Myanmar agrees to export 100,000-tonne rice to Bangladesh

A coordination meeting was held in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday to discuss 100,000-tonne rice export to Bangladesh under the bilateral agreement between the two governments.

Union Minister for Commerce Dr Pwint San said the Myanmar Rice Federation would manage the export of high-quality rice by forming a task force participated by the relevant ministries and associations.

Union Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation U Tin Htut Oo discussed the importance of the export sector to promote the livelihood of farmers, while food security is required during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also said some trade restrictions would be released for the rice export to Bangladesh.

The ministers and officials coordinated the discussions of rice merchants and associations.—MNA

31 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 17 February, total figure rises to 141,690

Updated at 8 pm, 17 February 2021

MYANMAR’S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 141,690 after 31 new cases were reported on 17 February 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these confirmed cases, 3,192 died, 130,944 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Ministry of Health and Sports
Civil service personnel to receive salary

THE State Administration Council has confirmed that salaries and pensions will be given to the civil service personnel in accordance with their pay scale. The Council also said that some unscrupulous persons calling for the civil disobedience movement are spreading the baseless rumour about no payment for civil service personnel and the retired persons. It is not required for the civil service personnel to have any concern for the salaries, and they were also advised to perform their duties as their payments will be given accordingly.—MNA

Websites of CBM, Office of Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, True News Information Team under attacks

THE website of Central Bank of Myanmar and the ordinary online information platforms of Office of Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services and the True News Information Team were under the attacks, causing some delays yesterday. Computer experts of the Tatmadaw could try to run the websites of Office of Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services and the True News Information Team within hours. The website of CBM is being repaired by its developer company for the recovery soon. These websites are the information websites and are not concerned with the operation of respective organizations, according to the report from the Information Team of State Administration Council.—MNA

Saltwater fishing licence extended up to 75 days

THE Fisheries Department has extended the term of licence for offshore fishing vessels from 60 to 75 days. The department made a statement that the licence extension was made in order to cover inevitable losses in the fishing industry impacted by COVID-19 pandemic, declining market demand and lower prices of seafood. The ongoing fishing licence is valid from 1 September 2020 to 30 April 2021 for the 2020-2021 fishing season. The fishing vessels will expire their business licence after 60 days for the third time in going fishing in the sea.—MNA

Celebrities charged with CDM incitement

THE LAWSUIT was filed against celebrities for their incitement to civil disobedience movement. Actor Pyay Ti Oo, Director Ko Pauk, Actor Lu Min, Director Wine, Director Na Gyi and singer Annet Ga are now charged with Article 505 (A) of the Penal Code at the respective police stations. The Myanmar Police Force also announced to report on the findings of these persons to the phone numbers of police stations and the centres in Nay Pyi Taw and other regions/states, and those who hide them will also face legal actions.—MNA

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
-067 412 388
-067 412 246
-067 412 387
-067 412 444
-067 412 388
-067 412 444
-067 412 598
-067 412 066
-067 412 539
-067 412 540

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
-99 797 144 144
-99 694 740 311

COVID-19 Call Centre opens daily

In efforts to speed up the prevention, containment and treatment of the COVID-19 disease, the call centre (phone number 2019) is established by four communications operators and the Blue Ocean Company with the coordination of the Medical Research Department of the Health and Sports Ministry and Post and Telecommunications Department from 9 am to 5 pm daily at the Medical Research Department in Yangon. Over 43 staff from the Medical Research Department and 17 volunteers from the Myanmar Medical Association totally 60 workers have been working at the centre since 8th April.—MNA
We will review the laws for their benefits

REGARDING the civil service personnel, the 2008 State Constitution has defined that ‘The Union shall enact necessary laws for Civil Services personnel to have security and sufficiency of food, clothing and shelter; to get maternity benefits for married women in service, and to ease livelihood for the welfare of retired Service personnel’. There have been some laws for civil service personnel. There might be some weaknesses in these laws. We will review the laws for their benefits. The civil service personnel have got a direct chance to serve the country and people. They are honourable persons for their public services through their responsibility and accountability for operating the sectors of legislation, administration and judiciary. We need to maintain this dignity.

(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)

MoBA discusses border area, human resources development

THE Ministry of Border Affairs organized a coordination meeting on the development of border areas and human resources yesterday.

During the meeting, Union Minister Lt-Gen Tun Tun Naing highlighted the impacts of COVID-19 on businesses, society and education in addition to health sectors, the safe condition only after the fully COVID-19 vaccination programmes and efforts of State Administration Council for vaccination programmes.

The Union Minister also urged to serve the duties with consideration in accordance with the COVID-19 health rules of the Ministry of Health and Sports.

He then discussed the re-opening of university and degree college of Human Resources Development, youth training centres and vocational training in the post-COVID-19 period, capacity building of instructors and staff, and completion of region/ state construction works in 2020-2021FY in accord with the fixed quality and criteria.

He then highlighted the strategy of ministry - “to ensure that there is no lapse in the border and ethnic development of the various regions of Myanmar”, proportionate development between border area development and human resources development processes, sustainable socio-economic development of border ethnic people, stability and peace in border areas.

MoBA Union Minister Lt-Gen Tun Tun Naing chairs the coordination meeting on the border areas development and human resources yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

He also stressed the need to utilize the state budget for the priority sectors in border areas, effective use of budget, accountability and responsibilities of staff in every level to scrutinize the work to complete in time in accordance with the fixed quality, standards, policies and directives.

He also emphasized the Civil Services Law, relief measures of State Administration Council for the civil services to enter the workplaces in time and consideration of civil services for the interests of country and people.

Then, the Directors-General briefed the performance of departments and Rectors of development university, Deputy Directors-General, principals of degree colleges and other officials presented the work plans being conducted in 2020-2021FY, plans for reopening of university, colleges and training schools in the post-COVID-19 period and management system of administrative affairs.

The Ministry of Border Affairs spent a total of K62,343,763 million of the budget for the border area development programmes in 2020-2021FY while K10,230,466 million of the budget for the human resource development of ethnic young people.

—MNA

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
MoPFI discusses CERP implementation

THE Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry organized a coordination meeting on the progress in the implementation of COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan (CERP) yesterday.

During the meeting, Union Minister U Win Shein discussed the need to carry out the CERP processes released on 27 April 2020 and the progress of work plans in respective sectors of 7 goals, 10 strategies, 36 action plans and 78 actions of CERP.

He also instructed to review the ongoing processes and further work plans with analysis teams and to expand the works if necessary, by considering whether the plan meets the objectives.

MoSWRR discusses celebration of International Women’s Day, reinstitution of Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs

THE Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement held a meeting on the celebration of International Women’s Day and reorganization of Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs yesterday.

During the meeting, Union Minister Dr Thet Thet Khine discussed the duties of the ministry that serves from the expectant mothers to elderly people including woman sector; the wide scope of social affairs and successive holding of state-level International Women’s Day since 2012 in the country.

The Union Minister mentioned the women’s power as the strength of the country. She also sought suggestions for the celebration of International Women’s Day that falls on 8 March amid COVID-19 pandemic.

The Director-General and Deputy Director-General of Social Welfare presented arrangements to hold International Women’s Day on 8 March 2021 and plans for the appointment and duty assignment of Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs.

Then, the Permanent Secretary coordinated the discussion, and Union Minister instructed the necessary things.—MNA

Announcement to the civil servants who fail to perform their duties for various reasons

1. Civil servants are the people who are working to make the whole State machinery function well. No matter how much the political, economic or government changes, civil servants must perform the duties to function the State machinery. They must abide by the rules and regulations regarding working hours, performance, and conduct in the workplace in accordance with the Civil Service Law and Employee Ethics. Those who breach the employee ethics and misconduct can be taken action in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Service Law. If an employee’s act or fail to serve is a possible offence, legal action will be taken.

2. Therefore, it is announced to the civil servants who fail to perform their duties for various reasons to return to work as soon as possible while urging employees to return to work.

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
The mini-buses and buses are seen ferrying the civil service personnel from their living quarters to the workplaces and departments concerned in Nay Pyi Taw. These are the welcoming signs for those who still fail to return to work to serve the people and the country.
Union Minister U Shwe Lay inspects infrastructural developments in Mon, Taninthayi

UNION MINISTER for Construction U Shwe Lay inspected the construction of roads and bridges in Mon State and Taninthayi Region on 14 and 15 February. During his inspection tour in Mon State, the Union Minister looked into the building of Phayagyi-Kyaikto-Mawlamyine bridge constructed under the BOT system and the construction of Kyaikto Bypass Road in the East-West Economic Corridor Section and instructed the responsible persons on the work requirement.

The Union Minister and party also inspected the paving of Mawlamyine-Thabyuzyat-Ye-Dawei road with 24 feet wide asphalt concrete, the strength of Kalawpi Bridge and paving the entrance and exit of the bridge, construction of retaining wall to prevent road erosion and paving of the road between the Mile Post (65/4 to 72/7) and drawing the centre line of the 24 feet wide two-lane road.

The Union Minister also inspected the construction of Dawei Bypass Road and the construction of the two bridges on the bypass road, in Dawei on 15 February. He said the need to continue the construction work in the respective regions, districts and townships with the systematic use of the fund in accordance with the financial rules and regulations.

During the meeting with directors, deputy directors and assistant directors from the departments of Building, Road, Bridge, Urban and Housing and Rural Road Development in Taninthayi Region, the Union Minister said the bridge and road construction works implemented by the Ministry of Construction must continue since the State Administration Council took office and the employees are required to abide by staff rules and regulations. He urged to focus on the improving of the bridges and roads in the region for the convenience of the people. Afterwards, the directors discussed their responsible works with powerpoint presentation, and the Union Minister coordinated the requirement.—MNA

Myanmar takes part in second day meeting of Trade Policy Review Body

THE Trade Policy Review Body of the World Trade Organization held the second-day virtual meeting on the second trade review report of Myanmar yesterday. The Chair of TPRB from World Trade Organization and the Ambassador of Iceland, Mr Harald Aspelund, extended greetings to the meeting which was taken part by Permanent Secretary U Min Min from the Ministry of Finance, and he discussed the implementation of agreements, rules and pledges in the provisions of WTO. During the first day session of the body, a total of 23 representatives from Canada, the United States, Indonesia, EU, Brazil, China (Taipei), India, Cambodia, Viet Nam, Czech, Australia and Nepal discussed the issues in the trade policy review of Myanmar and raised some questions.

Myanmar will also reply to the questions received after 11 January on the scheduled date. Ms Kirsti Kauppi, the Ambassador of Finland, and Mr Harald Aspelund made their remarks on the trade review processes of Myanmar. The meeting was taken part by 30 representatives from the trade and relevant departments online, and representatives from 164 countries joined the meeting online and in person.—MNA

Dala-Pyapon highway express reunites at Dala bus terminal

THE highway express running to the townships in Ayeyawady Region through Dala Township, which had halted in the pandemic period, resumed its operation beginning from 16 February.

Htet Aung Kyaw bus line and Paing Ayar bus line are recently running along the Dala-Pyapon route from the Dala bus terminal for the passengers’ convenience. These two bus lines are running in line with the current COVID-19 rules and regulations.

The YBS Numbers 47, 48, 49 and 50 are running as usual from Dala-Twante-Kawhmu-Kungyangon townships to Hlinethaya.

The YBS bus lines officials have warned YBS passengers to wear masks and maintain social distance from fellow passengers while travelling onboard the buses.

About 294 YBS buses, from 23 bus lines in Dala township in about 294 YBS buses, from 23 bus lines in Dala township in Ayeyawady, transport the passengers. Now, some townships are lifting the restriction, and some buses are resuming their operation. —Naing Lin Kyaw (Dala)
MoALI to set up FMD free zone in Kutkai Tsp, Muse

A foot-and-mouth-disease (FMD) free zone, control zone and vaccination areas will be set up in Kutkai Township of Muse District, where animal disease surveillance station is also located, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation.

The officials from the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department (LBVD) under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation signed with China’s counterparts regarding cattle surveillance and health projects for live cattle export on 18 January 2021, intending to enhance livestock trading and ensure regular border trade through legitimate channel.

The LBVD has been implementing the establishment of FMD free zone, control zone and vaccination areas since 14 July 2020 to export live cattle to China through the land border.

The development of the FMD zones will help bring about the local breeders’ socio-economic development, market potentials for the livestock products and revenue for the country.

About 10,000 heads of cattle, owned by 150 companies, are stranded in Muse border as China stopped purchasing cattle. The labour wages and feedstuff cost burden them. It costs K400,000-600,000 to take care of 100 heads of cattle every day.

Some traders brought the cattle from Muse back to their home owing to the burden of high feedstuff cost and labour wages. Some intentionally stated that they would return to the original designated place but conduct illegal trade in border areas.

For legitimate trade, China permits live cattle import only after ensuring the cattle is free from 20 diseases including Foot and Mouth Disease, along with vaccination certificates, health certificates, and farming registration certificates. Therefore, the officials concerned from the two countries are negotiating this.

Earlier, 1,500-2,000 heads of cattle were daily traded through Muse border Chinese New Year holidays, precautionary measures for the COVID-19, and other reasons contribute to the cattle trade suspension.

Additionally, Myanmar’s live cattle export relies heavily on the China market due to a fair price. However, Myanmar has other external markets such as Laos, Thailand, Malaysia and Bangladesh, he added. The Ministry of Commerce grants a permit to each company for 100 cattle export, and the permit is valid for three months.

The Ministry of Commerce grants a permit to each company for 100 cattle export, and the permit is valid for three months. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

MoALI to set up FMD free zone in Kutkai Tsp, Muse

Myanmar exports plummet by $1 bln as of 22 January

MYANMAR’S exports over past three months of the current financial year 2020-2021 touched a low to US$4.73 billion, reflecting a tremendous drop of over $1 billion compared with a year ago period of the previous FY, according to data from the Ministry of Commerce.

During the corresponding period in the previous FY, exports stood at $5.74 billion, according to the data released by the ministry.

The pandemic deals a severe blow to the manufacturing, mineral and other service sectors as it shut down the events. Additionally, people demand only staple food.

Drop-in exports of natural gas, gems and jewellery and CMP garments contribute to a slump in exports, the ministry stated.

Both sea trade and border trade dropped amid the corona-virus impacts. The neighbouring countries tightened border security and limited the trading time to contain the spread of the virus. Pandemic-induced container shortage pushed up the freight rates to almost triple in Myanmar, causing delays for exporters.

Of the seven export groups, agricultural exports showed an increase of $114.58 million against a-year ago-period. At the same time, exports of other goods were also seen a small rise. Meanwhile, exports of livestock, forest products, minerals, fishery products and finished industrial goods declined.

Between 1 October and 22 January of the current FY, export values have registered at $1.64 billion for agro products, $15.665 million for livestock, $297 million for fishery products, $386.227 million for minerals, $42 million for forest products, $3.2 billion for manufactured goods, and $143 million for other goods.

The country’s export sector relies more on the agriculture and manufacturing sectors. At present, CMP garment exports drastically dropping since the western countries cancelled order following the COVID-19 impacts. The country’s export sector is likely to extend its drop due to the current political climate, an exporter shared his opinion.

The Ministry of Commerce is focusing on export promotion and market diversification. Since 2011, the Ministry of Commerce has adhered to its reform policy. A series of moves to liberalize and open the economy have been introduced through policy development to improve the trade environment. — KH/GNLM
**Extension of fishing season a step to minimize COVID-19 impacts on fishing communities**

With the 13-day extension to the fishing season which will end in the first week of March, concerns of the communities who are relying on the offshore fishing as their main source of livelihood have been lifted. The announcement on the 13-day extension to offshore fishing is a relief for fishing communities as fishing is a major commodity in coastal areas. Fisheries, workers and businesses are suffering from negative consequences of the pandemic.

Due to the decrease in demand for seafood as there are logistic restrictions and no export amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the aquaculture sector hit hard those depending on the sector for their livelihood.

Vessels from conducting illegal fishing is also an effective way to prevent illegal fishing.

Installation of the vessel monitoring system to prevent fishing is also an effective way to prevent illegal fishing.

Due to the decrease in demand for seafood as there are logistic restrictions and no export amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the aquaculture sector hit hard those depending on the sector for their livelihood.

When it comes to responding to the COVID-19 and businesses, we also need to consider how to minimize the impact on the fishing sector and how to make these enterprises grow in the long term.

**UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore’s remarks at the UN Security Council Open Debate on ensuring equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines**


The chief executive of the world’s largest humanitarian network warned world leaders of the consequences of high levels of mistrust and persistent inequity in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

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EU to launch programme for ‘second generation’ Covid-19 vaccines

THE EU will launch a programme to study Covid-19 variants and produce “second generation” vaccines against future strains, the bloc’s president has said.

The “HERA incubator” programme, which begins Wednesday, will bring together the pharmaceutical industry, laboratories, health authorities and researchers, Ursula von der Leyen told French daily Les Echos on Tuesday.

“The virus has evolved and will continue to evolve,” said a spokesperson for the bloc – which has been criticized for its slow rollout of vaccines so far.

“It is important we prepare for mutations.”

Member states will also be asked to contribute additional funds so the EU can adapt and modify contracts already signed with vaccine providers and secure doses against future variants, Bloomberg reported.

The EU Commission did not comment when contacted by AFP. With delays to deliveries of three already-authorized vaccines by AstraZeneca, Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, the EU’s medicines regulator is under pressure from European capitals to speed more into service.

Ongoing negotiations include US pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson is the latest to apply for authorisation for its coronavirus vaccine in the EU with a decision possible by the middle of March, European drugs regulator said Tuesday. —AFP

Joe Biden says vaccines available for all Americans by end July

US President Joe Biden said Tuesday that all Americans will have access to Covid-19 vaccines before August.

Biden has previously predicted that vaccines might be available to all by spring, but the White House has recently toned down its optimism, citing difficulties both with availability of vaccines and ability to deliver them.

Asked when all Americans would be vaccinated, Biden told a CNN town hall meeting with members of the public: “By the end of July this year.”

“By the end of July we’ll have 600 million doses, enough to vaccinate every American,” he said.

Biden also said that he wanted a faster return of children to schools and that he backs vaccinations for teachers. Authorities should “move them up in the hierarchy.”

Asked at the town hall session when life would get back to normal, Biden said “by next Christmas we’ll be in a very different circumstance.”

“A year from now I think that there’ll be significantly fewer people that have to be socially distanced, have to wear a mask,” Biden said, adding that he couldn’t be sure. —AFP

Japan begins vaccinations targeting medical workers, New Zealand to lower COVID-19 alert level in Auckland

JAPAN on Wednesday began administering its first COVID-19 vaccines to medical workers, while New Zealand will lower its COVID-19 alert level in Auckland, in the latest developments of the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia-Pacific region.

Japan’s first inoculations used the vaccine developed by U.S. pharmaceutical firm Pfizer and German partner BioNTech used the vaccine developed by AstraZeneca, Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, the EU’s medicines regulator is under pressure from European capitals to speed more into service.

Japan’s first inoculations used the vaccine developed by U.S. pharmaceutical firm Pfizer and German partner BioNTech at the National Hospital Organization Tokyo Medical Centre.

New Zealand will lower the COVID-19 alert level in its largest city Auckland on Monday, bringing the country’s total number of vaccinated to 50,047.

Thailand confirmed 175 new cases of COVID-19 infection, mostly domestic, according to the Centre for the COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA).

Of Wednesday’s new cases, 168 were domestic infections while seven others referred to imported cases, CCSA spokesman Taweesin Visanuyothin told a press conference.

The Department of Health (DOH) of the Philippines reported 1,184 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total in the Southeast Asian country to 553,424. —AFP

Trump health policies condemned by Lancet commission

40% of Covid-19 contractions and deaths in the United States could have been avoided, but for the policies and actions of former President Donald Trump, the widely-respected international medical journal The Lancet said in a report published last week.

The report by the Lancet Commission on Public Policy and Health in the Trump Era reviewed President Trump’s health-related policies throughout his term. In particular his public comments on the coronavirus were condemned, particularly as his private knowledge and understanding of the virus painted a far gloomier picture than the one he portrayed in public.

His underplaying of the seriousness of the virus, the promotion of false ‘cures,’ conspiracy theories and serious disinformation and misinformation, at most times in conflict with professional advice he was receiving, and his dismissal of measures such as the wearing of masks were cited.

Other high-income G7 countries that were not subject to the Trump administration’s actions and statements fared far more favourably (on average by 40 per cent), than the United States, the report stated. At the time of writing there have been 27,536,548 cases reported in the United States, and 482,933 deaths.

On the basis of The Lancet’s findings, 11,014,619 cases, and 193,173 deaths could have been avoided but for President Trump’s policies and public statements.

The report, published Thursday, listed the former president’s health policies well beyond his handling of the coronavirus. —ANI
New PM Draghi to unveil plan to rescue Italy from virus crisis

ITALY’S new Prime Minister Mario Draghi is due to unveil his rescue plan for the country on Wednesday, two weeks after he was called in to tackle the coronavirus crisis.

The former head of the European Central Bank (ECB), known as “Super Mario” for his role in saving the euro, was scheduled to address the Senate before submitting his government to a vote of confidence.

The lower house of parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, was due to hold its own vote on Thursday — although there is little suspense, as he has the support of almost all the main political parties. Italy has high hopes of the 73-year-old economist, who has already gone down in history with a 2012 speech in which he pledged to do “whatever it takes” to shore up the European single currency.

In his new mission, Draghi needs equal determination.

He was sworn in on Saturday as Italy’s 30th prime minister in 75 years of republican history, ending a month-long political crisis that played out in the middle of a raging coronavirus pandemic.

The country’s death toll is approaching 100,000, and there is rising concern about a new surge in cases brought about by the spread of British, Brazilian and South African variants.

Meanwhile, the economy shrank by almost nine per cent last year, one of the worst reversals in history for a Western nation. Draghi’s government will have to help develop vaccines and treatments.

“While there has been very positive progress in vaccine development, we want to find the best and most effective vaccines for use over the longer term,” Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said. The study will “help accelerate scientists’ knowledge of how coronavirus affects people and could eventually further the rapid development of vaccines,” he said.

Italy’s new Prime Minister Mario Draghi is due to unveil his rescue plan for the country on Wednesday, two weeks after he was called in to tackle the coronavirus crisis. PHOTO: AFP

Results in the eurozone, and close to 450,000 people lost their jobs – mostly women and young people.

In a short acceptance speech on February 3, after President Sergio Mattarella asked him to form a government, Draghi called for national unity in the face of a “difficult moment”.

Long-awaited overhaul

He listed as his immediate priorities “defeating the pandemic, completing the vaccination campaign and relaunching the country” with the “extraordinary resources” offered by the European Union.

Italy expects to receive more than 300 billion euros ($340 billion) from the EU’s post-coronavirus recovery fund, but in return, it is expected to commit to potentially difficult or unpopular reforms.

The Senate speech will give Draghi the chance to finally unveil his agenda for the country, after weeks in which he hardly spoke in public, working mostly behind the scenes. —AFP

In UK, volunteers to be infected with Covid-19

A study which will expose volunteers to the coronavirus is to begin in Britain within a month after it gained approval from the country’s clinical ethics body, the government said on Wednesday.

The trial will look to establish the smallest amount of virus needed to cause infection, in order to help develop vaccines and treatments.

“While there has been very positive progress in vaccine development, we want to find the best and most effective vaccines for use over the longer term,” Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said. The study will “help accelerate scientists’ knowledge of how coronavirus affects people and could eventually further the rapid development of vaccines,” he said.

The study, the first of its kind in the world, will expose up to 90 volunteers between 18 and 30 years old to Covid-19 in a controlled environment, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said.

The European Union has bought up to 300 million extra COVID-19 vaccine doses from US firm Moderna, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

The new deal, which she hailed as “good news”, adds “the possibility for the virus to mutate”, as is already being seen with variants, some of which appear to be at least partially resistant to some of the current vaccines.

“We will always have to be vigilant to be able, if there are escaped mutations, to fight them with improved vaccines,” she said.

But another reason for such a big stock was to hedge against “the possibility for the virus to mutate”, as is already being seen with variants, some of which appear to be at least partially resistant to some of the current vaccines.

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Spanish police seize 4 million fake medical-grade masks

SPANISH police on Wednesday said they had seized around four million counterfeit medical-grade face masks at a hotel during a raid on a gathering that violated virus restrictions.

Officers found the masks inside cardboard boxes on the ground floor and in the warehouse of the hotel in Leganes on Madrid’s southern outskirts, police said in a statement.

The boxes were “ready to be transported” and marked as containing high-protection KN95 and FFP2 face masks, it said.

In addition, police found a printer that was capable of printing masks with the so-called CE mark, reflecting conformity to European standards. “The material which was seized leads investigators to believe that non-approved masks were being put through a (CE mark) printing process so they could be put on the market as certified masks,” the statement said.

Police searched the hotel after being notified of a gathering of 48 youths that violated restrictions regarding the number of people allowed to meet up. —AFP

EU buys up to 300 million more Moderna jobs

The European Union has bought up to 300 million extra COVID-19 vaccine doses from US firm Moderna, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

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**German investor confidence leaps on reopening hopes**

GERMAN investor sentiment jumped in January amid growing confidence Europe's top economy will bounce back from the brutal blow of the coronavirus pandemic, data showed Tuesday.

The ZEW institute's monthly barometer measuring economic expectations in Europe's largest economy rose 9.4 points in January, to a new reading of 71.2 points in January. It was the highest score since September, before the second wave of the pandemic hit.

"The financial market experts polled "are optimistic about the future" and "confident that the German economy will be back on the growth track within the next six months", ZEW president Achim Wambach said in a statement.

In December, Germany tightened restrictions to curb the spread of the virus, closing most shops after a previous shutdown closed restaurants, bars, gyms and cultural activities.

Last week Chancellor Angela Merkel and state leaders extended the measures until March 7 and raised the prospect of a gradual reopening if new infection numbers continue to fall and highly contagious variants can be kept at bay. —AFP

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**Iran, Russia start joint naval drill in Indian Ocean**

THE Iranian and Russian militaries have kicked off a joint naval drill in the Indian Ocean aimed at boosting security of maritime trade in the region, Iran's state TV reported on Tuesday.

The TV said units from Iran's Navy and the powerful Revolutionary Guard's navy will take part in the exercise dubbed "Iran-Russia Maritime Security Belt 2021" in the northern part of Indian Ocean, spanning a stretch of about 17,000 kilometers (10,600 miles).

According to Iranian Adm. Gholamreza Tahani, the drill spokesman, a Russian destroyer, logistics ship and a helicopter were to participate in the drill.

This is the second such joint Russia-Iran exercise since 2019, when the two nations held a four-day exercise.

Tehran has been seeking to step up military cooperation with Beijing and Moscow amid regional tensions with the United States. Visits to Iran by Russian and Chinese naval representatives have also increased in recent years.

In the last few months, Iran has stepped up military drills as the country tries to pressure US President Joe Biden over the JCPOA nuclear accord, which he has said America could reenter. Last Thursday, Iran's Revolutionary Guard conducted a ground forces drill near the border with Iraq in which drones, helicopters and military tanks were used.

In January the Guard conducted a drill and launched anti-warship ballistic missiles at a simulated target in the Indian Ocean. —AFP

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**Millions struggle without power as cold snap grips US**

Residents clear snow from a sidewalk on February 16, 2021 in Chicago, Illinois. PHOTO: AFP

MILLIONS were left without power as a winter storm gripped the southern and central United States Tuesday with record-low temperatures in ill-prepared areas, and a tornado claiming three lives.

More than 20 storm-related deaths have been registered so far, including in traffic accidents in Texas, Kentucky and Missouri, according to local media.

In hardest-hit Texas, where freezing conditions prompted utility companies to implement rotating blackouts, a woman and girl died from carbon monoxide poisoning after using a car to generate heat, according to NBC News. —AFP

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**Singapore hindu temple priest charged in $1.5 million gold pawning case**

THE former chief priest of Singapore's oldest Hindu temple has been charged with repeatedly pawning gold religious ornaments for a total of $1.5 million, court officials said Wednesday.

Kandasamy Serapathi was found to redeem the pawned ornaments when he had raised enough money and return them to the temple, according to local media — but his ruse was uncovered when he could not get enough cash to buy the gold back after the coronavirus pandemic hit. The 57-year-old Indian national worked at the Sri Mariamman Temple, a 194-year-old, ornately decorated place of worship in downtown Singapore that is popular with devotees and tourists alike. He is accused of having pawned the gold items five times between 2016 and 2020 when he was still chief priest.

Temple authorities discovered the items were missing during an audit and he was arrested, and later stripped of his role as chief priest. Kandasamy later managed to redeem the gold items and returned them to the temple. The total pawn value of the items, which were frequently used in prayers, was more than S$1.5 million (US$1.55 million), according to court documents seen by AFP. The ornaments were supposed to be kept in the custody of the chief priest in the temple's inner sanctum. —AFP

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**1 student shot dead, hundreds kidnapped by gunmen In Nigeria: Report**

GUNNEMEN believed to belong to a criminal gang have kidnapped hundreds of schoolboys from their hosts along with some of teachers in central Nigeria, an official and a security source told AFP Wednesday.

The attackers wearing military uniforms stormed the Government Science College in "huge numbers" in the town of Kagara in Niger state late on Tuesday, herding the students into a nearby forest, the sources said. One student was dead during the kidnapping, the official said. Northwest and central Nigeria have increasingly been targeted by criminal gangs known locally as "bandits" who kidnap for ransom, rape and pillage across the region. "Bandits went into GSC Kagara last night and kidnapped hundreds of students and their teachers," said an official who asked not to be identified due to the sensitivity of the issue. "One of the kidnapped staff and some students managed to escape. The staff confirmed a student was shot dead during the kidnap operation," the official said. The school has around 1,000 students and it was not immediately clear how many were taken. —AFP

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**Hamas condemns Israel for blocking Covid-19 vaccines to Gaza**

Hamas on Tuesday blasted Israel's refusal to allow some 2,000 coronavirus vaccine doses destined for Gaza health workers through its blockade of the territory as a "violation" of international law.

The Palestinian Authority, based in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, had planned to send the Russian Sputnik V doses through Israel to Gaza, a separate territory run by Islamism movement Hamas. But on Monday evening, the PA health ministry said Israel had blocked the delivery. But on Monday evening, the PA health ministry said Israel had blocked the delivery. Israel's move marked "a real crime and a violation of all international laws and humanitarian standards," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said. —AFP
Hong Kong remains competitive as global financial hub: officials

AS trading resumed on Hong Kong’s financial markets Tuesday after the Chinese Lunar New Year holiday, officials of the global financial center said Hong Kong has shown resilience and retained competitiveness over the past year despite the COVID-19 fallout.

While the pandemic put international markets to the test, Hong Kong’s status as a financial hub has remained firm, showing strong momentum and making considerable progress, Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Carrie Lam said in her video speech at the Lunar New Year Open Market Ceremony of Hong Kong’s Chinese Gold & Silver Exchange.

The gold price opened at 16,800 Hong Kong dollars (about 2,167.74 U.S. dollars) per taels on Tuesday, down 250 dollars from the previous trading day. — Xinhua

Tokyo stocks close lower on profit-taking

Japan logged a trade deficit of 32.3 billion yen ($31 billion) in January, according to finance ministry data released shortly before the opening bell.

Tokyo stocks closed lower Wednesday on profit-taking, taking a pause after recent rallies.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index lost 0.58%, or 175.56 points, to 30,292.19, while the broader Topix index slipped 0.18%, or 3.59 points, to 1,961.49.

“I am natural to see profit-taking after the Nikkei rose so fast in the past few weeks,” said Shin-ichi Yamamoto, a broker at Okasan Securities in Tokyo.

Some dealers said the market was overheating, “but sentiment is not weak at all,” Yamamoto told AFP.

“Although investors tend to lock in profits at this level, the market is expected to remain bullish for now,” he said.

The dollar fetched 105.83 yen in Asian afternoon trade, against 105.99 yen in New York late Tuesday.

Toyota fell 0.67% to 8,247 yen after announcing plans to suspend 14 lines at nine of its 15 automobile assembly plants in Japan for up to four days as part procurement has been affected by an earthquake that hit the northeastern part of the country on Saturday.

Procurement has also been affected by cold weather across parts of the United States.

Among Toyota’s rivals, Honda was up 0.88% at 3,088 yen and Nissan jumped 2.55% to 617.9 yen.

BridgeStone lost 4.13% to 4,271 yen after announcing an annual net loss.

Sony fell 0.32% to 12,200 yen and SoftBank Group lost 0.14% to 10,405 yen, both on profit-taking, but Nintendo gained 0.39% to 68,610 yen.

Japan logged a trade deficit of 32.3 billion yen ($3 billion) in January, according to finance ministry data released shortly before the opening bell. —AFP

Ministry of Transport and Communications
Myanmar Port Authority
Open Tender Invitation

1. Myanmar Port Authority is planning to construct the following vessel, funded by foreign currency USD (United States Dollar) only, within the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 fiscal years. Therefore, interested Tenderers are cordially invited to submit the complete project proposal for the following:

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<th>Currency</th>
<th>Tender closing date and time</th>
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<td>Buoy Vessel (Multi-Purpose Buoy Handling Vessel) (1 unit)</td>
<td>USD Only</td>
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2. Tender forms can be purchased at the Main Store Department, New Strand Road (Concrete Road), near Tollgate, Botataung Township, Yangon, Myanmar, during the office hours, starting from 23rd February, 2021.

3. The Tender Submission will be accepted in terms of one tender two sealed envelopes system, i.e., Prequalification Bid and Price Bid to be submitted with each sealed envelope. The Explanation Session for the Prequalification Bid will be held at 13:00 PM on 12th March 2021, at the Meeting Room (First Floor) of the Head Office of Myanmar Port Authority. No.5, Pansodan Street, Kayuakakda Township, Yangon, Myanmar.

4. Should you need more detailed information, please contact us at +951-8610218, +951-8610225, and email: arkar.mpa@gmail.com; info@mpa.gov.mm.
Coffee sector full of beans despite pandemic

As cafes and office canteens shuttered worldwide due to the coronavirus pandemic, coffee growers feared 2020 would be a bitter year for business. But the sector was saved from ruin by a blend of rising home consumption, good prices, and better-than-expected production yields in some countries.

**Coffee break**

Synchronous with social interactions from business meetings to first dates, coffee consumption has been confined to the home for much of the last year, as millions of people worked from houses and apartments, still needing their caffeine fix.

As people became their own baristas, supermarket sales partly made up for revenue lost to takeaway and sit-down coffee, with overall global sales falling by a less-than-expected 2.4 percent.

This despite flight bans severely disrupting product movement and harvests.

According to the International Coffee Organization (ICO), in London, some 168.68 million bags of beans were harvested in the “coffee year” that ran from October 2019 to September 2020. This was slightly more than the 164.53 million bags of coffee beans gzuzzled over the same period – the third year in a row of production exceeding consumption.

A projected 1.9-per cent increase in global production in the 2020/21 year will yield an excess of 5.27 million bags, as out-of-home consumption of the beverage is likely to remain lower than usual, said the ICO.

With more supply than demand, this could spell a period of lower prices in a volatile market also swayed by harvest predictions and futures speculation.

—AFP

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Kuwait plans to shorten oil supply deals for some Asian buyers: sources

Kuwait plans to shorten oil supply deals for some Asian buyers, sources told Reuters.

The proposed change follows a decision by Iraq, OPEC’s second-biggest producer, to cut its oil exports to India this year to comply with OPEC quotas just as Indian refiners ramp up output to meet a demand upsurge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

KPC’s 615,000 barrel per day Al-Zour refinery, the country’s fourth, is due to start operating to ward the end of the year, turning the nation into one of the biggest fuel producers in the region, the sources said.

The company is aligning and arranging its contracts with customers as domestic demand will rise early next year. To avoid making any full-year commitment, KPC has cut the contract duration to nine months, the sources said.

One of the sources, adding that KPC will again sign 12-month contracts from April 2022. KPC did not respond to Reuters’ emailed request for comment.

Supply squeeze

Indian refiners had planned to ramp up imports of Kuwaiti oil this year after Iraq cut term supplies of its Basra Light grade this year, the sources said.

Bharat Petroleum Corp. has sought a 25% increase in its KPC supplies to 60,000 bpd with an option to buy an additional 50,000 bpd for 2021/22. The company had an annual supply of 28,000 bpd in this financial year to March 31, the sources said. —AFP

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Ecuador ex-president who dollarized economy dies

FORMER Ecuador president Gustavo Noboa, who dollarized the economy in 2000, has died at the age of 83, President Lenin Moreno announced on Tuesday.

“Ecuador is in mourning. From tomorrow I will declare a period of national mourning,” Moreno announced on Tuesday.

Moreno added that the economy in 2000, has died at the Jackson Memorial hospital in Miami where he underwent an operation for a heart attack on Tuesday.

Although the operation appeared to have gone well, he suffered a heart attack on Tuesday, local press reported. —AFP

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WTO needs to show results on economic crisis, vaccines: Okonjo-Iweala

NIGERIA’s Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, newly selected head of the World Trade Organization (WTO), said Tuesday she will push for concrete results in addressing the dual economic and health crises facing the globe.

Her immediate goals are to ensure vaccines are produced and distributed worldwide, not just for rich nations, and to resist the push toward protectionism that worsened during the pandemic, so that free trade can help the economic recovery.

“I think the WTO is too important to allow it to be slowed down, paralyzed and mortgaged,” she told AFP in an interview. “That’s not right.”

She will take over leadership on March 1 of an institution that has become weighed down and increasingly defanged, especially by the open hostility of Donald Trump’s administration.

Amid the turmoil, including the US move that shut down the dispute resolution court in December 2019 about complaints about handling of disputes with China, her predecessor stepped down last August, a year before his term was up.

Selected by the membership on Monday after US President Joe Biden’s administration backed her candidacy, Okonjo-Iweala promised to breathe fresh life into the trade body which she says has lost focus on helping improve living conditions for real people.

“I believe the WTO can contribute more strongly to a resolution of the Covid-19 pandemic by helping to improve access affordability and affordability of vaccines to poor countries,” she said.

“It’s really in the self-interest of every country to see every one of them vaccinated because you’re not safe until everyone is safe.”

Some countries, such as India and South Africa, have been pushing for a suspension of trade rules on patents to allow more rapid vaccine rollout.

But rather than get caught in another squabble among WTO members, Okonjo-Iweala said the organization could promote a quicker path. —AFP

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**Prince Ernst August of Hanover, the husband of Princess Caroline of Monaco, is suing his son to win back control of a German castle and prevent it from falling into public hands, a court said Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP**

PRINCE Ernst August of Hanover, the husband of Princess Caroline of Monaco, is suing his son to win back control of a German castle and prevent it from falling into public hands, a court said Tuesday.

Ernst August, 66, gave his son the fairytale-like Marienburg castle and several other properties between 2004 and 2007, but now wants them back citing “gross ingratitude,” the district court of Hanover said in a statement. It is the latest public spat to hit the aristocratic family, whose patriarch has over the years been nicknamed “the party prince” and even “the brawling prince” over his jet-set lifestyle and drunken escapades.

According to the court statement, Ernst August filed a lawsuit at the end of last year seeking to revoke the gifts of Marienburg Castle, the Calenburg manor house and a royal property in Herrenhausen.

He accuses his son, Ernst August junior, of acting against his wishes and going behind his back by offering Marienburg Castle to the state of Lower Saxony as public property — partly because of the huge costs of maintaining the mid-18th-century Gothic-style building.

The plaintiff, who lives in Austria, also accuses his son of improperly appropriating artworks and antiques owned by the family.

Ernst August senior estimated the total value of the disputed properties and items at some five million euros, the court said. Ernst August junior, 37, told German news agency DPA that the case had no merit, saying all the arguments raised “have already been invalidated out-of-court in the past”.

He said the deal struck to transfer ownership of Marienburg Castle to the regional authorities of Lower Saxony was “legally secure”. —AFP

**India bus plunges into canal, killing at least 40 passengers**

MEMBERS of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) conduct a rescue operation at the site of a bus accident near Patna village in Siddhi district, about 493 km east of Bhopal, the capital city of Madhya Pradesh, India, Feb. 16, 2021. PHOTO: AFP

At least 40 passengers were killed and several others went missing on Tuesday after a bus carrying them skidded off the road and plunged into a canal in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, officials said.

Seven people survived the accident and among them, some swam safely to the bank and others were rescued.

The accident took place near Patna village in Siddhi district, about 493 km east of Bhopal, the capital city of Madhya Pradesh. According to officials, the driver of the bus lost control over his vehicle and plunged into the canal, where it submerged completely in water. Following the accident, locals alerted the police who rushed to the spot to carry out searches for the missing.

“As of now 40 people were killed in this tragic accident,” an official at the district magistrate office Siddhi said. “The deceased include 21 men, 18 women and a child.” — Xinhua

**COVID-19 seen spurring hate speech against LGBTI in Europe, including Malta**

HATE speech against LGBTI people in Europe and Central Asia has spiked during the coronavirus pandemic, a group defending their rights said on Tuesday.

Verbal attacks on members of lesbian, gay, trans, bi-sexual and intersex communities by politicians have risen in Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, Russia, Slovakia and Turkey, the ILGA-Europe federation said in its annual report surveying 54 countries.

Religious leaders in Belarus, Greece, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine are also accused in the report of hate speech, with some of them alleging LGBTI people are behind the spread of COVID-19.

“The federation, representing 600 associations, also pointed the finger at increased hate speech in online media in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Malta, Montenegro, Russia and Turkey — and in mainstream media in some cases, notably in Slovenia and Ukraine.

“There has been a resurgence of authorities and officials using LGBTI people as scapegoats,” ILGA-Europe’s chief, Evelyne Paradis, said. —AFP

**Sweden readying to close gyms, restaurants, hair salons**

Sweden, known for its softer approach to the pandemic, is preparing to use new legislation to close gyms, restaurants and hair salons ahead of a feared third wave of virus infections, the government said Wednesday.

Sweden in January adopted a pandemic law giving the government new powers to curb the spread of the virus. The country has never imposed the type of lockdown seen else-where in Europe, controversially relying on mostly non-coercive measures.

It has however gradually tightened measures since November, including a ban on alcohol sales after 8.00 pm and on public gatherings of more than eight people. —AFP

**Blood banks in Yemen face severe shortage as demand surges**

Blood banks in hospitals of Sanaa, Yemen’s capital, are having difficulty providing enough blood for those in need as the demand increases rapidly, a health official said on Tuesday.

Adnan Hakimi, technical director of the National Centre for Blood Transfusion and Research in Houthi-controlled Sanaa, said hospitals in the capital have seen a surging demand for blood as the war and economic crisis are creating more patients.

“We are facing a severe shortage of blood, which forces us to launch a blood donation campaign,” said Hakimi. —AFP

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**Blood banks in Yemen face severe shortage as demand surges**
YANGON United confirmed that Magwe FC defender Hein Htet Sithu has joined the squad with a two-year contract, according to the team statement.

Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo told an online press conference on Tuesday that central defender Leonardo Bonucci is not ready and Bonucci will make the trip to Portugal “because they all want to be close to the team,” said Pirlo.

Even without Bonucci, Juventus can choose between veteran club captain Giorgio Chiellini, 21-year-old Matt hijis de Ligt and 22-year-old Merih Demiral at centre-back.

Even so, Pirlo said he is confident they would cope.

“We’ve missed Dybala’s … serve more for this team”, said defender Hein Htet Sithu. Hein Htet Sithu started his youth professional life at National Football Academy in Mandalay from 2010 to 2015. He was selected in Myanmar National League U-18 team in Myanmar National Youth League which was held in 2015. Next, he was offered by Magwe FC and played for U-21 team of Magwe FC for three consecutive years. Then he was selected for the senior squad of Magwe FC in 2019.

Liverpool stun Leipzig 2-0 to snap losing run

They gained a clear advantage in their tie going into the March 10 return leg thanks to two blunders by Leipzig.

Salah easily intercepted a back pass by Leipzig’s Marcel Sabitzer to put the Reds ahead in the 53rd minute and on course for their first win in any competition since late January.

Mare then pounced on another mistake when Nordi Mukiele failed to clear a long ball five minutes later, leaving the Germans stunned in Budapest’s Puskas Arena where the game had been relocated due to COVID-19 restrictions in Germany.

“It was an important game for us, a tough game,” Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson said.

“Keeping a clean sheet was important for us.” –AFP

Melbourne to lift lockdown, allow fans at Australian Open

“In a broader sense, we are safe and open,” Andrews said in a televised media conference, but cautioned that the lifting of restrictions will allow at least some spectators at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne, where players have competed in empty stadiums during the lockdown.

“There will be meetings early this afternoon … where we will go through what is a safe number and will get that decision made as soon as possible,” Andrews said.

The virus cluster linked to a hotel quarantining travellers returned from overseas has grown to 19 people, but there were no new cases reported on Wednesday. –AFP

YANGON United signs Magwe FC defender on loan

Yangon United signs Magwe FC defender on loan

Again, he was chosen in Myanmar National teams and participated in Thanh Nien Newspaper International U-21 Competition in Viet Nam to secure the bronze medal for the team—GNLM

Juventus will have to juggle their defence when they visit Porto in the Champions League on Wednesday in a round-of-16 first leg that will take Cristiano Ronaldo back to his native country.

Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo told an online press conference on Tuesday that central defender Leonardo Bonucci and Argentine midfielder Paulo Dybala are out of the game but Welsh midfielder Aaron Ramsey will return to the squad.

“Ramsey is available, Dybala is not ready and Bonucci is out,” Pirlo said.

Juventus had already announced that Colombian wing-back Juan Cuadrado would miss the game after suffering a thigh injury.

Dybala, out since mid-January with a knee problem, has resumed training but “is not ready to play”, Pirlo said.

“We’ve missed Dybala’s goals a bit and we haven’t had him available often, we hope he can find continuity and he will be like a new signing,” Pirlo said.

The coach said Bonucci was “already not right” last week. He has had “another small physical problem” and is “not available”.

Both Dybala and Bonucci will make the trip to Portugal “because they all want to be close to the team,” said Pirlo.

Even without Bonucci, Juventus can choose between veteran club captain Giorgio Chiellini, 21-year-old Matt de Ligt and 22-year-old Merih Demiral at centre-back.

Chiellini said he was confident they could cope.

“All four us are centre-backs of a high standard,” he said. “The team wins, we alternate, and there is a great feeling among us.”

At 36 and out of contract in June, Chiellini said he was not thinking “in the long term”.

—AFP

Melbourne to lift lockdown, allow fans at Australian Open

“In a broader sense, we are safe and open,” Andrews said in a televised media conference, but cautioned that the latest outbreak had not yet been fully contained. The lifting of restrictions will allow at least some spectators at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne, where players have competed in empty stadiums during the lockdown.

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