmation of those reports.

Morocco has experienced heavy rains in recent weeks, after a long period of drought.

In early January, the inclement weather caused several dilapidated buildings to collapse in Casablanca, the country’s economic capital, causing at least four deaths, according to local media.

Poorly maintained drainage systems often exacerbate flooding in cities.

Fifty people died in floods in 2014 caused by heavy rains in the south of Morocco. — AFP
**SPORT**

Melbourne — Defending champion Novak Djokovic said he played “flawless and dominant” tennis to blast past Frenchman Jeremy Chardy Monday in an ominous start to his bid for an unprecedented ninth Australian Open title.

The Serbian world number one, who clinched his 17th Grand Slam in last year’s gripping Melbourne final against Dominic Thiem, wasted little energy in the 6-3, 6-1, 6-2 romp in just 91 minutes on Rod Laver Arena.

The writing was on the wall with Chardy failing to take a set to self, dishing up a masterclass for the socially-distanced fans in the stadium.

And he clearly enjoyed himself, dishing up a masterclass for the socially-distanced fans in the stadium.

“I feel great. I mean, I started the match really well, broke his serve and was pretty much a flawless match,” he said, adding that he felt “relaxed and comfortable”.

“Especially on my service games, I was very dominant. Just overall, I think every shot that I executed tonight was really good and on a high level.

“I’m very pleased with the way I opened up the Australian Open.”

Djokovic, chasing an 18th Slam crown to close in on the 20-year-old Nadal, has likened his relationship with the Australian Open to a “love affair.”

And he clearly enjoyed himself, dishing up a masterclass for the socially-distanced fans in the stadium.

“It feels great, so great to see people back in the stadium,” he said.

“I’m really glad to see a lot of people actually — this is the most people actually — this is the most

FEBRUARY 2021
THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

LONDON — Lewis Hamilton gives an interview after winning the Turkish Formula One Grand Prix at the Intercity Istanbul Park circuit in Istanbul. Lewis Hamilton has ended his long-running contract saga by signing a new one-year deal, the Formula One team announced on Monday.

The British driver will be competing for an unprecedented eighth world title when the new season gets underway in Bahrain next month.

The 30-year-old German midfielder said the current coronavirus-shortened season had been unusually competitive.

**Hamilton signs one-year deal with Mercedes F1 team**

**Gundogan’s Man City must stay ‘humble’ despite winning streak**

**Manchester City’s German midfielder Ilkay Gundogan passes the ball during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Manchester City at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on February 7, 2021. Manchester City won the game 4-1. PHOTO: JON SUPER / POOL / AFP**

LONDON — Ilkay Gundogan has urged Manchester City to stay “humble” despite their eye-catching winning run as they close in on a third Premier League title in four years.

Sunday’s 4-1 win over Liverpool at Anfield made it 14 victories in a row in all competitions, equalling the record for top-flight sides set by Preston and Arsenal.

Their five-point gap at the top of the table could become eight if they win the game in hand they have over the chasing pack.

But Gundogan, who scored twice at Anfield despite missing a first-half penalty, said Pep Guardiola’s men could not take anything for granted.

“Probably the most important thing now is to stay humble and to approach every game like we did in the last few weeks and months,” he said.

“Every single game brings a new challenge, but it is always about taking these challenges and trying to make the best out of it.”

The 30-year-old Germany midfielder said the current coronavirus-shortened season had been unusually competitive.

— AFP