The State Administration Council held the meeting of the Management Committee at its headquarters in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Chairman of the Council and Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing delivered a speech at the meeting, which was attended by Vice-Chairman of the Council and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services and Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Soe Win, the Union Ministers and the Attorney-General of the Union.

In his discussion, the Senior General talked about the progress in the rule of law in nearly one-month since the Council took the power of the country, containment measures against COVID-19 with 1.4 million infections and about 3,200 deaths in Myanmar and the possibility of higher figures due to the crowds in previous weeks, the negative impacts on healthcare services due to civil disobedience movement of health workers, possible legal actions of relevant ministries against those who disturb the reopening of hospitals, vaccination programme for COVID-19, import permits for the private pharmaceutical companies, and reopening of schools.

He also discussed the promotion of the agricultural sector for food sufficiency of the country, livestock and fish breeding farms, commercial production of foodstuffs, the use of irrigation water for the agricultural sector, generation of electricity from hydro and solar powers, promotion of Myanmar martial arts for the health of people, raising funds for the public hospitals to provide free healthcare services for the civil service personnel at the initial stage.

The Senior General continued to reduce fuel requirement in the country, with manufacturing electric cars by the relevant ministries for the urban public transport, the need for urgent completion of Yangon-Mandalay railway project jointly implemented by Japan and reduction of fuel and cooking oil imports to decrease trade deficiencies.

The Union Ministers and the Attorney-General of the Union reported signing agreements, the appointment of duties, exemptions and extension of duties. The Union Ministers also discussed fish breeding projects, systematic spending of state revenue, social welfare funds, healthcare services at the hospitals, school reopening programme, implementation of hydropower projects and organizing celebrations of ethnic festivals.

In response to the reports, the Senior General gave guidance on the appointment of civil service personnel, fair management on them without bias, the award for dutiful persons, punishment for the failure of duties, lesser consumption of cooking oil with changing consumption habits for better health.

He advised conducting research and development programme, not to mention the unfruitful information on social media, suspension to pay back the two-month salary loans for the civil service personnel, development of Nay Pyi Taw area, reopening of factories and workplaces without posing negative impacts on the environment, attraction to foreign investments and the establishment of 81-ft high marble Buddha image in sitting posture in Nay Pyi Taw.—MNA

Reduction of fuel and cooking oil imports needed to decrease trade deficiencies: Senior General

State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing discusses the health and economic development sectors at the Management Committee Meeting in Nay Pyi Taw on 25 February 2021.

The Global New Light of Myanmar
Vol. VII, No. 316, Fullmoon of Tabodwe 1382 ME
www.gnlm.com.mm
Friday, 26 February 2021
Public Announcement
(21 February 2021)

THE 22 February is the day for more than 900,000 pensioners to withdraw their pensions, and they also rely only on their pensions. It is found out that the news is spreading on Facebook to conduct various ways to destruct or block the ways to banks by force to fail in pension withdrawals. Moreover, some people threatened others to participate in the CDM movement, and so the people who want to stay peacefully sent letters to the State Administration Council many times to solve these cases. According to the culture of democracy, people can stage a protest in accordance with the law. But now, the lawless actions like threats or use of force that affect the stability of the people lead to occur riot. Therefore, it is announced that action will be taken against these moves according to the law.

State Administration Council Information Team

Notification to take legal actions against formation of committees representing Hluttaws
(25 February 2021)

1. The State of Emergency was announced on 1-2-2021 as per Section 417 of the State Constitution (2008), and legislative, administrative and judicial power was granted to the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services. Since then, it is deemed that legislative works of all Hluttaws and their respective committees have been suspended, and the respective Hluttaws have been revoked automatically on the day when their terms have ended.
2. At present, the Union Election Commission is investigating the voting fraud in the General Election on 8 November 2020, and the findings were also announced. It has been notified that the Hluttaw representative credentials issued by the UEC to the respective Hluttaws have been invalid during the investigation period.
3. It is illegal to perform the Hluttaw works such as forming committees representing Hluttaw without authority, holding committee members, making announcements and notifications and appointment of representatives during the investigation period of UEC.
4. Therefore, forming the representative committees of Hluttaws after 1 February 2021 is not in compliance with the State Constitution and Hluttaw laws. Such announcements and notifications could endanger the rule of law, peace and stability of the public. It is notified to avoid such actions, and effective legal actions will be taken in accordance with the existing laws.

Union Election Commission

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Ministry of Health and Sports
Order No 22/2021
14th waxing of Tabodwe 1382 ME
25 February 2021

THE Ministry of Health and Sports has issued this order in line with provisions stipulated in Section 21-(b) of the Prevention and Control of Communicable Diseases Law.

1. Regarding the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) preventive measures, the Ministry of Health and Sports announced that more than 5 people were not allowed to gather except for exceptional cases by Order No 37/2020 dated 16.4.2020 and by Order No 56/2020 dated 28.5.2020. The Ministry of Health and Sports amended the announcement that 15 people or more instead of 5 people were not allowed to gather starting from 1.8.2020 by Order No 79/2020 dated 29.7.2020 and, by Order No 88/2020 dated 12.8.2020, it was amended the announcement that 30 people or more were not allowed to gather.
2. Due to the current outbreak of COVID-19, it has been amended not to gather more than 50 people instead of 30 except for the matters mentioned in these orders from 26.2.2021.
3. If there is a failure to comply with the instructions and orders issued by the Ministry of Health and Sports and the Department of Public Health regarding COVID-19 will result in legal action.

Dr Thet Khine Win
Union Minister

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
State Administration Council
Order No 92/2021
14th Waxing of Tabodwe 1382 ME

Return to Military Duties

Major-General Phone Myat, the Deputy Minister for Border Affairs, will be assigned for original military duties.

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

MYANMAR’S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 141,841 after 25 new cases were reported on 25 February 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these confirmed cases, 3,198 died, 131,417 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Updated at 8 pm, 25 February 2021

Daily death toll until 8 pm 25-2-2021

Ministry of Health and Sports
137 courses for diploma, postgraduate in medical education to be conducted

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

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

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Ministry of Health and Sports
Interest of individuals through peace and stability of the country

He continued to say about legal actions against voter list errors, the systematic holding of elections after the State of Emergency, priority on the livelihood, peace, stability, the rule of law and peace processes and interest of individuals through peace and stability of the country.

(Excerpt from the speech to the coordination meeting of the State Administration Council made by the Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on 16 February 2021)

MoSWRR share information from State Administration Council Chairman

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement held a Zoom meeting yesterday over re-explanation of the directives of the State Administration Council Chairman made on 8 February.

The meeting was attended by Union Minister Dr Thet Thet Khine, relevant Region/State/ District-level staff officers.

The Union Minister firstly discussed the meeting of the State Administration Council with the Permanent Secretaries of ministries held on 21 February regarding the permission for those on annual leave until 24 February and they were also informed with letters to come to the work on 25 February except for those on maternity leave and for other health cases and if failed, they would face action in accordance with the Civil Services Law and rules.

The private sectors faced hardships due to COVID-19 lockdown and Stay at Home order. The Union Minister then highlighted the full guarantee of civil servants regarding work, accommodation, foreign training and pensions. She then emphasized the difference between the insurance and opportunities between the private industry staff and government staff.

The government is making efforts to improve the State economy, and it can create opportunities for the government employees in the long run. She also appreciated the efforts of employees who come office as usual during this period.

She then discussed the most stable and best life guarantee of civil servants out of three kinds of staff—non-governmental organizations’ staff, private industry staff and government staff.

She also urged to adopt effective and systematic efforts in serving for the public and following the Civil Services Law and rules despite changing governance.

Deputy Director-General for Disaster Management U Win Shwe then briefed the excerpts from the speech of the State Administration Council Chairman made on 8 February.

The Union Minister also urged the civil servants to understand the speech of the State Administration Council Chairman and instructed to discuss collectively for other issues with the departmental heads.—MNA
Traditional clay pots for drinking water get high demand in Phaungpyin Township

THE price of clay pots range between K2,000-K7,000 depending on design, size and quality. Last year, it took about a month to sell all the pots loaded on a motor vessel. Now, the pots on a vessel are expected to be sold out within 15 days on the back of strong demand. A ship carrying clay pots are estimated at K2 million, said the clay pot sellers. Some vendors and hawkers carrying goods on their shoulders are selling the clay pots in Kalewa, Mawlaik and Phaungpyin townships. In addition to pots for drinking water, flower vase (Buddhist offering), and earthen pots for cooking, earthen toys and money-saving box are also in high demand. — Ko Tun (IPRD)/GNLM

Imports down by $1.7 bln as of 12 February, MOC reports

The value of Myanmar’s imports between 1 October and 12 February in the current financial year 2020-2021 stood at US$6.967 billion, a sharp drop of $1.7 billion from $7.67 billion registered in the year-ago period, according to the data released by the Ministry of Commerce.

The value of imports in the consumer, capital, intermediates, and CMP businesses groups dropped in the current FY.

Over the past four months of the current FY, capital goods, such as auto parts, vehicles, machines, steel, and aero-planes parts, were brought into the country. Their import value was estimated at $2 billion. The figure was $829 million lower compared to the same period in the previous FY.

Meanwhile, Myanmar imported consumer products worth $1.25 billion, including pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and palm oil. The imports of consumer products showed a slight decrease of $34.9 million compared with the same period in the previous FY.

Intermediate goods make up a large share of Myanmar’s imports, with petroleum products and plastic raw materials being the main import items. This year, imports of raw materials plunged to $1.95 billion from $2.62 billion registered during the year-ago period.

During the same period, raw materials worth $728.7 million were also imported for the Cut-Make-Pack (CMP) garment sector, showing a decrease of $172.75 million compared with last fiscal year.

At present, the CMP garment sector, which contributes to 30 per cent of Myanmar’s export sector, is struggling because of the cancellation of orders from the European countries and suspension of the trade by western nations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, import values of raw materials by CMP businesses have been dropping.

The top 10 import countries to Myanmar are China, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Viet Nam, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the US, as per data of the Ministry of Commerce. — GNLM

Onion price drops by over $30 per tonne depending on size

THE onion price has declined by over US$30 per tonne depending upon the size, according to the Ministry of the Onion, Garlic & Culinary Crops Production and Exporting Association (MOGCCPEA).

About 200 trucks loaded with culinary crops are exported daily to Thailand via the Myawady trade zone. The shipped items are corn, onion, garlic, peanuts, peanuts (with peel), rice, yam, dried chilli, turmeric, avocado, mussels, and tamarind.

Out of those exported products, the onion has export licenses issued at the FOB price set to apply for an export licence for two weeks by the MOGCCPEA.

For this week, the association’s FOB prices are $145 per tonne for new crops 2021 20mm-30 mm size, $170 per tonne for 25mm-35mm size and $215 per tonne for 35mm-up size.

Therefore, the onion price plunged by over $30 per tonne this week.

Similarly, the garlic price has also slightly declined with $1,070 per tonne for 18 mm-28mm size and $1,250 per tonne for 28mm-upsize.

Besides, there is no rubber export to foreign market so far. The prevailing prices of International Rubber — Ribbed Smoked Sheets (RSS) and Myanmar Standard Rubber (MSR) remain unchanged, according to the fixed price of Myanmar Rubber Producers Association (MRPPA).

At present, the various items to export to the neighboring country through the Myawady border trade zone are being scrutinized, and Form-D is being issued to get Customs clearance.

Starting from 1 January 2021, Form-D is issued by transmitted e-ATIGA Form-D using the electric data exchange system. However, if there is a technical error or internet error, Manual Form-D is being issued with a manual sign instead of e-ATIGA Form-D. —NN/GNLM

Okra growers in Pwintbyu enjoy high price

WITH the abundant yield of okra in Pwintbyu township, the local growers are happy with the high price of okra in the market, according to the local farmers from Nyaung Gone village in Pwintbyu township.

The farmers from the villages near Mann creek in Pwintbyu township, Magway region, are growing okra on a commercial scale using the water irrigated from Mon creek and also the underground water.

We are mainly cultivating gourd, pumpkin, cucumber, eggplant, tomato, chilli, onion, corn, bitter gourd, radish, coriander plant, rose and water green. We are relying on cultivation because it can earn us daily income in the pandemic period. Among other crops, the cultivation of okra is successful, and the okras are sold for a high price,” said U Than Htay Aung, a vegetable grower from Nyaung Gon village.

Okra, or commonly known as lady’s finger, is a widely consumed vegetable. It can be fried, pickled or grilled. This green veggie is filled with phenol and flavonoid. Consuming okra can help people in their fight against cancer in addition to the reduction of stress, can cure kidney and liver diseases and diabetes. People with a high blood glucose level should include okra in their daily diets. —Ye Win Naing (IPRD)/GNLM
China's major carmaker to boost cooperation with Sweden's Volvo

CHINESE carmaker Zhejiang Geely Holding Group said Wednesday that its group company will boost cooperation with Swedish auto manufacturer Volvo, but apparently failed to agree on a previously explored merger.

The Chinese automaker said it will work together with the Swedish manufacturer to develop "connected cars" equipped with advanced telecommunications systems.

Zhejiang Geely completed its acquisition of Volvo in 2010. It has also decided to establish a new firm to produce an electric vehicle in cooperation with China's leading internet search provider Baidu Inc. China has been eager to phase out new sales of gas-powered cars and bring eco-friendly ones to the mainstream by 2035, while President Xi Jinping has pledged to make the country carbon neutral by 2060.

H.K. to book record budget deficit amid worst economic contraction

HONG KONG is likely to see a record high deficit amid the biggest annual economic contraction brought by the novel coronavirus pandemic, the territory's finance chief said Wednesday.

Announcing the annual budget at the legislature, Financial Secretary Paul Chan said the deficit for the 2020 fiscal year, which spans from April to March, is expected to be HK$527.6 billion (US$33.2 billion), while fiscal reserves are expected to be HK$902.7 billion.

"Hong Kong will record a deficit for a number of years after achieving a surplus for 15 years," Chan said. "The deficits are mainly caused by the fact that the rise in government expenditure is outpacing the increase in government revenue." He added that government expenditure increased substantially last year, including HK$120 billion in counter-cyclical relief measures, to alleviate economic hardship caused by the pandemic.

Sri Lanka seeks £1.6 billion from China as reserves shrink

SRI LANKA is seeking £2.2 billion (£1.6 billion) from Chinese banks, the government said on Thursday, in echoes of a borrowing binge more than a decade ago that resulted in the country having to give up a strategic port to China.

An oil refinery facility under construction at Hambantota. Sri Lanka was forced to hand over Hambantota port on a 99-year lease to a Chinese firm in 2017 after Colombo said it was unable to service the $1.4-billion debt from Beijing used to build it. PHOTO: AFP

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An oil refinery facility under construction at Hambantota. Sri Lanka was forced to hand over Hambantota port on a 99-year lease to a Chinese firm in 2017 after Colombo said it was unable to service the $1.4-billion debt from Beijing used to build it. PHOTO: AFP

Money and capital markets minister Nivard Cabraal said the government was hopeful of finalising a £1.5-billion (£1.1 billion) swap facility with China's central bank. "Within the next two weeks we should be able to finalise it," Cabraal told reporters in Colombo while maintaining that the funds would be used as a "buffer" to meet the government's foreign currency needs.

Officials figure show Sri Lanka's foreign reserves plummeted to $4.8 billion (£3.4 billion) at the end of January, the lowest since September 2009 when they fell to $4.2 billion (£2.9 billion).

Officials said Sri Lanka was also in talks with China Development Bank for a $700-million (£496 million) loan that would include the equivalent of $200 million (£142 million) being drawn in Chinese currency. Under former president Mahinda Rajapaksa between 2005-15, Colombo borrowed billions from China, accumulating a mountain of debt for expensive infrastructure projects. This sparked Western and Indian concerns that the strategically located Indian Ocean nation was falling victim to a Chinese debt trap. Mahinda Rajapaksa returned to power as prime minister in 2019 after his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa as elected president. Sri Lanka was forced to hand over its strategic Hambantota port on a 99-year lease to a Chinese company in 2017 after Colombo said it was unable to service the £1.4-billion (£1 billion) debt from Beijing used to build it. — AFP

Indonesia hunts for missing after mine collapse kills six

RESCUERS hunted for at least one person still missing Thursday after an illegal gold mine collapse in Indonesia killed six people.

A landslide Wednesday evening buried the remote site on Sulawesi island’s Parigi Moutong district, where five women and one man died while some 16 survivors were pulled from the debris.

At least one person was still missing, authorities said.

Unlicensed mines are common across the mineral-rich Southeast Asian archipelago and the scene of frequent accidents.

Last year, 11 miners died in Sumatra after a landslide sparked by heavy rains, with another nine people also killed in a landslide at an abandoned gold mine on the island.

In 2019, at least 16 people were buried alive when a mine collapsed in North Sulawesi. — AFP

Six people were killed after an illegal gold mine collapsed in Indonesia. Authorities said at least 15 survivors had been found and at least one person is still missing. PHOTO: AFP

Driverless bus hits streets of Malaga in southern Spain

The electric-powered vehicles operate autonomously, but a driver still needs to sit behind the wheel as Spanish law doesn't allow self-driven vehicles yet. PHOTO: AFP

A new driverless electric bus has begun operating in the southern Spanish city of Malaga, in a project presented as a first in Europe.

The bus, which began running on Saturday, is equipped with sensors and cameras and links Malaga’s port to the city centre on an eight-kilometre (five-mile) loop it does six times a day.

“The bus knows at all times where it is and what is around it,” said Rafael Durban Carmona, who heads the southern division of Spanish transport company Avanza that leads the public-private consortium behind the project.

It can “interact with traffic lights,” which are also equipped with sensors that alert the bus when they turn red, he told AFP. The bus uses artificial intelligence to improve its “decisions” based on data recorded along the route.

The 12-metre (39-foot) vehicle, which looks like any other bus, can carry 60 passengers and was developed by Spanish firm Irizar.

Other driverless pilot projects already exist in Europe, but none of them involves a regular-size urban bus that runs on a normal street with other vehicles.

Despite the advanced technology, there is a driver at the wheel to take control if necessary since Spanish law does not currently allow vehicles to operate without a driver.

“We put it in automatic mode and it runs completely autonomously,” explains Cristobal Maldonado, the driver. — AFP
U.S. economy’s contraction in 2020 unrevised at 3.5%

THE U.S. government on Thursday left the country’s economic contraction for 2020 unchanged at 3.5 per cent in its latest data revision, with the figure representing the worst performance since 1946 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In the October-December period, the U.S. economy expanded an annualized real 4.1 per cent, revised upward by 0.1 percentage point from an earlier estimate, according to the Commerce Department.

The revised data for gross domestic product in the fourth quarter of 2020 was roughly in line with the average market forecast of a 4.2 per cent expansion.

Personal spending, which accounts for two-thirds of the world’s largest economy, increased 2.4 per cent after jumping 41.0 per cent in the July-September period.

Nonresidential private investment, a measure of business spending, rose 14.0 per cent following a 22.9 per cent growth.

Exports grew 21.8 per cent after soaring 59.6 per cent in the preceding quarter. Imports gained 29.6 percent after a 93.1 per cent surge in the July-September period.

GDP measures the total output of goods and services within a country’s borders.

Japan, 7 other economies agree to cut saury catch quotas by 40%

JAPAN, China and six other economies of the North Pacific Fisheries Commission agreed Thursday to cut their saury catch quotas by 40 per cent to 333,750 tonnes per year in order to address fishery resource depletion.

The new catch limit, which was decided during a three-day online meeting through Thursday, will be in place until the end of 2022.

The saury catch limit is currently set at 556,250 tonnes among the eight participating economies, with 330,000 tonnes allocated for high seas and 226,250 tonnes for exclusive economic zones in Japanese and Russian waters. The members have agreed to cut both allocations by 40 per cent to 198,000 tonnes and 135,750 tonnes, respectively.

Tokyo proposed a reduction of the annual catch quotas, first agreed to in 2019, as a way to prevent overfishing in the high seas by China and Taiwan.

According to a national saury fisheries cooperative, Japan’s saury haul in 2020 fell 27 per cent from the previous year to a record low 20,566 tonnes.

China sees acceleration in work resumption after Spring Festival holiday


PHOTO: XINHUA

To prevent the sporadic resurgence of COVID-19, China encouraged people to stay put over the holiday this year, which lasted from Feb. 11 to 17.

EARLIER WORK RESUMPTION

The car plant resumed production on Feb. 14, after a three-day break, when most people were still celebrating the holiday. More than 1,700 employees, or 85 per cent of its staff, clocked in on the first day of work, including over 800 migrant workers who stayed during the holiday. The manufacturing capacity has returned to the pre-holiday level, with 600 to 700 vehicles rolling off the production line per day, according to the company.

“Another production line resumed operation on Feb. 17, whose capacity is around 300 units a day. Cars coming from this assembly line will be exported to Saudi Arabia, Chile and Brazil,” said Xue Wen, an engineer with the company.

Pandemic hits beer sales at brewery

THE world’s largest brewer, AB InBev, said Thursday its annual profits were cut by half in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The group, which includes the Budweiser, Stella Artois and Corona brands, saw 2020 net profit slump to $3.8 billion.

But in the fourth quarter, profits more than doubled to $2.2 billion from $962 million in the same period in 2019 and it forecast “strong recovery” in sales and profits for 2021.

“Following a strong start to the year, our overall results in 2020 were significantly impacted by the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic,” the Belgian-Brazilian brewer said in a statement.

Beer consumption plummeted as lockdown measures were imposed throughout the world since early last year to contain the coronavirus.

But “consumers rapidly adjusted to the new reality by shifting to in-home consumption occasions, increasing adoption of the e-commerce channel and finding new ways to connect with others, reinforcing our confidence in the long-term potential of the beer category,” the group said.

It said sales volumes declined 4.7 per cent, but revenues by just 3.7 per cent to $46.9 billion due to higher pricing.
**OPINION**

Rabies is preventable through vaccination and post-exposure immunization. Yet, nearly 70,000 people still die from the disease every year across the world, mostly in rural areas.

According to a 2018 survey, there are over 4 million dogs in Myanmar, and this number is too high for our development. Nonetheless, if we ensure that human vaccines and immunization are affordable and accessible, we can reduce the fatality rate, which is almost 100 per cent if post-exposure prophylaxis is not given before symptoms develop. Vaccinating 70 per cent of dogs can reduce human cases to zero, and the cost of dog vaccines is much lower than that of post-exposure prophylaxis for human beings.

Wherever we read stories about rabies and animal bites in the media, registration of cats and dogs is the first idea that comes to our head. Registration of cats and dogs is the first step to resolving animal control issues. At the same time, we need to raise awareness about responsible ownership of pets. To ensure responsible pet ownership and to prevent animals from causing a nuisance to the public, registration of stray animals is not being allowed.

This reflects that ownership of pets comes with responsibilities and if one cannot fulfill them, then it is better to forego pets.

Meanwhile, local communities’ education is also a key priority to ensure that people get bitten seek prompt treatment. To achieve a target of no rabies deaths by 2030, we must recognize that rabies elimination is a health priority.

**Long-term Covid should be ‘clear priority’ for authorities: WHO**

“The world is facing a learning opportunity to make a priority of understanding the long-term consequences of coronavirus infections as some people show worrying symptoms months later,” WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said. “There is a clear priority for WHO, and of the utmost importance. It should be for every health authority.”

“It’s a clear priority for WHO, and of the utmost importance. It should be for every health authority,” Hans Kluge, regional director for WHO Europe, told a press conference. While some studies are beginning to shed light on the illness, it is still unclear why some patients with Covid-19 continue to show symptoms for months, including tiredness, brain fog, and cardiac and neurological disorders.

“The burden is real and it is significant. About one in 10 Covid-19 sufferers remain ill after 12 weeks, and many for much longer,” Kluge said.

Noting that reports of long-term symptoms came soon after the disease was first discovered, he said that some patients were “mess with disability or lack of understanding.”

Kluge stated that those patients “need to be heard if we are to understand the long-term consequences and recovery from Covid-19.”

**Covid vaccines block disease, but do they stop infection?**

Several such variants – more contagious, more deadly or both – have already proliferated in England, South Africa and Brazil as the SARS-CoV-2 virus finds it harder to find new hosts, a predictable phase in the evolution of a pandemic.

If it can -- and this is the big question -- we would eventually no longer need to take behavioral measures such as lockdowns or masks to interrupt spread. But here is it that despite hundreds of studies, as well as rigorous clinical trials involving tens of thousands of people and resulting in more than half a dozen successful vaccines, we still do not know yet how well they block infection? SOURCE: AFP

**Responsible pet ownership a step towards curtling rabies**

**Rabies**

Responsible pet ownership is a step towards curtling rabies.

Lately, we have read a few stories about rabies and animal bites in the media, where death of a woman who was bitten by a dog]

**MYANMAR GAZETTE**

Appointment of Permanent Secretary

The State Administration Council has appointed U Min Min, Directer-General of the Union Government Office, as the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce.

Appointment of Head of Civil Services Organization

U Seik Win, Deputy Permanent Secretary (Health) of Union Government Office, Ministry of Health and Sports, is appointed as Director-General for the Union Government Office on probation period with effect from the day of his first duty.

**THE GLOBAL NEWS LIGHT OF MYANMAR**

26 February 2021

Students in Wuhan, China, where COVID-19 was first detected, donned face masks for their graduation ceremonies, joining many around the world for whom masks have become essential.

**THE GLOBAL NEWS LIGHT OF MYANMAR**

26 February 2021

**Appointment of Head of Civil Services Organization**

University of Alabama in Huntsville, UK

Professors and researchers of the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH), US, have announced the discovery of a new type of artificial intelligence (AI) that can learn from medical images.

Dr. Andrew R. Hyatt, an associate professor of computer science and engineering at UAH, said that the team has developed an AI system that can detect early signs of cancer in medical images.

The system, which is called the “Deep Cancer Detector,” can be used to detect early signs of cancer in medical images, such as mammograms or CT scans.

Hyatt said that the system is capable of detecting tumors at an early stage, which is crucial for successful treatment.

The system is trained on a large dataset of medical images, and then it can be used to detect early signs of cancer in new images.

The system is currently being tested on a dataset of 2000 medical images, and the results show that it can accurately detect early signs of cancer in 90% of cases.

Hyatt said that the system has the potential to save lives by detecting cancer at an early stage.

The team plans to continue testing the system on a larger dataset, and to eventually use it in clinical settings.

**FORECAST VALID UNTIL NOON OF THE 26 February, 2021**

Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin State. Degree of certainty: 90%.
Modern South Africa variant-specific vaccine ready for testing

US biotech firm Moderna said Wednesday that doses of its new COVID-19 vaccine candidate aimed at the South African coronavirus variant had been shipped to the US National Institutes of Health for testing.

“We look forward to beginning the clinical study of our variant booster and are grateful for the NIH’s continued collaboration to combat this pandemic,” said CEO Stephane Bancel.

The South African variant is considered among the more dangerous of current mutations because it evades some of the blocking action of antibodies that target the older coronavirus strain.

That means people who were infected with the classic strain are more susceptible to reinfection, and research has also shown the variant has partially reduced the protection of the current generation of vaccines.

While initial testing has shown that Moderna’s original vaccine — called mRNA-1273 — remains effective against emerging variants, the company said it was pursuing the development of a variant-specific vaccine as part of a number of strategies being considered.

Either a South Africa variant-specific candidate, called mRNA-1273.351, could be used as a booster, or the company might use a booster that combines the classic vaccine with the variant-specific mRNA-1273.351 to create a new product. —AFP

Channel Tunnel operator deep in red as virus hits

GETLINK, the operator of the Channel Tunnel link with Britain, reported Thursday a 2020 net loss of 113 million euros due to the coronavirus pandemic and Brexit but said it was confident in the future.

The company, formerly known as Eurotunnel, reported a 2019 net profit of 159 million euros ($193 million).

Revenues were down 25 per cent at 816 million euros last year, with Eurostar passenger services badly hit by the pandemic restrictions and the fallout from Brexit.

Operating profit — the company’s preferred measure — plunged 41 per cent to 328 million euros, an amount described as still “very substantial.

“The company said it had not “burned through cash,” and had also managed to reduce debt during the crisis.

Boss Yann Leriche said the company had put in a “solid” performance in exceptional circumstances caused by the pandemic and Brexit. “We have no doubt that the rebound will be rapid as soon as restrictions are lifted and that the situation will improve, notably thanks to vaccination,” he added.

Qantas posts huge loss, says no international flights until October

Qantas, Australia’s biggest airline says it suffered an underlying loss of Aus$1.3 billion (US$858 million) in the six months to December 31. PHOTO: AFP

AUSTRALIAN carrier Qantas reported on Thursday a US$5.5 billion plunge in revenue during the second half of 2020 and said international passenger flights would not resume until October as the pandemic continued to devastate the industry.

The country’s biggest airline said it suffered an underlying pre-tax loss of Aus$1.63 billion (US$1.14 billion) in the six months to December 31, with statutory losses climbing to Aus$1.47 billion.

“These figures are stark, but they won’t come as a surprise,” said Qantas CEO Alan Joyce.

“A year ago, none of us knew just how big an impact Covid would have on the world, or on aviation. It’s clearly worse than anyone expected,” he said.

“Border closures meant we lost virtually 100 percent of our international flying and 70 per cent of our domestic flying — three-quarters of our revenue — around Aus$7 billion — went with it.”

Joyce noted that the company had already seen revenue fall Aus$4 billion during the first half of 2020, bringing the total impact of the pandemic to Aus$11 billion. “That is a massive number, probably a bigger number than any other company in Australia is experiencing because of Covid,” he told a news conference.—AFP

Mafia eye health, recovery projects in virus-hit Italy

In coronavirus-hit Italy, mafia groups are eyeing the health sector and EU-funded infrastructure projects as their next big money-spinners, police warned in a report Wednesday.

“Significant criminal investments are conceivable in companies operating in the so-called health chain,” Italy’s anti-mafia investigative police (DIA) wrote in a bi-annual report to parliament.

Potential targets include building and renovating hospitals, the production and supply of medical equipment, hospital waste disposal, and sanitary and funeral services, DIA said.

Police also said it was “very likely” that mafia organisations would “try to intercept the new financing channels” set to be made available to upgrade Italy’s infrastructure and modernise its economy.

That is a reference to the more than €200 billion Rome expects to receive from the European Union’s post-coronavirus Recovery Fund over the 2021-2026 period.

DIA called for the “utmost vigilance” on companies bidding for international passenger flights until October

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PHOTO: AFP

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PHOTO: AFP
Nuclear issue key as Iran readies for Rouhani replacement

IRAN will vote in June for a successor to President Hassan Rouhani and his moderate-reformist government, but politics in the country is dominated by the nuclear issue and no frontrunner has emerged.

Several conservative heavyweights are thought to be considering running in the key June 18 race, with the winner to help set the direction of the Islamic republic.

"For the moment, the electoral atmosphere remains cold," political analyst Amir Mohebian told AFP, adding that while politicians "try to warm it up, people are not paying attention".

Following the election of US President Joe Biden, Washington, European powers and Tehran are trying to salvage the troubled 2015 nuclear accord, which granted Iran international sanctions relief in return for restrictions on its nuclear programme.

The accord has been nearing collapse since Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew in 2018 and reimposed crippling sanctions as part of a "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran.

Rouhani, who bet on engagement with the West when Barack Obama was president, has shown a willingness to engage with the incoming Biden administration.

But Rouhani will step down after completing the second of his two consecutive four-year terms allowed under the constitution, and, while Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei remains in charge, the new president will direct his own policy course. —AFP

Libya's new PM to unveil team in first hurdle of transition

Libya's prime minister-designate Abdul Hamid Dbeibah is set to name a transitional government Thursday tasked with unifying the war-torn nation and leading it to elections in December.

Dbeibah, himself selected earlier this month in a UN-sponsored process, will deliver his line-up to Libya's presidential council, before it is submitted to parliament for approval at a venue and date that have yet to be agreed, a member of his office said late Wednesday.

Libya last week marked 10 years since the start of its 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi, plunging the country into a decade of violence and political turmoil.

Today, the oil-rich North African nation is split between two rival administrations, as well as countless militias.

Eneseddin Badi, an analyst at the Geneva-based Global Initiative, warns that Dbeibah faces a rough ride ahead.

While his appointment "temporarily" resulted in support across Libya, he said, those left out "will undoubtedly mobilize to hinder support for his administration."

The new team aims to replace a Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), headed by Fayez al-Sarraj, and a parallel cabinet in eastern Libya backed by military strongman Khalifa Hafter and parliament.

It faces the daunting challenge of addressing the grievances of ordinary Libyans, hit by a dire economic crisis, soaring unemployment, wretched public services and crippling inflation.

Dbeibah, a 61-year-old engineer and businessman who once held posts under Gaddafi, was selected on February 5 by a forum of 75 Libyan delegates at UN-led talks in Switzerland. —AFP

Pakistan, India pledge to end skirmishes along Kashmir frontier

PAKISTAN and India on Thursday pledged to end all firing along their disputed Kashmir frontier, according to a joint statement from their militaries, after months of violence between the nuclear-armed rivals.

The two nations regularly exchange artillery and machine-gun fire along the cease-fire line known as the Line of Control (LoC) that has separated the countries for decades.

"Both sides agreed for strict observance of all agreements, understandings and ceasefire along the Line of Control and all other sectors with effect from midnight," read the statement.

The announcement follows months of clashes with each accusing the other of being responsible for thousands of ceasefire violations in the past year alone.

According to the Pakistan military, approximately 1.7 million civilians live along the LoC and increasingly rely on hundreds of bunkers to shelter during frequent skirmishes.

Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since their acrimonious separation in 1947. The region has been a cause of two of their three wars since then.

The nations agreed in 2003 to a ceasefire along the LoC, which has prevented another full-blown war from erupting but has largely failed to quell the skirmishes.

Both countries claim large portions of the Himalayan region, where India is also fighting an insurgency that has left tens of thousands of Indians dead since 1989.

New Delhi regularly accuses Pakistan of supporting the insurgents. —AFP

German man charged for spying at parliament for Russians

GERMAN prosecutors said Thursday they have filed spying charges against a man suspected of passing floor plans of parliament to Russian secret services, in a new case that risks further inflaming tensions between Berlin and Moscow.

The suspect, a German national named only as Jens F., worked for a company that was repeatedly contracted by the Bundestag to carry out regular checks on electric equipment across parliament premises.

"Against this background, the defendant had access to PDF files with the floor plans of" parliamentary properties, said federal prosecutors.

The suspect is believed to have decided sometime in the summer of 2017 to pass on the information to Russian secret services. —AFP

Australia passes landmark law requiring tech firms to pay for news

AUSTRALIA'S parliament passed landmark legislation Thursday requiring global digital giants to pay for local news content, in a move closely watched around the world.

The law passed easily after a last-minute deal that watered down binding rules Facebook and Google had fiercely opposed in return for the tech giants agreeing to pay local media companies.

The new law paves the way for Google and Facebook to invest tens of millions of dollars in local content deals, and could provide a model for resolving the firms' tussles with regulators worldwide. Google will now pay for news content that appears on its 'Showcase' product, and Facebook is expected to pay providers who appear on its 'Local News' product, which is to be rolled out in Australia later this year.

Regulators had accused the companies, who dominate online advertising, of draining cash away from traditional news organizations while using their content for free. —AFP
Heathrow airport dives into £2.0 bn annual loss

LONDON’S Heathrow airport dived into a pre-tax loss of £2.0 billion (€2.3 bn) last year, a result that “underlines the devastating impact of COVID-19 on aviation”, it said on Wednesday.

The loss reflected a 73 per cent plunge in passengers, Heathrow said in a statement.

The airport, one of the world’s busiest hubs, recorded a pre-tax profit of £546 million in 2019.

Heathrow chief executive John Holland-Kaye, who said passenger levels shrank in 2020 to levels last seen in the 1970s, voiced optimism for the year ahead with Britain vaccinating millions of adults and preparing to exit its virus lockdown.

“We can be hopeful for 2021, with Britain on the cusp of becoming the first country in the world to safely resume international travel and trade at scale,” he said in the earnings statement. “Getting aviation moving again will save thousands of jobs and reinvigorate the economy.”

Heathrow last year had 22 million passengers compared with 81 million in 2019. More than half of the 22 million travelled in the first two months of last year, before the pandemic took hold and governments worldwide implemented national lockdowns.

Holland-Kaye’s revenue meanwhile tumbled 62 per cent to £1.2 billion in 2020, while cargo volumes slid 28 per cent. Heathrow said it has £3.9 billion of liquidity, enough to see it through until 2023.

The airport’s last financial year was notable also owing to Britain’s Supreme Court ruling that it could build a third runway.

“The global economy recover from the crisis, “our first task must be stopping the virus” with worldwide immunization, she said.

But she warned against making the mistake of pulling back too soon on the stimulus which governments have been providing to shore up their economies, saying now is the time to “go big”.

Developing nations have raised the alarm that the pandemic could widen the global divide, echoing the Interna-

“The world’s most advanced nations must work in unison both to continue spending to boost the pandemic-reiced crystal and help the poor nations acquire Cov-

Yellen urges G20 to ‘go big’ with pandemic stimulus

No one nation alone can declare victory over these crises,” Yellen said in a letter to G20 finance officials meeting virtually. “This is a moment made for action and for multilat-

Yellen warned that this would lead to further loss of life and delay the economic recovery, and urged the G20 “to increase their support to meet the high, unmet needs” of global vaccine initiatives like COVAX.

“A rapid and truly global vaccination program is the strongest stimulus we can provide to the global economy,” she said.

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Vodafone prepares to float ‘€15 billion’ tower business

BRITISH mobile phone giant Vodafone on Wednes-

In the battle to help stitch up Europe’s mobile phone networks, Vodafone CEO Nick Read said Thursday. Vodafone prepares to float ‘€15 billion’ tower business

“Europe has raised the alarm that the richest others -- that the richest

Britain’s Supreme Court ruling that it could build a third runway.

China is the strongest

fencing (IFO) on the Frank-

Analysts believe that up to €4 billion could be raised from floating a mi-

Vodafone chief executive Vivek Badrinath said the IPO “sets the foundations for the next stage of our growth within the dynamic towers indus-

Vodafone has raised the alarm that the richest economies around the world are struggling to recover from the pandemic, echo-

Treasur Yellen, who said advanced countries must act together to spend ‘big’ on economic recovery from the pandemic and help poor countries obtain vaccines. PHOTO: AFP

Vodafone prepares to float ‘€15 billion’ tower business

A Vodafone booth at a trade fair in Germany. PHOTO: AFP

Across Europe, driven by data growth, 5G roll-out and regulatory coverage obligations”, Vodafone said in a statement. The initial public offer-

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Daw Yee Mon Aung, (Advocate)
For THE POLO/LAUREN COMPANY, L.P.
c/o Baker & McKenzie Limited

Level 18, Unit 18-03, Sule Square,
221 Sule Pagoda Road, Kyauktada Township,
Yangon, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar.
Dated: 26 February 2021
Large real world study confirms Pfizer Covid vaccine 94% effective

THE Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine has proven 94 per cent effective in a study involving 1.2 million people in Israel, the first peer-reviewed real world research confirming the power of mass immunisation campaigns to bring the pandemic to a close.

The experiment was carried out between December 20, 2020 and February 1, 2021 — a period when a newer variant first identified in Britain was rampant in Israel, making the vaccine’s performance all the more impressive. Around 1.2 million people were divided into equal groups of vaccinated and unvaccinated. Each vaccinated participant was matched to an unvaccinated “control” person of similar age, sex, geographic, medical and other characteristics.

Lead author Noam Barda, head of epidemiology and research at the Clalit Research Institute, told AFP the matching process was highly robust. —AFP

The paper, which was published in the New England Journal of Medicine on Wednesday, also demonstrated there is likely to be a strong protective benefit against infection, a crucial element in breaking onward transmission.

“The fact that the vaccines worked so well in the real world… really does suggest that if the nations of the world can find the will, we now have the means to end Covid-19 forever,” said Ben Neuman, a virologist from Texas A&M University who was not involved in the research.

“Starting this week, the government is imposing a curfew throughout the kingdom from 10 pm (2000 GMT) Thursdays until 6 am Saturdays,” Information Minister Ali al-Ayed said in a statement. Walking to a mosque for Friday prayers, however, is permitted, he said. An existing nightly curfew will begin at 10 pm on Wednesdays.

Bulgaria scraps vaccine priority lists after low take-up

BULGARIANS of all ages, some as young as 20, joined long queues at hospitals this weekend after low uptake on priority lists led the government to open up vaccinations to everyone.

Fewer than a third of those designated as first in line for Covid-19 jabs have chosen to take the offer since they became available in late December.

Many of those queueing this weekend were eager to be among the first non-priority Europeans to get vaccinated, after Bulgaria announced Friday that some hospitals would start administering AstraZeneca shots to anyone.

The decision to scrap its original prioritization lists came after Bulgaria recorded the lowest vaccination rate in the European Union — largely due to worries over side effects and growing distrust of the government and its institutions.

“Other people however were happy to take the place of the sceptics. 

“To be frank, I did not expect that we’d be allowed to go so quickly,” said Denitsa Valkanova, a healthy 31-year-old who got vaccinated together with her mother.

“Friends who live abroad now tell me they will have to wait for another seven or eight months before anything like this could happen,” she added. —AFP

UK drug dealers adapt to lockdown

ILLICIT drug users in Britain have reported few problems maintaining their supply since the first coronavirus lockdown, with around one in 10 purchasing from the dark web, according to a study published Thursday.

USERs reported some difficulties in finding a supplier and a desired drug during the first national lockdown last year, and faced higher prices, according to the online survey of 2,621 respondents carried out by drugs charity Release.

BUT the majority of respondents now “did not report finding a supplier to be more difficult compared to before the arrival of Covid-19”, said lead author Judith Aldridge, with more now seeking deals online.

“At the start of lockdown, many presumed that the drugs market would be severely affected by border closures… and by ‘stay at home’ restrictions.

“We did… observe increased difficulties in purchasing drugs as the first lockdown eased and was lifted, this also coincided with reports of increased prices.”

ONE in 10 purchases reported in the survey were made on dark web markets. Thirteen percent of those using such websites reported that it was the first time they had done so. —AFP

Bangladesh vaccinates sex workers at largest brothel

BANGLADESH has begun administering coronavirus vaccines to sex workers from the country’s largest brothel, a vast warren of shacks home to around 1,900 prostitutes.

THE South Asian nation has so far vaccinated nearly three million people aged 40 or above with the AstraZeneca jab, but has scrapped the age restriction for sex workers at the town of Daulatdia in the country’s west.

“At least 100 sex workers have already got the anti-Covid-19 jabs,” Asif Mahmud, health chief in Daulatdia, told AFP.

“IT is very necessary to vaccinate the sex workers… Thousands of people visit the brothel every day and the sex workers at the massive brothel are most vulnerable to the virus.”

THE country has focused on inoculating the elderly, frontline health workers and security forces since its vaccination drive launched early this month, but plans to eventually cover about 80 per cent of the population.

THE first sex workers from the brothel to receive the jab travelled to a clinic five kilometres (three miles) away, but Mahmud said authorities were also planning a dedicated vaccination centre inside the brothel. —AFP

Jordan reimposes Friday curfew as virus surges

JORDAN has reimposed an all-day curfew on Fridays to stem the spread of coronavirus, as cases rise.

“Starting this week, the government is imposing a curfew throughout the kingdom from 10 pm (2000 GMT) Thursdays until 6 am Saturdays,” Information Minister Ali al-Ayed said in a statement. Walking to a mosque for Friday prayers, however, is permitted, he said. An existing nightly curfew will begin at 10 pm on Wednesdays.

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EU leaders’ summit confronts vaccine rollout woes

EU LEADERS meet Thursday under pressure to speed up Europe’s coronavirus vaccine rollout, and divided over border closures and what introducing vaccine travel certificates could mean.

The video summit for the leaders of the 27-nation bloc comes a year into the Covid-19 crisis, as most of the EU is experiencing a second wave of cases — or a third wave for some — that stubbornly won’t diminish.

And the member states now face outbreaks of more contagious variants from Britain and South Africa.

Brussels has warned six governments, including Germany’s, of unilateral border restrictions, while tourist-dependent countries are piling on the pressure to lift travel barriers in time for summer vacations.

After a sluggish start to the EU vaccination rollout — largely because the EU’s plan was dependent on the vaccine from drugs giant AstraZeneca, which under-delivered — European capitals hope supplies will surge from April as Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna ramp up production.

A one-shot vaccine by Johnson & Johnson could also be approved by mid-March.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen told the German national daily Augsburger Allgemeine that, despite the friction with AstraZeneca, “vaccine manufacturers are our partners in this pandemic”.

Her goal is to have 70 per cent of adults in the European Union vaccinated by mid-September.

Johnson & Johnson Vaccine Highly Effective Against Severe Covid

The vaccine was generally well-tolerated, with no reports of severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis), which have been seen in rare cases for the Pfizer and Moderna shots.

Mild to moderate reactions, like injection-site pain, headache, fatigue and muscle pains were more likely to occur in younger participants than older.

There were no reported deaths in the vaccine group, but five in the placebo group.

The analysis supported a favourable safety profile with no specific safety concerns identified that would preclude issuance of an EUA (emergency use authorization),” the FDA wrote.

One dose, fridge storage

A third vaccine is seen as a vital means to ramp up the immunization rate in the United States, where more than 500,000 people have lost their lives to the coronavirus.

Some 65 million people in America have so far received at least one shot of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines — but unlike those, the J&J vaccine requires just one dose, and is stored at fridge temperatures.

—AFP

China denies using Covid-19 anal swabs on US diplomats

CHINA on Thursday said it had never asked US diplomats to undergo Covid-19 anal swabs, following American media reports that State Department personnel had complained of being subjected to the intrusive test.

China — which has largely brought the virus under control domestically — said last month that anal swabs can be more effective than normal throat and nose swabs as the virus can linger longer in the digestive system.

But Beijing rebuffed reports from Vice and Washington Post — citing US officials — that State Department employees in China had been given the test “in error”, despite diplomats being exempt from the procedure.

“China has never requested US diplomatic personnel in China to undergo anal swabs,” foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said at a regular press briefing Thursday.

Officials in China have used anal swabs to test people it considers at high-risk of contracting Covid-19, including residents of neighbour- hoods with confirmed cases as well as some international travellers. —AFP

New Zealand Coronavirus cluster grows as three new cases registered

NEW ZEALAND reported three new locally transmitted cases of coronavirus on Tuesday, as the cluster in its biggest city of Auckland expanded just days after authorities were forced to impose fresh curbs. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern lifted a brief COVID-19 lockdown in Auckland last week, saying the measures had helped limit the spread of the infection to a family of three.

However, a student from Papatoetoe High School in Auckland was reported to have tested positive for COVID-19 earlier in the day. Health authorities later said that two siblings of the student were also infected with the virus, and have asked everyone linked to the school to get re-tested. Officials have also called on people who had visited specific locations to self-isolate and call local health officials for advice on testing.

Auckland’s nearby 2.2 million residents were plunged into a snap three-day lockdown earlier this month, after a family of three — two adults and a child — were diagnosed with the more transmissible UK variant of coronavirus. —AFP

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Mild to moderate reactions, like injection-site pain, headache, fatigue and muscle pains were more likely to occur in younger participants than older.

There were no reported deaths in the vaccine group, but five in the placebo group.

The analysis supported a favourable safety profile with no specific safety concerns identified that would preclude issuance of an EUA (emergency use authorization),” the FDA wrote.

One dose, fridge storage

A third vaccine is seen as a vital means to ramp up the immunization rate in the United States, where more than 500,000 people have lost their lives to the coronavirus.

Some 65 million people in America have so far received at least one shot of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines — but unlike those, the J&J vaccine requires just one dose, and is stored at fridge temperatures.

—AFP

China denies using Covid-19 anal swabs on US diplomats

CHINA on Thursday said it had never asked US diplomats to undergo Covid-19 anal swabs, following American media reports that State Department personnel had complained of being subjected to the intrusive test.

China — which has largely brought the virus under control domestically — said last month that anal swabs can be more effective than normal throat and nose swabs as the virus can linger longer in the digestive system.

But Beijing rebuffed reports from Vice and Washington Post — citing US officials — that State Department employees in China had been given the test “in error”, despite diplomats being exempt from the procedure.

“China has never requested US diplomatic personnel in China to undergo anal swabs,” foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said at a regular press briefing Thursday.

Officials in China have used anal swabs to test people it considers at high-risk of contracting Covid-19, including residents of neighbourhoods with confirmed cases as well as some international travellers. —AFP

New Zealand Coronavirus cluster grows as three new cases registered

NEW ZEALAND reported three new locally transmitted cases of coronavirus on Tuesday, as the cluster in its biggest city of Auckland expanded just days after authorities were forced to impose fresh curbs. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern lifted a brief COVID-19 lockdown in Auckland last week, saying the measures had helped limit the spread of the infection to a family of three.

However, a student from Papatoetoe High School in Auckland was reported to have tested positive for COVID-19 earlier in the day. Health authorities later said that two siblings of the student were also infected with the virus, and have asked everyone linked to the school to get re-tested. Officials have also called on people who had visited specific locations to self-isolate and call local health officials for advice on testing.

Auckland’s nearby 2.2 million residents were plunged into a snap three-day lockdown earlier this month, after a family of three — two adults and a child — were diagnosed with the more transmissible UK variant of coronavirus. —AFP
Fans, but no cheering, for delayed Olympic torch relay

TOKYO — Spectators will be allowed to line the route when the Olympic flame begins its delayed relay across Japan next month, organizers said Thursday, but cheering will be strictly banned.

The torch relay was scrapped just days before it was due to kick off last year when Japanese and Olympic officials took the unprecedented decision to postpone Tokyo 2020 over the coronavirus pandemic.

Despite persistent concerns about the safety of holding the Games this summer, organizers say the massive event can go ahead and the torch relay will kick off as planned on March 25.

“The infection situation will vary from area to area, so we need to take that into account and it will be very important to have a meticulous approach,” Tokyo 2020 president Seiko Hashimoto told reporters.

“We want to get the understanding of people in every area and connect the whole country under the torch relay concept ‘Hope Lights Our Way.’” —AFP

Mourinho compares ‘diamond’ Spurs teen Scarlett to Rashford

LONDON — Jose Mourinho has compared “diamond” wonderkid Dane Scarlett to Marcus Rashford after the 16-year-old impressed in Tottenham’s 4-0 Europa League win against Wolfsberger.

The Spurs boss took the opportunity to blood some youngsters during Wednesday’s second leg as they cruised into the last 16 of the competition 8-1 on aggregate.

“It was a rare chance for Mourinho to highlight the positives after the worst run of his stellar managerial career.

A dismal run of six defeats in their previous eight games in all competitions had left Tottenham in ninth place in the Premier League and out of the FA Cup.

Winning the Europa League is probably their best chance of qualifying for the Champions League next season.

Scarlett is the first 16-year-old to assist a Europa League goal since Kylian Mbappe in 2015, for Monaco against Tottenham.

His performance reinforced Mourinho’s belief that he is ready to be elevated to the first team squad for next season.

“‘He is a diamond, a kid with incredible potential,’ said the Spurs boss.

“He will be 17 next month and I want him to be part of the first-team squad next season.” —AFP

Mendy’s late strike puts Real Madrid in sight of Champions League quarters

MADRID — Ferland Mendy put Real Madrid within touching distance of the Champions League quarter-finals on Wednesday with the late strike that sank 10-man Atalanta 1-0 in Bergamo.

The French left-back’s curling effort came four minutes from time in a last 16, first leg clash in which the hosts had to play a man down for over 70 minutes, giving Zinedine Zidane’s side the advantage heading into the second leg in Madrid on March 16.

We didn’t have a great game tonight, but the most important thing was the result, scoring away was important for us,” said Zidane.

“It’s a very good result against an Atalanta team even at ten, because they defended very well.

“The tie is open. We are going to have a great return match.”

Atalanta had attacked early but the game was transformed when Swiss midfielder Remo Freuler was harshly send off in the 17th minutes for tripping Mendy at the edge of the penalty area.

Gian Piero Gasperini’s woes continued with forward Duvan Zapata limping off after half an hour with a muscular problem with midfielder Mario Pasalic coming off the bench. —AFP

HANTHARWADY United defender Nyi Nyi Aung retired from football

HANTHARWADY United defender Nyi Nyi Aung retired from football, according to a previous announcement of the football club.

As a greeting, his teammates made a special wish for the player, saying that “May you be peaceful, happy and have a safe life in the future Nyi Nyi Aung”.

Before arriving at the Hantharwady United Football Club, the 31-year-old defender played for the Ministry of Mines Football Club.

Hantharwady United won the championship trophy of the Myanmar National League in 2010, the 5th place in 2011, the fourth in 2018, the fifth in 2019, and bagged second place in 2020, respectively and the defender assisted the team with the best of his effort.

Nyi Nyi Aung played for Hantharwady United for a decade and also showed superb skills in 12 matches in the International Club Invitational Tournament and 147 matches in the Myanmar National League.

He scored one goal in an international tourney and scored another single goal in the domestic league. —GNLM