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Bawdikan bridge construction completed 84% in Taninthayi township

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Yay Pyan Gyi waterfall in Nawngkhio

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Message for 75th Diamond Jubilee Anniversary of MRTV sent by State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing

TODAY is the 75th Diamond Jubilee Anniversary of Myanma Radio and Television which started broadcasting as Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS) on 15 February 1946. If we think of the life expectancy, the 75 years old one is rich in experiences and knowledge such as hardships, challenges and development after passing many decades.

Together with the motto “To inform, to educate and to entertain the public,” MRTV which provides access to information, knowledge and news for the national, ethnic people living in the country and other Myanmar nationals residing in foreign countries, will always be in the heart of the Myanmar people in addition to others around the world.

Although the Myanma Broadcasting Service was first piloted in 1936-1937, it was not an independent national broadcasting service. In March 1945, Myanma Revolutionary Tatmadaw Broadcasting was established and introduced as an independent national broadcasting service.

The MRTV has been using modern techniques by overcoming the various challenges through generations to be on par with the world countries, with innovative ideas and creation for the public.

The name of Rangoon Radio was changed into Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS) on 15 February 1946 and it has been operating new programmes for the public since then.

SEE PAGE-3

People visit Shwedagon Pagoda with COVID-19 preventive measures

SHWEDAGON PAGODA was crowded with devotees during the COVID-19 prevention and control period, in accordance with the pandemic precaution methods.

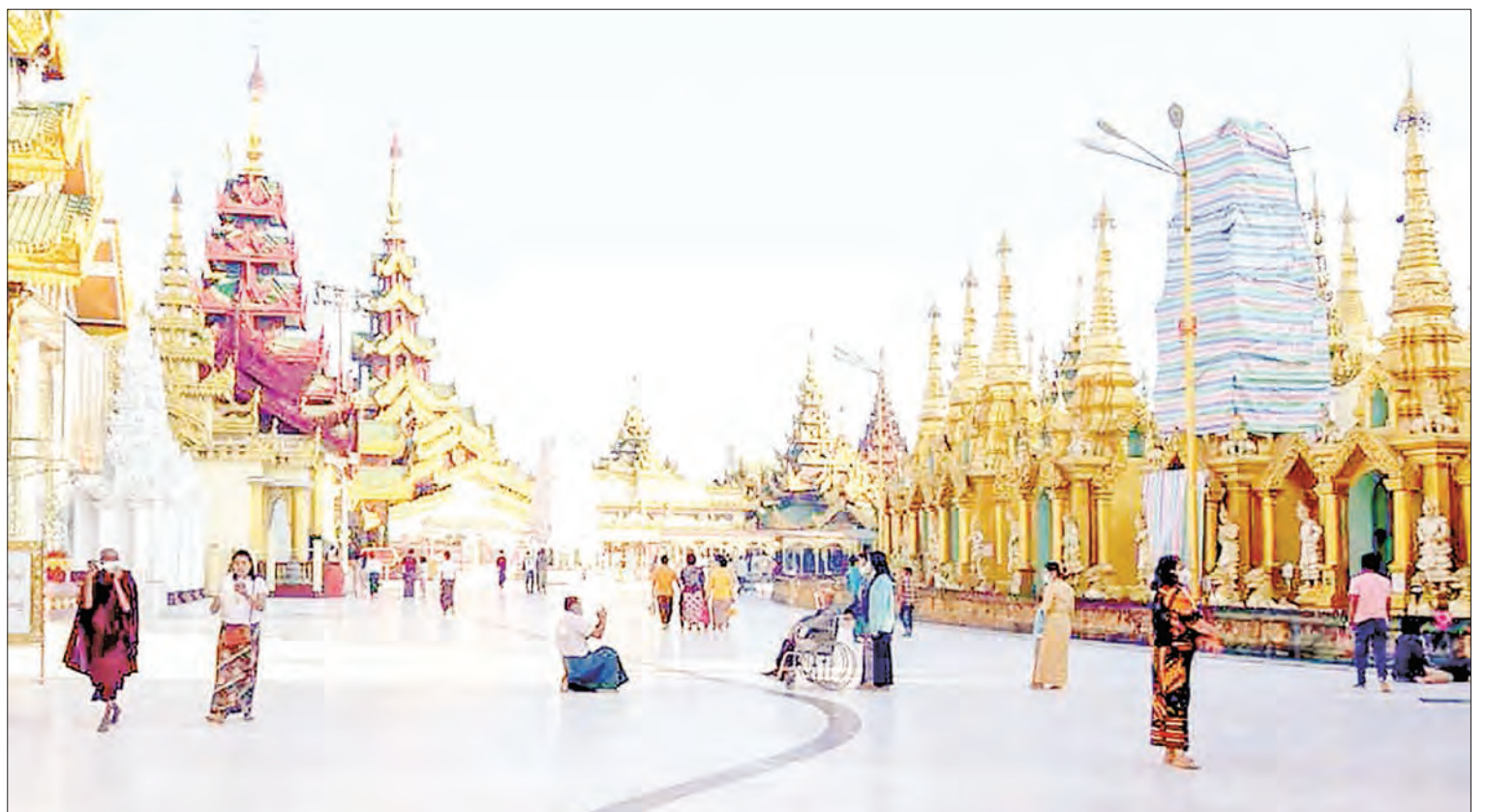
People are allowed for three pilgrimage sections respectively in the morning and afternoon- from 6:00 am to 7:00 am, 8:00 am to 9:00 am and 10:00 am to 11:00 am and 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm, 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm and 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm.

There will be six times for pilgrimage and 500 visitors will be allowed at a time, and a total of 3,000 people can visit per day.

Four stairways of the pagodas are allowed for the pilgrimages to reach the famous pagoda.

The pilgrims must wear masks, wash their hands with sanitizers and must take their temperature screening conducted by the officials at the stairways.

The pilgrims can pay hom-



Devotees are seen worshipping at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon. PHOTO: MYINT MAUNG

age to the pagoda by keeping social distancing after completing personal data, phone num-

bers in the designated forms and record books.

The pagoda was closed for

10 months during the COVID-19 period, but was reopened on 8 February due to a significant

drop of the pandemic across the country.—Myint Maung/ GNLM

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
State Administration Council
State Administration Council Law No (5/2021)
Law Amending the Penal Code

3rd Waxing of Tabodwe, 1382ME
14 February 2021

- The State Administration Council enacts this law according to Article 419 of the State Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.
- This law shall be called Law Amending the Penal Code.
- The Penal Code Section 121 shall be substituted as follows:
“121. Whoever wages war against the Union of Myanmar or any constituent unit thereof, or assists any State or person or incites or conspires with any person within or without the Union to wage war against the Union or any constituent unit thereof, or attempts or prepare to alter unconstitutional means or any other means or otherwise prepares by force of arms or other violent means to overthrow the organs of the Union or of its constituent units established by the Constitution, or takes part or is concerned in or incites or conspires with any person within or without the Union to make or to take part or be concerned in any such attempt shall be guilty of the offence of High Treason.”
- The Penal Code Section 124-A shall be substituted as follows:
“124 A. Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government established by law for the Union or for the constituent units or the Defence Services or Defence Services Personnel shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to twenty years with fine or with imprisonment which may extend to seven years with fine or fine.”
- After Penal Code Section 124-B, the Section 124-C and Section 124-D shall be added as follows:
“sabotage or hinder the performance of the Defence Services of the Union or Law Enforcement agencies
124 C. Whoever intends or causes to sabotage or to hinder the success of performance of the Defence Services and law enforcement organizations who are engaged in preserving the stability of the State, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term of twenty years, to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to twenty years with fine or with imprisonment which may extend to ten years with fine or fine.”
disrupts or hinders Defence Services and Government employees
124 D. Whoever causes or hinders the Defence Services personnel and Government employees towards the Government, disrupts or hinders by any means, those who are carrying out their duties, such a person shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to seven years or with fine or with both.”
- At Penal Code 505,
(a) Sub-section (a) shall be substituted as follows:
“(a) whoever with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, a member of the Defence Services or government employees to deprive affect, hinder, disturb, damage the motivation, discipline, health, conduct upon Government or the Defence Services and the duty of government employees or members of defence services to being into the hatred, disobedience, disloyalty;
(b) sub-section (a), (b), (c) shall be reclassified as sub-section (b), (c) and (d).
- After, Penal Code Section 505, Section 505-A shall be added as follows:
“cause fear, spread false news, agitate directly or indirectly criminal offence against a Government employee
505 A. Whoever-
(a) causes or intends to cause fear to a group of citizens or to the public,
(b) causes or intends to spread false news, knowing or believing that it is untrue,
(c) causes or intends to commit or to agitate directly or indirectly criminal offence against a Government employee, any kind of Government employees or Government employees;
Such a person shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years or with fine or with both.”

I hereby sign under Article 419 of the State Constitution.

Sd/ Min Aung Hlaing
Senior General
Chairman
State Administration Council

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
State Administration Council
State Administration Council Law No (6/2021)
Law Amending the Code of Criminal Procedure

3rd Waxing of Tabodwe 1382ME
14 February 2021

- The State Administration Council enacts this law according to Article 419 of the State Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.
- This law shall be called the Code of Criminal Procedure Amendment Law.
- At the table (2) of Code of Criminal Procedure,
(a) The Column (2) of Penal Code Section 124-C shall be added as “sabotage or hinder the performance of the Defence Services of the Union or Law Enforcement agencies”, while Column (3) as “Shall not arrest without warrant”, Column (4) as “warrant”, Column (5) as “Not bailable”, Column (6) as “Not compoundable” and Column (7) as “imprisonment for a term of twenty years, to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to ten years, to which fine may be added, or with fine”.
- (b) The Column (2) of Penal Code Section 124-D shall be added as “disrupts or hinders Defence Services personnel and Government employees”, while the Column (3) as “Shall not arrest without warrant”, Column (4) as “warrant”, Column (5) as “Not Bailable”, Column (6) as “Not compoundable” and Column (7) as “imprisonment which may extend to seven years, to which fine may be added, or with fine”.
- (c) The Column (2) of Penal Code Section 505-A shall be added as “cause fear, spread false news, agitate directly or indirectly criminal offence againsts a Government employee” while Column (3) as “May arrest without warrant” and Column (7) as “imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine”.

I hereby sign under Article 419 of the State Constitution.

Sd/ Min Aung Hlaing
Senior General
Chairman
State Administration Council

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
State Administration Council
Order No (64/2021)
3rd Waxing of Tabodwe 1382ME
14 February 2021
Appointment of Region/State Administration Councils Members

The Region/State Advocates General are appointed as additional members of Region/State Administration Councils in accordance with 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

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

We have adopted new plans for the vaccination programme to cover all the people

THE Ministry of Health and Sports and the military medical corps are working hard in offering public healthcare services. We are taking great care in building the country's strength and the health of people amid COVID-19 pandemic. Almost all the health workers at the front-line against the pandemic, volunteers and high-ranking officials above the directors of respective departments have received the first round of vaccination. The vaccination programme has reached the elderly persons of 65 years old and above in the townships included in the stay-at-home order. The programme will also be extended. Two million doses of Covishield injection against COVID-19 as a second batch will arrive in Myanmar from India today. We have adopted new plans for the vaccination programme to cover all the people.

(Excerpt from the speech to the Situation Report on the Country made by the Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on 12 February 2021)

Message for 75th Diamond Jubilee Anniversary of MRTV sent by State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing

FROM PAGE-1

Burma Broadcasting Service was transferred to Pyay road as “Myanma Athan”. It was then renamed as Myanma Athan under the Revolutionary Council Government and Burma Socialist Programme Party. The name was changed into the Information and Broadcasting Department in 1972, Myanma Television and Radio Department (MTRD) under the Tatmadaw Government in 1991 and Myanma Radio and Television (MRTV) in 1997, respectively.

During this special occasion of 75th anniversary of MRTV, the commemorative programmes for diamond jubilee were broadcast as the achievements of MRTV. On the 75th anniversary of MRTV, MRTV Radio arranged to broadcast a new “Myanmar Radio” FM Channel in the English language initially for Yangon, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw. It will also broadcast news section in English on MRTV TV channel.

During the State Administration Council takeover, MRTV has been conducting the programmes for the public with added momentum according to its aims and objectives. Similarly, the Information and Public Relations Department, the Printing and Publishing Department, the News and Periodicals Enterprise and MRTV have also successfully been serving the duties of public relations, information and media.

From the 75th Diamond Jubilee Anniversary, may MRTV be a fourth pillar that is reliable for the country and credible for the people.

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

Bawdikan bridge construction completed 84% in Taninthayi township

THE connecting bridge between Taninthayi Township and Bawdikan village tract has been under construction since 1 May 2018 and about 84 per cent of the bridge is completed to date, said U Win Aung, Assistant Director of Bridge Construction Group 4 of the Ministry of Construction.

The construction can be completed at the end of March, 2021, he added.

The Bawdikan Bridge is 787 feet long with 24 feet for vehicles, and 3 feet for sidewalk on each side. This R.C Concrete-made bridge will permit 75 tonnes of vehicle and cargo weights.

The Department of Con-



Picture shows the Bawdikan Bridge in Taninthayi Township, Taninthayi Region. **PHOTO: NAN THAYI (IPRD)**

struction has been construct- of K2,450 million and K1,150 ion Government and Tanin- ing this bridge with the budget million received from the Un- thayi region government fund

for the financial years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.

Before and during the construction of the bridge, the villagers have to rely on a single ferry owned by the township development authority to cross the river.

The bridge will make the villages in Bawdikan village-tract easily accessible as well as they can travel to Maw-taung town, the border town between Thai and Myanmar at any time, facilitating the the flow of goods and services for the people and definitely improve living standards of the residents.—Nan Thai, Htein Win/GNLM

Kayah State Administration Council
meets public, private bankers



Officials from Kayah State Administration Council meet with officials from Myanmar Economic Bank and private banks in Loikaw, Kayah State yesterday. **PHOTO: LOIKAW IPRD**

OFFICIALS from Kayah State Administration Council yesterday met officials from Myanmar Economic Bank and private banks at the meeting hall of Kayah State Administration Council in Loikaw, Kayah State.

First, Colonel Myint Wai, a member of the Kayah State Administration Council, spoke to the officials of the Myanmar Economic Bank in Kayah State that if there are any security problems in opening private banks, they will be assisted.

Afterwards, officials from Myanmar Economic Bank and Private Bank briefed on the current banking situation.

Next, Colonel Myint Wai, urged to the officials that necessary coordination should be made and security problems should be reported in advance.

Members of Kayah State Administration Council and Secretary; Officials of Myanmar Economic Bank and Private Bank and invited person joined the meeting. — Loikaw IPRD

Request to health workers

- 1. It is appreciated for the strenuous efforts of the medical doctors, nurses, medical experts and other health works 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

Request to Public

- 1. Democracy practices have granted the public freedom of speech, practices and living. Such freedoms should not harm others. Diverse views of others should be understood, but should not be disturbed or harassed. However, with the reason for human rights, some persons are now under pressure, harassed and threatened in breaching the laws. Undisciplined acts could lead to tarnishing the image of democracy.
- 2. For preventing destructive actions against the stability of the State, the safety of the public and the rule of law, it is also required to take 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's Announcement

Some unscrupulous persons are putting various forms of pressures and posing threats to civil service personnel in performing their duties at present. The civil service personnel who have encountered such pressures and threats shall contact the following phone numbers. Strong legal actions will also be taken against those who make such pressures and threats.

Contact phone numbers	-067 412 168 -067 412 222	-067 412 246 -067 412 387	-067 412 388 -067 412 444	-067 412 598 -067 412 066	-067 412 539 -067 412 540
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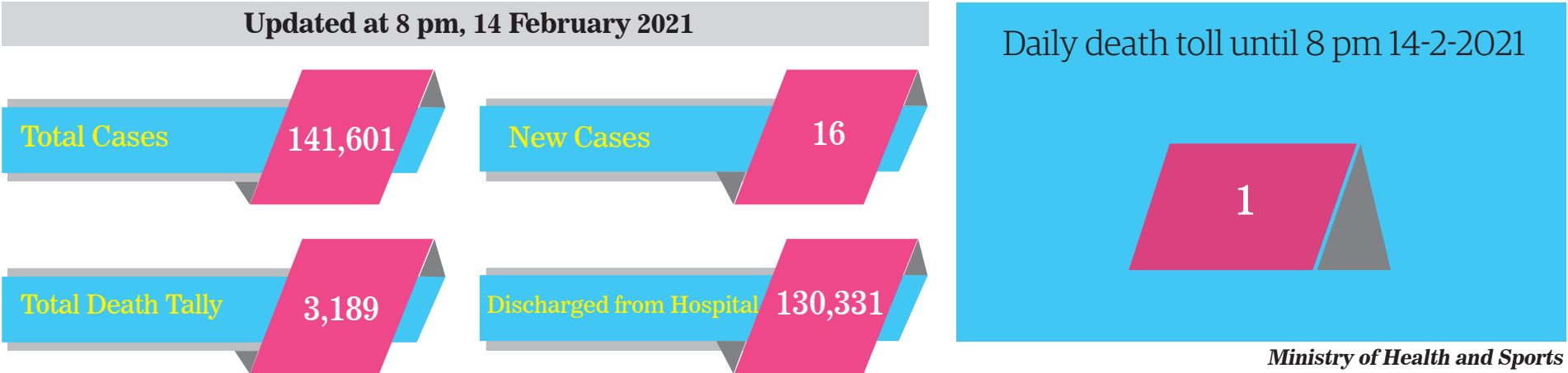
Mandalay Region Administration Council's Announcement to Public

Some unscrupulous persons are putting various forms of pressures and posing threats to civil service personnel in performing their duties at present. The civil service personnel who have encountered such pressures and threats shall contact the following phone numbers. Strong legal actions will also be taken against those who make such pressures and threats.

Contact phone numbers	-02 403 9635 -02 403 7199	-02 403 6869 -02 403 6978	-09 797 144 144 -09 694 740 311
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16 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 14 February, total figure rises to 141,601

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 141,601 after 16 new cases were reported on 14 February 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these confirmed cases, 3,189 died, 130,331 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA



YSX stock trading value drops by 50 per cent in Jan 2021

The value of shares traded on the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) in January 2021 plunged by half compared with January 2020, the YSX's monthly report indicated.

In January 2021, K640 million worth of 121,893 shares were traded on the exchange. The figures plummeted from K1.2 billion worth of 196,836 shares registered in January 2020.

At present, shares of six listed companies — First Myanmar Investment (FMI), Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings (MTSH), Myanmar Citizens Bank (MCB), First Private Bank (FPB), TMH Telecom Public Co. Ltd (TMH) and the EFR are being traded on the exchange.

The shares prices last month showed downtick compared to the prices registered in January last year. The price per share of FMI decreased from K11,500 in January 2020 to K9,700 in January 2021. Similarly, the share price of MTSH slid to K3,900 from K4,000 last year. MCB's stock

price also dipped to K8,200 from K8,400. The cost of FPB showed a small drop from K23,000 to K22,000, while TMH slightly fell to K2,700 from K2,850. The share price of EFR listed in May 2020 on the exchange stood at K3,600 in January 2021.

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, Myanmar's securities market has been able to continue operating without stopping trading.

In 2020, the value of stocks traded on the exchange peaked at K1.48 billion in February. In contrast, trading on the exchange registered an all-time low of K552.9 million in November due to the COVID-19 resurgences in Myanmar; the exchange's monthly report showed.

A total of K12.6 billion worth of 1.87 million shares by six listed companies were traded on the exchange in 2020, a significant drop compared to 2019, according to the annual report released by the exchange.

Over 2.4 million shares from five listed companies, valued at

K13.39 billion, were traded on the exchange in 2019.

In 2016, shares of only three companies were traded on the YSX — FMI, MTSH, and MCB. One more public company, FPB, was listed on the YSX in 2017. In 2018, TMH debuted on the exchange. EFR entered the exchange in 2020. This year, Amata Holding Public Co., Ltd. (AMATA) will be listed on Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) on 12 March 2021, and its share trading will be made on the same day, YSX notified on 29 January.

More than 2.5 million shares of three listed companies were traded on the YSX in 2016, and their values were estimated at K70 billion. In 2017, despite an increase in the stock trading volume to 2.6 million shares, the trade value was only K22 billion. In 2018, 2.3 million shares of five companies, worth K11.5 billion, were traded on the exchange, according to the annual report of the YSX. The stock markets worldwide have reported their



Amid the COVID-19 crisis, Myanmar's securities market has been able to continue operating without stopping trading. **PHOTO: GNLM/FILE**

largest declines since the 2008 financial crisis. Similarly, the local equities market is also scared by the COVID-19 crash, a market observer points out.

YSX held webinar sessions on 26 and 27 December to share the future benefit of stock investment for the investors, in coordination with securities companies (MSEC, KBZSC, CBSC, AYA Trust SC, KTzRH and uabsc).

Next, the Securities and Exchange Commission of Myanmar (SECM) has allowed foreigners to invest in the local equity market from 20 March 2020.

Furthermore, YSX launched pre-listing board (PLB) on 28 September 2020 to provide un-

listed public companies with fund-raising opportunities and build a bridge toward listing on YSX, the Yangon bourse stated.

The YSX was launched four years ago to improve the private business sector. It disseminates rules and regulations regarding the stock exchange and knowledge of share trading through stock investment seminars. The stock exchange has also sought the government's support to get more public companies to participate in the stock market and help more institutional investors, such as financing companies, investment banks, and insurance companies, to emerge. — KH/ GNLM

Imports of machinery, spare parts via Myawady border increase year over year

Myanmar's imports of machinery and spare parts through Myawady land border has increased year over year, the Ministry of Commerce stated.

SMEs constitute 90 per cent of businesses in Myanmar. Therefore, machinery and spare parts are increasingly imported into the country via Myawady border.

To effectuate Myanmar's industrial development, the trade department permits importing machinery and spare parts without import licence according to the notification order (68/2020) of the Ministry of Commerce. However, importers will be required to pay the set duties with Import Declaration ID to the Customs Department. The importers use Myawady border trade to import machinery and spare parts based on fair logistic cost and advantages of road transportation.

The import values of machinery and spare parts stood at US\$17.125 million in the financial year 2018-2019, \$21.731 million in the FY2019-2020, \$5.6 million in the October of current FY, the Ministry stated.

Additionally, the import value of machinery and spare parts via both sea trade and land borders are estimated at over \$1.2 billion during the past FY2019-2020 and \$121.76 million in the first two months (Oct-Nov) of the current financial year 2020-2021, the Ministry of Commerce's data indicated.

Similarly, the country imported \$899.89 million worth of vehicles and spare parts last year and \$163.4 million in Oct-Nov of current FY.

Imports of commercial vehicles and machinery have been permitted through seaports and three land borders — Muse, Myawady, and Tachilek.

"Starting from 1 January, imports of commercial vehicles on a company licence are not allowed. Importers are required to operate a car showroom in line with the prescribed rules and regulations. However, the new policy can pose difficulties for traders conducting business on a manageable scale," said importers.

To maintain the social distancing during the coronavirus

crisis, the Ministry of Commerce provided fully online licence system for the car showrooms for car imports. It will extend its online service to sales centres later, said the Ministry's statement issued on 2 November 2020.

According to the press release of the Commerce Ministry, under the 2021 vehicle import policy, 2019 will be the oldest model to be issued an import permit for private cars with non-commercial purpose.

Except for machinery, all import vehicles must be left-hand drive under the 2021 vehicle import policy.

When vehicles with engines under 1,350 CC are individually imported, the model year must be 2019 and later. Passengers vehicles such as mini-bus, city bus, express bus and commercial trucks manufactured in 2017 and later can be imported.

Under a free-of-charge (FOC) licence system, fire trucks, ambulances and hearse vehicles manufactured in 2012 or later are imported.

Heavy equipment, as they

cannot be driven on public roads, such as excavators, bulldozers, wheel loaders, vibratory roller, clamp loader, motor grader, road roller compactor, bridge crane, gantry crane, tower crane, pilling machine, crawler drill/crane, mobile crane, rough-terrain crane, forklift, boom lift and asphalt finisher are allowed to be brought into the country as long as they are 15 years old or less.

Myanmar cuts tariff on import of private cars and Semi-Knocked Down vehicles amid the COVID-19 impacts. This move is likely to bring down the prices of vehicles with engines above 1,500 CC. The dealers pointed out that the price could drop by K2 to 15 million depending on vehicle brand and specifications.

In a bid to remedy the businesses slowdown caused by the COVID-19 impacts, the government has brought tax cuts on the importation of private cars with non-commercial purpose and SKD vehicles assembled in Myanmar starting from 1 August 2020, according to notification of the Ministry of Planning, Finance

and Industry released on 29 July 2020.

The government lowered custom duty from 30 to 20 per cent on imported private cars with the engine under 2,000 CC and 40 to 30 per cent on cars with 2,001 CC and above. Meanwhile, the locally assembled vehicles under the SKD system were totally exempted from 10 per cent tax. Additionally, tariffs on SKD vehicles with 2001 CC and above were reduced from 20 to 5 per cent.

Additionally, starting from 7 August 2020, registration fees at the Road Transport Administration Department (RTAD) on FOB price of the private vehicles were reduced from 30 to 15 per cent for vehicles with 1,500 CC and above, 50 to 25 per cent for vehicles with 1,351-2,000 CC, 80 to 40 per cent for cars with 2,001-5,000 CC and 120 to 60 per cent for cars with 5,001 CC, and above respectively, the RTAD stated. However, tax cuts still do not cover special goods tax, commercial tax and income tax to hold the vehicle ownership status.—KH/ GNLM

EU to fast-track jabs against virus variants

THE EUROPEAN UNION has agreed to fast-track approvals of vaccines updated to target coronavirus variants, the bloc's health commissioner said Sunday, following criticism of the EU's sluggish vaccine drive.

"We looked at the process together with the European Medicines Agency (EMA)," Stella Kyriakides told German daily Augsburger Allgemeine in an interview.

"And we have now decided that a vaccine, which has been improved by a manufacturer based on its previous vaccine to combat new mutations, no longer has to go through the entire approvals process.

"So it will be faster to have suitable vaccines available without cutting corners on safety," she said.

The EU's vaccine rollout has been snagged by delays and controversies, leaving it lagging behind countries like the United States, Britain and Israel where



The European Union has agreed to fast-track approvals of vaccines updated to target coronavirus variants, the bloc's health commissioner said Sunday, following criticism of the EU's sluggish vaccine drive. **PHOTO: AFP**

a larger share of the population has been injected so far.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen last week admitted that mistakes had been made in procuring vaccines on behalf of all 27 member states.

She told the European Parliament that the bloc had been late to authorise jabs, and had underestimated the difficulties of vaccine mass production.

She also warned that scientists do not yet know if the vaccines approved so far -- those by BioNTech/Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca/Oxford -- will remain effective against new mutations.

"But we do know these variants will continue to emerge. And we do know that we need to anticipate and prepare immediately," she said. — AFP

Israel, Cyprus agree travel deal for vaccinated citizens



Israeli medical worker fills an international certificate of vaccination for coronavirus at the Sheba Medical Center in Ramat Gan near the coastal city of Tel Aviv on Dec. 19, 2020. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

ISRAEL AND CYPRUS have agreed in principle a deal allowing coronavirus-vaccinated citizens of the two countries to travel between them without limitations, once flights resume, Israel's president said Sunday.

Israel reached a similar agreement with Greece last week, as the Mediterranean nations seek to revive tourism industries battered by the pandemic.

"Let me say how pleased I am with the recent understandings that will allow the renewal of flights between Israel and Cyprus and call on more countries to adopt the 'green pass,'" Israel's President Reuven Rivlin said in a statement after meeting his Cypriot counterpart Nicos Anastasiades.

Rivlin's spokesman Jonathan Cummings confirmed to AFP that the 'green pass'

referred to an arrangement whereby vaccinated people from both countries would be permitted reciprocal travel with few restrictions.

Anastasiades, who is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu later Sunday, was quoted in the Israeli statement as saying that Cyprus and the Jewish state had "an ambitious plan of action for cooperation between our countries."

Israel's aggressive vaccination campaign has seen 3.8 million receive the first of two required doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, while 2.4 million have received the second shot.

The country of nine million people, currently easing restrictions after ending its third nationwide lockdown this month, is aiming to vaccinate everyone over the age of 16 by the end of March.

Israel has recorded 723,038 coronavirus cases, including 5,368 deaths. The country's airport remains closed to all non-emergency travel. — AFP

UK eyes next phase in vaccine rollout as 15 mln get jabs

BRITAIN was preparing Sunday to move to the next phase of its coronavirus vaccination programme, as it neared a target of inoculating 15 million of the most vulnerable people.

The country will start administering vaccines from Monday to those aged between 65 and 69 and the clinically vulnerable to Covid-19, with almost 1.2 million already invited to book their jabs, the state-run National Health Service (NHS) said.

The step comes after the government was set to meet its aim to have offered vaccinations to the top four priority groups of around 15 million people by the end of this week.

That comprises all over-70s, care home residents and staff, NHS workers and the extremely clinically vulnerable to the virus.

The government said Saturday more than 14.5 million

had received a first dose.

And Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said it was "on track" to meet the "important milestone" and officials could now focus on vaccinating all over-50s by May and all adults by September.

"(It is) the first milestone towards the wider plan to get 99 percent of those at risk of dying (from Covid-19) vaccinated with a first dose by the end of April, and then everyone in the country... by the autumn," he told Sky News.

Britain, which has been the hardest hit in Europe by the pandemic, registering nearly 117,000 deaths within 28 days of a positive Covid-19 test, began its biggest ever vaccination campaign in early December.

It now has one of the highest proportions of people vaccinated against the virus in the world. — AFP



Britain is set to meet its aim to have offered vaccinations to the top four priority groups of around 15 million people by the end of this week. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

NEWS IN BRIEF

Schools in England could reopen by 8 March, says foreign secretary

Dominic Raab told interviewers the government plans to reopen schools for all pupils from 8 March, after more than 60 Tory MPs wrote to the Prime Minister demanding lockdown restrictions be eased. The so-called Covid Recovery Group said their demands were based on the vaccine rollout and called for a complete end to domestic controls. The lockdown-sceptics added that a lockdown could no longer be justified once all over-50s were vaccinated. Boris Johnson is expected to unveil a plan for coming out of lockdown on 22 February. — AFP

N.Z. gov't orders Auckland lockdown after community coronavirus cases

The New Zealand government imposed a lockdown for three days in the country's largest city Auckland from midnight Sunday after the discovery of coronavirus infections in a family.

Under the first lockdown in the country since August, people are required to work from home unless they are unable to do so and public venues such as libraries, museums, gyms and pools must remain closed.

The infections were found in three members of a household -- a father, mother and their daughter who goes to high school. The mother reportedly works for an airline catering provider, but it is unclear how they got infected. — Kyodo

Japan approves first vaccine with Olympics in sight

JAPAN on Sunday approved its first coronavirus vaccine, clearing the way for mass inoculations as the nation prepares to host the postponed 2020 Olympics.

“The health minister today gave a special approval to the Pfizer vaccine,” the prime minister’s office said in a tweet.

Japan is now expected to put the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine in the arms of 10,000 to 20,000

medical workers from as early as Wednesday, before making it and other coronavirus vaccines available for more medical workers and the elderly from April.

The government is yet to outline the exact rollout schedule for the rest of its population of 126 million people.

Olympics officials have insisted that the Tokyo Games will take place even though Covid-19

continues to affect the entire world.

Athletes and other participants will be encouraged, but not obliged, to be vaccinated to take part. Japan is now trying to secure enough special syringes that can extract the full six doses from each vial of the Pfizer vaccine.

More commonly used syringes can only draw five doses.—AFP ■



Japan is expected to put the Pfizer vaccine in the arms of thousands of medical workers. PHOTO: THOMAS KIENZLE/ AFP/FILE

China’s online health services expand amid COVID-19

CHINA’S online health services industry expanded further in 2020, with wider user groups and increasing service providers as the COVID-19 epidemic reshaped the country’s healthcare sector, said a report on the country’s internet development.

By December 2020, online health service users in China totaled 215 million, accounting for 21.7 per cent of the internet-using population, according to the report issued by the China Internet Network Information Centre.

It said that by the end of October 2020, China had over 900 online hospitals, more than 5,500 major hospitals in China offered online services, and a remote medical coordination network covered all prefecture-level cities.

The report also noted that online and offline health services in China, as well as insurance services, had been boosted in a more coordinated way with greater participation from major internet companies in the sector.—Xinhua ■

Lebanon kicks off vaccinations against Covid



Head of the intensive care unit at Lebanon’s Rafik Hariri Hospital battling the coronavirus, Mahmoud Hassoun, receives the first coronavirus jab as the Mediterranean country kicks off its inoculation drive on Valentine’s Day. PHOTO: ANWAR AMRO/ AFP

LEBANON Sunday gave its first Covid-19 vaccines dose to a doctor and an elderly actor, as it started an inoculation drive it hopes will keep the pandemic in check amid deepening economic crisis.

Mahmoud Hassoun, the

head of the intensive care unit at the key Rafik Hariri Hospital battling coronavirus, was the first person to get the jab, an AFP correspondent said.

“Hopefully this will be the start of the end of this plague in

the country,” Hassoun told AFP.

He received a Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, a day after the very first 28,500 doses landed at Beirut’s airport. Healthcare workers and those over 75 years are the first to be vaccinated under the national rollout plan.

Popular Lebanese comedian Salah Tizani, 93, who is best known by his stage name Abu Salim, was second to roll up his shirt in front of the cameras.

“I’m telling everyone to come and get vaccinated and not be scared. Better to get vaccinated than to be knocked down by this deadly virus,” he told AFP.

Caretaker premier Hassan Diab visited the Rafik Hariri Hospital in Beirut and praised the hard work of healthcare workers, but said he would wait his turn

to be vaccinated. “Today is not my turn,” said the 61-year-old premier. “The priority is for the health sector, which has... made great sacrifices,” he said.

Healthcare workers at three Beirut hospitals in total were to receive their first shot on Sunday. From Monday, another 18 hospitals across the country are to join in the vaccination campaign, health ministry adviser Mohamad Haidar has said.

The World Bank has allocated \$34 million to inoculate two million of Lebanon’s six million inhabitants. Lebanon has been under a lockdown since mid-January, after an unprecedented spike in cases blamed on holiday gatherings that forced overwhelmed hospitals to turn away patients for lack of beds.—AFP ■

Sri Lanka import ban takes the spice out of life

AN import ban in cash-strapped Sri Lanka is leaving a bad taste in the mouths of its curry lovers, depriving them of vital turmeric supplies and encouraging

budding smugglers to take their chances with the spice. With no foreign cash coming in as Covid-19 cripples the tourism industry, the government in March im-

posed a ban on many imports to stop money leaving the country, so that it can pay \$4.5 billion this year to service its international debt. Cars, floor tiles and machin-

ery parts are among the items prohibited but it is a ban on turmeric that has the Indian Ocean island simmering with anger.

The aromatic root is a vital ingredient in curries and other local cuisine and also increasingly sought after as a health supplement. But only a fifth of the 7,500 tonnes Sri Lanka consumes every year is produced locally.

Since the pandemic, demand has increased so much that prices have shot up 20-fold to an eye-watering 9,000 rupees (\$48) a kilogramme – a week’s wages for many Sri Lankan workers.

“Our home-cooked curries are not the same since the pandemic,” said health worker Prarthana Weerasinghe, who claimed that many market varieties were now “adulterated”.

“We never thought turmeric would be such a big issue. We had taken it for granted. Now, we can’t afford to use it in our daily cooking.”—AFP ■



Customs agents recently found 25 tonnes of turmeric smuggled into Sri Lanka from India, while navy patrols have seized several tonnes from Indian fishermen. PHOTO: AFP

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Trump acquitted by US Senate

DONALD TRUMP survived a second impeachment trial Saturday when the US Senate acquitted him on the charge of incitement of insurrection, ending Democratic efforts to hold the former president accountable over the deadly US Capitol riot.

The five day trial, in which Democratic impeachment managers argued that Trump betrayed his oath of office by urging his supporters to storm Congress in a bid to block certification of the November election, concluded with an insufficient 57-43 majority of senators voting to convict.

It was the most bipartisan impeachment trial vote ever, with seven Republicans breaking ranks to join all 50 Democrats in seeking conviction — a dark and permanent stain on a former president who may yet seek to run for office again.

But two-thirds of the chamber, or 67 senators, is necessary to convict, and the Senate ultimately was not willing to punish the former president.

In Trump's historic second impeachment trial, the senators for the first time ever were not only jurors, but witnesses to the assault at the heart of the charge against Trump.



US Senate voted on Saturday and acquitted former President Donald Trump, concluding his second impeachment trial which is the shortest one in the US history. **PHOTO: AFP**

Democrats argued that Trump's behaviour was an "open and shut" example of an impeachable offense, saying that as president he repeated the falsehood that the election was stolen, then whipped up supporters to attack Congress and stop the certification of the vote.

"He summoned his supporters to Washington, on the Ellipse, whipped them into a frenzy, and directed them at the Capitol," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said after the vote.

The defense team swatted such evidence away, insisting the Senate had no constitutional

jurisdiction to try a former president. Most Republican senators agreed.

Trump, who has been sequestered in his Florida club since leaving office on January 20, issued a statement in which he expressed thanks for the verdict, and called the proceedings "yet another phase of the greatest witch hunt in the history of our country."

The 74-year old Republican also hinted at a possible political future, and at "continuing our incredible journey together to achieve American greatness for all of our people." —AFP ■

Kosovo election pits new generation against an old guard

KOSOVARs went to the polls Sunday in an early election that could see a new generation of politicians take the lead after tapping into widespread frustration and fatigue with the political establishment.

The general election comes after a year in which the coronavirus pandemic has deepened social and economic crises in the former Serbian province, which declared independence 13 years ago.

Already one of Europe's poorest economies, Kosovo is now struggling through a pandemic-triggered downturn, with vaccination yet to start for the population of 1.8 million.

Vetevendosje (Self-determination) — an anti-establishment protest movement turned political party — looks set to benefit from a growing hunger for change.

Polls place it in a comfortable first place, though potentially short of an absolute majority.

The party has been campaigning on an anti-corruption platform, accusing traditional

elites of squandering Kosovo's first years of independence with graft and mismanagement.

For most of the past decade, Kosovo has been run by the former rebel commanders who led the 1990s rebellion of ethnic Albanian guerillas against Serb forces.

But their camp is now missing its top leaders after a court in The Hague detained ex-president Hashim Thaci and others in November on charges of war crimes dating back to the conflict. Analysts say this has helped open a path for Vetevendosje, whose calls for change may even win over some who do not align with the movement's radical past, including sometimes violent protests, anti-West rhetoric and incidents in which MPs unleashed tear gas in parliament.

"For many, Vetevendosje is being seen as the last resort which will either make or break the country," Donika Emini, executive director of CiviKos Platform, a umbrella group for NGOs, told AFP. —AFP ■

Taliban warn NATO against continuation of war

THE Taliban on Saturday warned NATO against seeking a 'continuation of war', as the alliance weighs a planned withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Defence ministers from

the Washington-backed allies are to meet next week to discuss whether NATO's 10,000-strong mission — mostly carrying out support roles — should stay or go, as Taliban

violence rages. 'Our message to the upcoming NATO ministerial meeting is that the continuation of occupation and war is neither in your interest nor in the interest of your and our people,' the Taliban said in a statement.

'Anyone seeking extension of wars and occupation will be held liable for it just like the previous two decades.'

Former US president Donald Trump struck a deal with the Taliban last year under which the United States agreed foreign troops would leave Afghanistan by May 2021 in return for conditions including cutting ties with al-Qaeda and opening peace talks with the Kabul government.

Joe Biden's administration has said it would review the deal, with the Pentagon accusing the Afghan insurgent group of not meeting their commitment to reduce violence. —AFP ■



The Taliban on Saturday warned NATO against seeking a 'continuation of war', as the alliance weighs a planned withdrawal from Afghanistan. **PHOTO: AFP**

Aegean Sea a lawless space for migrants as abuses soar: NGO

THERE was an 'unprecedented escalation' of human rights violations against migrants in the Aegean Sea last year, a campaign group said Friday, accusing Greece and the EU's border patrol agency Frontex of being behind a soaring number of illegal returns to Turkey.

Berlin-based Mare Liberum said it had documented 321 incidents from March to December 2020 in which over 9,000 people 'were violently pushed back to Turkey and thus deprived of their right to asylum'.

'Illegal pushbacks at Europe's external borders are not an unfamiliar phenomenon, but they have reached an entirely new dimension,' the rights group said in a new report, describing the Aegean as a 'lawless space' for migrants. The report said that 'besides the Greek Coast Guard as the main actor, the European border agency Frontex and ships under NATO command are also involved in these systematic and illegal expulsions'.

The report was compiled in part by reconstructing pushbacks from the testimonies of witnesses who were themselves returned.

Frontex is taking on a greater frontline role in patrolling the EU's borders despite being under investigation by OLAF, the EU's independent corruption watchdog, over allegations of illegal pushbacks of migrants arriving in Greek waters from Turkey. 'These pushbacks are not isolated or extreme instances of European deterrence, but rather the current and everyday 'modus operandi' at the EU's external border,' said Mare Liberum's Paul Hanewinkel, one of the authors of the report.

Mare Liberum called for 'independent control instances, the clarification of all previous cases and the abolition of Frontex'.

Since its election in 2019, Greece's conservative government has strongly prioritized 'security' at its borders, adopting a strict migration policy. —AFP ■

Germany partially closes borders despite EU criticism

GERMANY partially closed its borders with the Czech Republic and Austria's Tyrol on Sunday over a troubling surge in coronavirus mutations, drawing a swift rebuke from the European Union.

A thousand police officers have been mobilized to ensure strict border checks, which recall the much-criticized early days of the pandemic when EU countries hastily closed their frontiers to each other.

At the Kiefersfelden crossing in southern Bavaria, officers in yellow high-visibility vests and wearing balaclavas to stave off the chill in -15 degrees Celsius (5 degrees Fahrenheit), meticulously stopped each vehicle coming from Austria.

Under the new rules, in place until February 17, only Germans or non-German residents are allowed to enter, and they must provide a recent negative coronavirus test.

Some exceptions are al-



A thousand German police officers have been mobilized to ensure strict border checks, which recall the much-criticized early days of the pandemic when EU countries hastily closed their frontiers to each other. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

lowed for essential workers in sectors such as health and transport, as well as for urgent humanitarian reasons, the interior ministry has said.

German rail company Deutsche Bahn has suspended services to and from the affected areas. At Frankfurt airport, the country's largest, federal police

were on Sunday checking passengers arriving from Vienna and Prague. The restrictions are aimed at slowing the spread of new, more contagious variants

that first emerged in Britain and South Africa, and have created new virus hotspots along the Czech border and in Austria's Tyrol region.

'Enough'

The European Commission, eager to avoid a return to go-it-alone pandemic responses, has condemned Germany's newest restrictions and urged it to facilitate cross-border movement for commuters.

"The fear of the coronavirus mutations is understandable," EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides told Germany's Augsburg Allgemeine newspaper on Sunday.

"But the truth is that the virus cannot be stopped by closed borders," she said, adding that vaccines and following hygiene precautions were "the only things that work".

"I think it's wrong to return to a Europe with closed borders like we had in March 2020," she added. —AFP ■

First bodies recovered from Indian flood disaster tunnel

RESCUERS on Sunday pulled the first bodies from a blocked tunnel at a power complex in a northern Indian valley devastated by a flash flood a week ago, where 161 people remain missing.

Scores were killed in Uttarakhand state when the deluge -- thought to have been triggered by a chunk of glacier sliding down a mountainside or a glacial lake breaching its banks -- swept down the Rishiganga valley in minutes, destroying roads, bridges and buildings. Amid warnings that river levels could rise again, the corpses of three victims were retrieved from the tunnel, where at least 30 people are thought to have been trapped by mud and rocks.

Initially there were hopes



Forty three bodies have now been recovered after a flash flood devastated an Indian valley a week ago, but over a hundred remain missing. **PHOTO: AFP**

that those inside might still be alive in air pockets. Two more bodies were found in a devastated village nearby, police said, bringing the total recovered over the past week to 43.

One of those identified was that of Alam Singh, a father of two. His family received a call from rescue officials early Sunday telling them that his body had finally been found. —AFP ■

Fire 'catastrophe' destroys 100 fuel tankers on Afghanistan-Iran border

AT least 100 oil and gas tankers have been destroyed by fire in a "catastrophe" at Afghanistan's biggest trade crossing with Iran, causing millions of dollars of losses, officials said Sunday.

The huge blaze, which broke out Saturday afternoon at Islam Qala port 120 kilometres (75 miles) from the western city of Herat, has been contained and an investigation launched into its cause.

"We were told that 100 or 200 tankers have been destroyed, but this number could be higher," Jailani Farhad, spokesman for the governor of Herat province, said after visiting the scene.

During the blaze looters descended on the site, stealing

goods that were being imported and exported across the border, Younus Qazi Zada, the head of the Herat Chamber of Commerce said.

"The catastrophe was much bigger than imagined," he said, adding: "Unfortunately, irresponsible people have looted a large number of goods."

Qazi Zada said initial estimates were of "millions of dollars of losses".

Farhad added that investigators needed more time to examine the extent of damage.

Videos posted on social media on Saturday night showed the towering fire and huge clouds of thick black smoke billowing into the sky. —AFP ■



The huge blaze at Islam Qala port has largely been extinguished and an investigation launched into its cause. **PHOTO: AFP**

Snow joke: Scotland's named gritter trucks warm hearts

TEMPERATURES fell to a record minus 23 degrees Celsius (minus 9.4 Fahrenheit) in the Scottish Highlands this week, as Britain shivered in the snow and ice of a harsh Arctic cold snap.

But one thing distracting people from the big freeze -- and the coronavirus lockdown -- has been Scotland's 230-strong army of gritter lorries and snowploughs battling to keep main roads clear.

Traffic Scotland has seen a surge in clicks to

its "Trunk Road Gritter Tracker" website, which allows users to follow their progress.

On Friday, "Gritney Spears" and "Spready Mercury" were making their way down the road towards the English border. "Sir Andy Flurry" was plying a route from the city of Perth to Dunblane -- home of the British tennis star surnamed Murray -- while over the hills and far away, "Sled Zeppelin" was making the roads safe around Loch Lomond. —AFP ■

Algeria's once ambitious auto industry hits a wall



An employee of French carmaker Renault group takes a picture of a car on an assembly line during the inauguration of a new production plant, in Oued Tlalat, Oran, southern Algeria, Nov. 10, 2014. **PHOTO: AFP**

SHUTTERED assembly plants, jailed bosses, laid-off workers. Algeria's once ambitious plans to create a flagship auto industry have turned into a fiasco.

The country's recent years of political turmoil have also seen its foreign joint venture factories close and cronies of

its ousted president Abdelaziz Bouteflika end up behind bars.

Algeria's dream of creating thousands of jobs has collapsed and the country is in dire need of new vehicles.

The government is putting on a brave face.

Industry Minister Ferhat-Ait Ali pledged last month

that it is "preparing the revival of this industry on solid foundations, which break with the practices of the past".

Algeria's auto industry was born in 2012 when French maker Renault partnered with the government in Algiers to build the first plant two years later near Oran, the country's second biggest city.

Other companies followed suit.

South Korea's Hyundai opened its assembly plant in 2016 in Tiaret, and Germany's Volkswagen started operations the next year in Relizane.

The sector became a priority as the North African country sought to reduce imports, compete in the sector with regional rival Morocco, and diversify its economy in the face of falling oil revenues, which had been the source of over 90 per cent of its export earnings. —AFP ■

US high court justice allows extradition to Japan of Ghosn allies

REJECTING AN emergency appeal, US Supreme Court justice Stephen Breyer has cleared the way for the extradition to Japan of two Americans accused of helping former Renault-Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn flee the Asian nation.

Breyer's order, which followed similar rulings by lower courts, was issued without comment. The appeal went to Breyer as the justice overseeing the northeast region where the Americans, Michael Taylor and son Peter Taylor, live.

The Taylors were arrested in May 2020 after Japan issued a warrant accusing them of helping Ghosn flee Tokyo for Lebanon on December 29, 2019 — reportedly secreted in a large box in a private jet — as he faced financial charges in Japan.

Japan has also named a Lebanese national, George-Antoine Zayek, as an accomplice

in the daring escape by onetime automobile titan Ghosn, who holds Brazilian, French and Lebanese citizenship.

Breyer's decision effectively reaffirmed a ruling Thursday by a three-judge panel of the First US Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston.

A US federal judge in late January had given the original go-ahead to extradite the father and son to Japan.

The courts have uniformly rejected the contention by the Taylors' lawyers that the two men would face torture-like conditions in Japanese prison sufficient to merit breaching the extradition treaty between Tokyo and Washington.

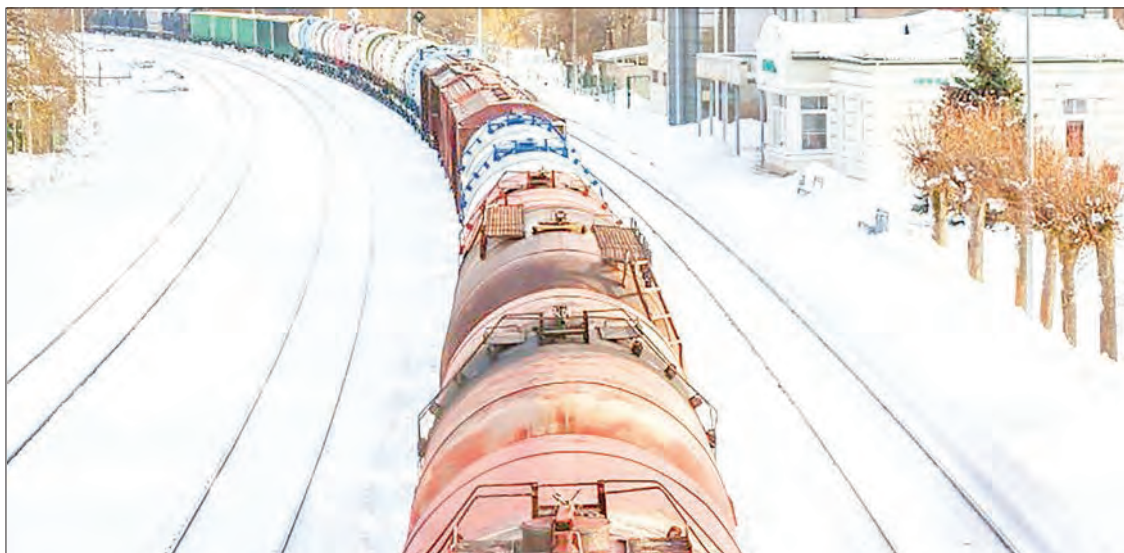
Federal Judge Indira Talwani pointed out, moreover, that their alleged actions would be considered a crime in the United States, as well as in Japan. —AFP ■

NEWS

IN

BRIEF

Fight against smugglers rages on EU border with Belarus



Smugglers are getting increasingly inventive in their efforts to get the contraband into the EU. **PHOTO: AFP**

ON the EU's frozen frontier with Belarus, Latvian border guards are fighting a growing flow of contraband cigarettes reportedly benefitting organized crime and a close ally of authoritarian Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

More than 200 trucks a day cross into European Union member Latvia at the Paternieki border point, some of them stuffed with smuggled cigarettes hidden among other cargo.

"We confiscated 21 million illegal cigarettes from Belarus

last year in this border sector alone, which is double the amount for 2019," Taivo Hanzens, deputy head of customs at Paternieki, told AFP at the crossing.

"And the contraband is still on the rise," he added.

Hanzens said that border guards often find cigarettes hidden among bricks and roof tiles, or foodstuffs like pasta, as he showed off piles of seized cigarettes.

To deal with the problem, the checkpoint is expanding and hiring more border guards, Customs

officers and veterinary officials to double its inspection capacity. **State involvement?**

Despite the close screening and inspections, cigarettes are priced so low in Belarus and taxed so high in the European Union that contraband remains lucrative, even with millions of them being confiscated every month.

EU border guards seized a total of 370 million illegal cigarettes in 2020, according to the European anti-fraud agency OLAF. —AFP ■

Beijing Hyundai to recall 425,201 vehicles

BEIJING Hyundai Motor Co. will recall 425,201 vehicles from the Chinese market, according to China's top quality watchdog. The recall, set to begin on March 16, will involve Tucson models manufactured between May 12, 2015 and Dec. 14, 2018, according to a statement by the State Administration for Market Regulation.

A short circuit could occur in the faulty hydraulic electronic control unit of the vehicles in question, which may lead to fires under extreme circumstances, the statement added.

The company will replace the fuses of the affected vehicles and upgrade related software. — Xinhua ■

S&P lowers ratings for US oil giants

S&P lowered the credit rating for US oil giants ExxonMobil, Chevron and ConocoPhillips on Friday, citing higher risk to the industry due to oil price volatility and climate mitigation policies.

The ratings agency cut the debt grade for the companies by one notch to 'AA-' for ExxonMobil and Chevron, and to 'A-' for ConocoPhillips, following a sector-wide review last month that showed a somewhat worse risk profile the whole industry.

In similar reports on Friday, S&P said that the downgrades were warranted despite 'significantly' better market for energy producers in 2021 'and beyond' compared with 2020.

S&P said that climate change posed a risk for the industry because of the possible loss of market share to renewable energy.

"In our opinion, stricter regulations, substitution and secular shifts in industry supply/demand fundamentals will contribute to a more difficult operating environment for fossil fuel producers and will likely augment the risk of stranded assets and significant asset write-downs," S&P said in its report on Chevron.

The S&P analysis suggests the upside for oil giants once the world recovers from COVID-19 may not be as high as from some past recoveries. —AFP ■

City of London pays early price of hard Brexit

EUROPE'S financial capital is feeling the cold of Brexit but UK officials insist the City of London is suffering a temporary blip and is well-positioned to profit from new trading horizons.

For the first time last month, as Britain's withdrawal from the EU took full effect, London's financial district lost its European share trading crown to Amsterdam.

Researchers at IHS Markit attributed the decline to a "relatively hard Brexit", and the UK government's failure so far to persuade Brussels to grant full trading rights to City-based firms under a regime known as "equivalence". London's daily trading volumes in other areas such as derivatives and foreign exchange still vastly outweigh its European neighbours, and Catherine McGuinness, policy chair at the City



For the first time last month, London's financial district lost its share trading crown to Amsterdam. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

of London Corporation, played down the development.

"We've always known that some EU-facing business would have to leave the City of London following Brexit, whatever the shape of the deal," she told AFP.

"However, significantly fewer jobs have shifted from the City because of

Brexit than was expected, and we remain very confident about the fundamental strengths of the City for the future," McGuinness said. London "continues to go from strength to strength" in emerging financial technology (fintech) and tech investment, as well as green finance, she added.

In January, according

to the Financial Times, an average of 9.2 billion euros (\$11.2 billion/£8.1 billion) of shares were traded each day on Euronext Amsterdam together with two other Dutch share markets.

That was more than four times their December figure, and overtook London's daily average of 8.6 billion euros, the newspaper said.—AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Global gold-backed ETF holdings up in January: WGC

NET inflows to global gold-backed exchange-traded funds (ETFs) amounted to 13.8 tonnes in January, data from the World Gold Council (WGC) showed.

The figure brought total global holdings of gold ETFs to 3,765 tonnes (equivalent to around 226 billion U.S. dollars) by the end of last month, according to the WGC.

Holdings of gold ETFs listed in Europe saw an increase of 17.5 tonnes in January, while those listed in North America decreased by 6.3 tonnes.—AFP ■

Renewable energy to become important heating source in rural China

CHINA will promote the use of renewable energy as one of the important sources of heating in the country's rural areas during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), the National Energy Administration (NEA) said.

The administration has issued a circular to improve energy structure and utilize renewable energy for heating, calling on all localities to take measures in accordance with local conditions.

To that end, local governments should set specific targets based on local conditions and energy demand, while supporting the building of a heating system combining renewable energy with other heating methods, the NEA said.—Xinhua ■

Even with Biden stimulus, US minority entrepreneurs fear for survival



Reign Free, founder and CEO of The Red Door Group catering company, photographed at her office in Oakland, California on February 12, 2021. PHOTO: AFP

FOR the past 11 months, Reign Free has done everything she can think of to keep her catering company open after the pandemic hit -- a fight shared by many Black-owned businesses across the United States.

As her business dried up, Free has taken out loans from the US government and other lenders and searched for new opportunities, but she wonders how much longer Red Door Catering in Oakland, California can survive the slump.

"We're getting crumbs and it's not enough. We're still having hope, and still trying to stay afloat, but really we're getting deeper and deeper into the hole," she told AFP.

Racial minorities have borne the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States, with higher

rates of death, unemployment and business failure, and less success obtaining federal government assistance intended to provide relief.

President Joe Biden has argued his proposed \$1.9 trillion spending package will both pay for an aggressive vaccine campaign to end the virus that has strangled business, while also addressing the longstanding racial inequities that have worsened during the pandemic.

"It is a great effort," Cathy Adams, president and CEO of the Oakland African American Chamber of Commerce, said of Biden's plan.

The chamber's members have managed to avoid closure, but only with considerable struggle, and Adams fears for their future. "This right here has hit us so hard," she said.—AFP ■

Germany's 'mini-jobbers' hit hard by pandemic fallout

SINCE losing her job as a school bus driver in November, German mum-of-two Viola Auer has had to rely on the generosity of neighbours and a small disability allowance to get by during the pandemic. "Who cares about us, Germany's working poor?" she asked. Auer, 47, is one of many Germans in so-called mini-jobs -- part-time, easily terminated contracts that allow workers to earn a maximum of 450



Many workers in Germany's service sector like waiters and supermarket cashiers are so-called 'mini-jobbers'. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

euros (\$545) a month. Though flexible and tax-free, these jobs are also extremely precarious and

not covered by Germany's vaunted furlough scheme. As Europe's top economy feels the strain from

months of coronavirus restrictions, these workers have been declared the "biggest losers of the crisis" by the German Institute for Economic Research. When she lost her job, Auer received no severance pay. "I'm keeping my head high and trying to keep going," she said.

Auer is now applying for welfare benefits and looking for another part-time job in her home town of Singen, southwestern Germany.—AFP ■

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V VAST OCEAN 1

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V VAST OCEAN 1 VOY. NO. (2101)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **15-2-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **MITT** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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Yay Pyan Gyi waterfall located near Dutthawady River Bridge has become famous recently.

Yay Pyan Gyi waterfall in Nawngkhkio

By Thiha Lu Lin
(Thina, the Traveller)
Translated by Ei Phyu Phyu Aung

PHOTOS: THIHA LU LIN,
KAUNGTHET LIN

THE popular Yay Pyan Gyi waterfall, located in Nawngkhkio Township, is a uniquely beautiful waterfall that flows directly into Duttawady River. The famous waterfalls among the waterfall lovers and tourists are mostly in Nawngkhkio Township, northern Shan State.

After crossing the river Duttawady river bridge and walking down towards Hsi-paw along the river, you can see the Yay Pyan Gyi waterfall with its surrounding area that is great to relax and unwind.

Usually waterfall flows into one end of a river. Still, it is rare for a waterfall to fall straight into a river like this one. For locals and tourists, enjoying the spectacular waterfall and relaxing in the Duttawady river will give a taste of life.

How to get to the waterfall?

From Nawngkhkio, we need to cross the dangerous 14-turn road to reach Duttawady bridge (Nawngkhkio). There

is a security checkpoint before the bridge, and there was a small parking lot behind the bridge, but we parked in the restaurants before reaching the more convenient security camp. From there, we need to cross the river bridge and walk down to the lower left of the bridge. It is known that you can go by boat, but you need to book a boat in advance. The boat fare is 35,000 kyats. The problem is that it would be challenging to order a boat since there is no telephone line.

Forest road to the Yay Pyan Gyi waterfall

Although it is not very tiring to walk through a forest, it needs to be careful. You will step on huge stones and sand on the seashore, giving you the feeling of being on the beach. Although it is walking along the river, sometimes, you have to go close to the river and sometimes go into the forest. As there were not yet many people visiting the waterfall, the way to it was

not that clear. It takes about 40 minutes to walk, but there is not much boredom along the way as the beauty of river flow, mountains and forests will make you amaze and attract you to take photos along the way.

When I see the Yay Pyan Gyi waterfall, I think it has only few amounts of water and is not pretty enough. But, I found its height and picturesque scene after a few minutes. If you are good at swimming, you can go to another side of the waterfall and feel the falling water. Some like this side as they can see the full scene of the waterfall. The people can play in the shallow waters. But, you all need to be cautious. Due to the cold weather, the water is cold, and so you might be confused to play water in noon. It's kind of fun for you to come back after taking a photo there and just playing water.

It will be easier in your return. It can save about 10 minutes.

Waste



We have to step on the large stones.



Dutthawady River Bridge



Memorable for 2021 with beautiful Nawngkhio Dutthawady River Bridge.



As soon as I see the Yay Pyan Gyi waterfall, I thought it has only few amount of water and is not pretty enough.

Some think the place will be full of the waste after the Bloggers posted their trip reviews. But, there is nothing to be covered up on social media. The people want to Like and Share, and so they will post about it. The waste has been existing there before the exploration of real bloggers or not. We don't have proper knowledge regarding littering. We easily throw the trash wherever we go. So, the places are full of waste. But, it is a shameful manner. I want to urge people to keep their litter with them. The plastic bags we left stuck in the trees along the river.

I was not feeling tried too much during my trip to Yay Pyan Tuang waterfall. You can quickly get to the waterfall without any rough routes like other waterfalls.

So, I want to urge my readers to pay a visit to Yay Pyan Gyi waterfall whenever you reach Nawngkhio.



- If you are good at swimming, you can go to other side of waterfall and feel the falling water. Some like this side as they can see the full scene of waterfall.

Patrick signs one-year contract with Yangon United



Patrick Gilles Ella Edubat (right) holds the insignia of Yangon United on his arrival at the team. **PHOTO:YUFC**

YANGON UNITED stated that Patrick Gilles Ella Edubat from Sagaing United has signed a-year contract till the end of 2021 Myanmar National League season. The 23-year-old Cameroonian

player joined MNL in 2018 with Ayeyawady United and scored 16 goals there. Patrick played for Sagaing United in the 2020 season generating a superb performance to put his name in the second

of the top scorer list along with 14 goals in Myanmar National League 2020.

"I'm so sad because two teams withdrew from the competition last year when I was in Sagaing United. If they counted these match goals, I would have earned 16 goals including two goals against Zwegabin United and one goal against Chinland.

And it will be 43 goals in total that I earned in Myanmar National League. Anyway I hope to be on the list of top scorers again with my new team and I believe I will have a chance to score more goals with an assist of my teammates to win the trophies", Patrick said. Patrick revealed his good feeling to join Yangon United that, "I feel happy to play for this prestigious club and I will try with my teammates to win. Give all my best to the fans to win more trophies. —GNLM

Alisson at fault again as Leicester earn comeback win over Liverpool

LEICESTER, England —An error by Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker helped Leicester come from behind to earn a 3-1 win on Saturday (Feb 13), with the champions losing three successive Premier League games for the first time since November 2014, when they were managed by Brendan Rodgers.

Liverpool were again forced into a defensive reshuffle due to Fabinho's injury, with January loan signing Ozan Kabak handed his debut. The 20-year-old's slip let Jamie Vardy in in the first half, only for the Leicester striker to hit the crossbar.

It was Trent Alexander-Arnold's turn to hit the woodwork from a free-kick just after the interval before Mohamed Salah finally broke the deadlock in the 68th minute after being set up by a superb Roberto Firmino backwards flick.

After VAR had overturned a penalty awarded to Leicester, James Maddison equalised from a free-kick, before Alisson, who made two glaring errors in Liverpool's loss to Manchester City last weekend, cost his side again.

The Brazilian came flying out of his goal to meet a long ball over the top but collided with Kabak and allowed Vardy in to score in the 81st minute.—AFP ■



An error by Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker helped Leicester come from behind to earn a 3-1 win on Saturday (Feb 13), with the champions losing three successive Premier League games for the first time since November 2014, when they were managed by Brendan Rodgers. **PHOTO:AFP**

Thiem shocked as Osaka, Williams survive at Australian Open

MELBOURNE—US Open champion Dominic Thiem became the first major men's casualty of the Australian Open on Sunday, as Naomi Osaka and Serena Williams survived scares to reach the quarter-finals.

A fatigued-looking Thiem, coming off a five-set win over Australia's Nick Kyrgios, slumped in straight sets to Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov who took it 6-4, 6-4, 6-0 in just over two hours.

Dimitrov's victory against Thiem, the third seed and last

year's runner-up, sets up a quarter-final with surprise package Aslan Karatsev, who is into the last eight on his Grand Slam debut. "Whether it's a fairytale or not, it's a match and you've got to be ready," Bulgaria's Dimitrov said of the unheralded Russian.

"I've seen a little bit of his matches, clearly he's a dangerous player."

Earlier, Japan's Osaka edged a thriller with fellow major-winner Garbine Muguruza and Williams came through a physical

test against Aryna Sabalenka to maintain her bid for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title. Karatsev beat Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime, and Taiwan's Hsieh Su-wei, 35, reached the last eight for the first time after 16 years of trying.

Later, all eyes will be on whether eight-time winner Novak Djokovic can recover from a serious abdominal injury in time for his night match with Milos Raonic, last up on Rod Laver Arena.—AFP

Diaz's 12-round southpaw showdown with Rakhimov ends in a draw



LOS ANGELES —Former champion Joseph Diaz fought to a majority draw with Shavkatdzhov Rakhimov in an IBF junior lightweight fight Saturday in the California desert.

American Diaz was stripped of his title Friday because he weighed more than three pounds over the 130-pound limit at the weigh-in, leaving Rakhimov with the only chance to claim the title which now sits vacant.

The two southpaws put on an entertaining slugfest with Diaz giving up some rounds in the middle before turning it on in the final round to salvage some pride.

One judge scored it 115-113 for Diaz while the other two had it 114-114 in the 12-round showdown inside the quarantine bubble at the Fantasy Springs Casino in Indio.

"It wasn't my best performance," said Diaz. "I didn't make weight and vacated my title. It was a mistake on my behalf." —AFP ■

Joseph Diaz and Shavkatdzhov Rakhimov. **PHOTO: AFP**