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PRESS RELEASE

THE informal briefing by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar to the United Nations General Assembly was held on 26 February 2021 at UN Headquarters in New York.

During the briefing, Ambassador/ Permanent Representative U Kyaw Moe Tun gave his statement in which he expressed that he was representing the NLD-led civilian government elected by the people of Myanmar and delivered the message of the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH). He added to support the people who are resisting the Tatmadaw and to render assistance to those people by the International Community, to release detained leaders and to end the military coup.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar instructed all Myanmar Missions abroad not to accept, reply and make any comments on communication such as e-mail and correspondence from the CRPH, which is committing the destructive acts.

Ambassador/ Permanent Representative U Kyaw Moe Tun did not comply with the instruction from the Ministry and committed the act of high treason. He also acted as a representative and followed the instructions of the CRPH, which is an unlawful organization, as well as abused his assigned duty and mandate. Therefore, he was dismissed as a civil servant on the morning of 27 February 2021 in accordance with the Civil Services Personnel Law, rules and regulations.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Nay Pyi Taw
Dated 27 February 2021

Three naval vessels bring 1,086 citizens back from Malaysia

THREE Myanmar naval vessels have already brought back a total of 1,086 Myanmar nationals from Malaysia, according to the Senior-General and officials meeting held on 2 February.

The three naval vessels named Mottama, Thanlwin and Sinphyushin, left Yangon for Lumut Maritime Terminal in Malaysia on 15 February.

The vessels arrived at the Lumut Maritime Terminal on 21 February.

The Myanmar nationals were handed over by Malaysian authorities on 23 February, and healthcare services plus donations for the returnees were provided by the Tatmadaw officials along their trip to Myanmar.

After arriving in Myanmar, Tatmadaw doctors and nurses provided healthcare services to the returnees who are currently staying at the



Naval vessels carrying Myanmar nationals are arriving in Myanmar from Malaysia on 27 February 2021. PHOTO: MNA

Tatmadaw quarantine centres to the officials. fare, Relief and Resettlement opportunities and reunion with Tatmadaw quarantine centres for COVID-19 safety, according Officials from Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Ministry will cooperate for job their families. —MNA

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Effective period for Temporary Measures to Prevent Importation of COVID-19 to Myanmar through Air Travel extended until 31 March 2021

THE effective period for the Temporary Measures to Prevent Importation of COVID-19 to Myanmar through Air Travel issued on 29 March 2020 by the Ministry of Health and Sports was extended up to 28 February 2021, 23:59 hours of Myanmar Standard Time, in line with the approval of the Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment of COVID-19.

As the infection of this disease remains increasing in most of the countries and more infectious variant of the COVID-19 virus first found in Britain has spread to other countries, including Asian nations, the existing effective period will be further extended with the approval of the Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment of COVID-19, until 31 March 2021, 23:59 hours of Myanmar Standard Time.

Ministry of Transport and Communications

Announcement on Extension of the Precautionary Restriction Measures Relating to Control of the COVID-19 Pandemic until 31 March 2021

1. With a view to the further strengthening of measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has issued the following announcements regarding temporary entry restrictions for visitors from all countries. All those restrictions were extended until 28 February 2021 by the Ministry's announcement dated 30 January 2021.
 - (a) Announcement dated 15 March 2020 regarding precautionary measures for all travellers visiting Myanmar;
 - (b) Announcement dated 20 March 2020 regarding additional precautionary measures for travellers visiting Myanmar and temporary suspension of issuance of visa on Arrival and e-visa;
 - (c) Announcement dated 24 March 2020 regarding additional precautionary measures for travellers from all countries visiting Myanmar;
 - (d) Announcement dated 28 March 2020 regarding temporary suspension of all types of visas (including social visit visas) and visa exemption services.
2. In order to continue its effective response measures to protect the population of the country from the risks of importation and spread of the COVID-19, the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has decided to extend the afore-mentioned entry restriction measures until 31 March 2021.
3. In case of urgent official missions or compelling reasons, foreign nationals, including diplomats and United Nations officials, who wish to travel to Myanmar by available relief or special flights, may contact the nearest Myanmar Mission for possible exception with regard to certain visa restrictions. However, all visitors must abide by existing directives issued by the Ministry of Health and Sports relating to the prevention and control of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Nay Pyi Taw

Dated. 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

Sittway-Kyaukpyu cruise resumes with COVID-19 guidelines



Sittway-Kyaukpyu cruise is seen reopening its services. PHOTO: MNA

THE Sittway-Kyaukpyu (coastal direct) cruise from the Inland Water Transport of the Ministry of Transport and Communications resumed in accordance with the COVID-19 disease prevention regulations yesterday morning.

The Sittway-Kyaukpyu (coastal direct) route, operated once a week by the Kissapanadi-3 cruise in the Rakhine branch, was temporarily suspended for the safety of passengers during the rainy season as well as due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Now, in accordance with the guidelines of the Ministry of Health and Sports, it reopens for the convenience of the travellers as the disease is also under control.

The Kissapanadi-3 measures 34.71 metres x 6 metres x 2.70 metres and can carry 150 passengers at a speed of 20 nautical miles per hour. The route is scheduled for the departure from Sittway every Saturday at 6 am and the departure from Kyaukpyu is scheduled for Sunday 7 am.—MNA / GNLM

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

Democratic practices in the country

SECURITY forces are hardly working in their duties in line with international rules; other countries, except the western states, have advised solving the internal problems in line with democratic practices; fraud voter lists are being scrutinized at present and will be announced worldwide; full cooperation of the council members is needed for democratic practices in 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)

Announcement of Union Election Commission 27 February 2021

The Union Election Commission inspected the figures of voting lists in Waingmaw Township of Kachin State and Magway Township of Magway Region in the multiparty democracy general elections held on 8 November 2020.

The findings in the respective townships were as follows:

Sr	Township and polling station	Figure of township Commission	Figure of MoLIP	Voter lists without any scrutiny cards	Same national scrutiny card found three times and above in voter lists	Same national scrutiny card found two times in voter lists
1	Waingmaw Township with 58 polling stations in Kachin State	94,153	77,220	7,605	724	8,934
2	Magway Township with 263 polling stations in Magway Region	242,199	212,688	23,112	3,421	32,998

Union Election Commission

Police to take action against leaders of protests

MYANMAR Police Force announced that they would take action against those who lead the protests in accordance with the law.

The statement said Section 144 of Criminal Procedure was imposed in some townships to protect the safety of people, the rule of law and community peace and to prevent occurring riots, effective 8 February. Despite the order, some cases that seem to oppose the State occurred, and the information team of the State Administration Council released the statement again to take action for violating the stipulations of Section 144 of Criminal Procedure on 26 February.

The protesters gathered at Hledan junction of Kamayut township, Myaynigone overpass of Sandyoung, Pinlon Square of Dagon Myothit (North), 5 junctions of Tamway, near City Hall of Kyauktada, Ocean Centre of Bahan, Singapore Embassy, Inya Myaing road, Insein road and San Yeik Nyein bus stop of Kamayut Township yesterday morning.

The security forces warned to disperse for many times, but



the protest crowds did not disperse. Therefore, the security members used sound bombs to disperse and detained a total of 166 people—106 men and 60 women and seized 4 vehicles and two tents that blocked the roads.

Similarly, the protesters staged strikes at 66th street (between 33th and 34th streets) of Chanayethazan of Mandalay Region, 30th street (between 77th and 78th streets), Manda-

lay railway station, 58th street of Mahaaungmye (between 35th and 36th streets), 62nd street of Mahamyain ward (between 39th and 40th streets). The security forces used sound bombs to disperse and detained a total of 92 people—53 men and 39 women.

Moreover, the security forces also warned not to occur mass gathering at Sin Phyu Yarma Pyathet monastery in Ayetharyar ward of Monwya township

of Sagaing Region in accordance with the law. The security members dispersed the protest crowds by using sound bombs and detained a total of 173 people—104 men and 69 women.

The security forces detained six men in Kawthoung, Myeik and Dawei townships of the Taninthayi Region.

Moreover, about 300 people protested in front of the Pauk township police station of Mag-

way Region, and the police used tear gas to disperse the crowds. Meanwhile, the people gathered in front of the Thiho Shin pagoda of Pakokku township and the security members used the sound bombs to disperse and detained six men.

The security forces also detained a total of 17 people—8 men and 9 women in Mawlamyinegyun township of Ayeyawady Region while 15 people 11 men and 4 women in Hpa-an and at No (1) friendship bridge of Myawady of Kayin State.

The security forces also disperse the protest crowds in Haka Township of Chin State and the security forces detained two women in Waingmaw Township of Kachin State.

The police also dispersed the protest crowds in Mawlamyine township of Mon State and detained two men.

The police will examine the detainees to uncover the leaders of protests against the State and serious action will be taken against them in accordance with the law, the statement said.—MNA/GNLM

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
State Administration Council
Nine Objectives

- 1. Political affairs**

 - (a) Building of a Union based on democracy and federalism in practising genuine disciplined multiparty democracy in a full fairness manner
 - (B) Emphasizing of restoration of eternal peace for the entire nation in line with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA)
 - (c) Continuous practising of the “principle” of peaceful co-existence among countries by holding up the independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy
- 2. Economic affairs**

 - (a) Further development of production based on agriculture and livestock breeding through modern techniques and all-round development of other sectors of the economy as well
- (b) Stability of market economy and inviting international investments to develop the economy of entire ethnic people
 - (c) Encouragement of local businesses to create employment opportunities to be able to produce many products of the State
- 3. Social affairs**

 - (a) For ensuring of dynamism of Union spirit which is genuine patriotic spirit
 - (b) Following customs and traditions of all ethnic nationalities and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national characters
 - (c) Enhancement of health, fitness and education standards of the entire nation

Five future programmes of State Administration Council

- 1. The Union Election Commission will be reconstituted to carry out tasks that should be done, including inspection of voting lists in accordance with the law.
- 2. Effective measures will be taken for the prevention of current infectious COVID-19 with added momentum.
- 3. Efforts will be made to recover businesses that faced loss caused by COVID-19 in various ways as quickly as possible.
- 4. Emphasis will be placed on restoring eternal peace in the entire nation in line with agreements from the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) as much as possible.
- 5. When missions will be accomplished in accord with provisions of the state of emergency, a free and fair multiparty democracy election will be held in accordance with the Constitution (2008), and further tasks will be undertaken to hand over State duty to the winning party meeting the standards of democracy.

Announcement

- 1. The State of Emergency was declared in accord with Section 417 of the Constitution, and the legislative, executive and judicial powers of the State were handed over to the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services. In accordance with sub-section (b) of Section 418 of the Constitution, the members appointed with the approvals of respective Hluttaws were already suspended from their duties from the date of transfer of powers, and the new Union Election Commission was formed according to Section 419 of the Constitution.
- 2. The currently-formed UEC released an announcement dated 5 February 2021. The announcement said, “ The Union Election Commission has begun its investigation on the voting fraud in the 2020 General Election. Therefore, the letters of accreditation issued by the Union Election Commission to the MPs of the respective Hluttaws will have no effects during the investigation period.” The announcement released on 25 February said, “It is illegal to perform the Hluttaw works such as forming committees representing Hluttaw without authority, holding committee meetings, making announcements and notifications and appointment of representatives during the investigation period of UEC.”
- 3. According to Pyithu Hluttaw Rule 5 and Amyotha Hluttaw Rule 5, out of 3 requirement to elect Hluttaw representatives, it states “the elected person must sign and make an affirmation in the presence of Chairman if the Speaker is not selected yet or in the presence of Speaker if selected, in accordance with the appendix (a). Those who do not make an affirmation or take an oath in accord with the stipulations of law are not deemed as Hluttaw representatives.
- 4. Therefore, the formation of “Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH)” by the ones who have no rights to stand as official Hluttaw representatives does not conform to the law and seems to violate the serious crimes. Therefore, it is here announced that not to cooperate with this unofficial committee directly or indirectly, and action will be taken against those who fail to follow.

Information Team
State Administration Council

Announcement

- 1. In the announcement of the Union Election Commission released on 5 February 2021, it said, “The Union Election Commission has begun its investigation on the voting fraud in the 2020 General Election. Therefore, the letters of accreditation issued by the Union Election Commission to the MPs of the respective Hluttaws will have no effects during the investigation period.” Moreover, it is found that those who do not complete taking oath according to Section 125 of the Constitution, Pyithu Hluttaw Rule 5 and Amyotha Hluttaw Rule 5 are not deemed as Hluttaw MPs.
- 2. The announcement of UEC on 25 February also stated, “It is illegal to perform the Hluttaw works such as forming committees representing Hluttaw without authority, holding committee meetings, making announcements and notifications and appointment of representatives during the investigation period of UEC.”
- 3. The formation of “Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH)” by the ones who have no rights to stand as Hluttaw MPs does not conform to the law and seem to violate the serious crimes. Those who do not want to participate in CRPH can report in person to the nearest region/state/ self-administered division or self-administered zones, district administration councils between 28 February and 6 March.
- 4. It is here announced that those who make a report during fixed period will not face action, and if not, serious action will be taken in accordance with the existing laws of the state.

Information Team
State Administration Council

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Departments integrate research and education for mechanized farming

UNION Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation U Tin Htut Oo, accompanied by officials from the respective departments of the ministry, arrived at the Training School for Agricultural Mechanization in Yezin, Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory yesterday morning.

The Union Minister and party discussed the cooperation between the Department of Mechanization Agriculture and the Department of Agricultural Research on applied industrial agriculture research and technology dissemination and inspected the works.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation will integrate all respective departments for the successful transition to mechanized farming; to be able to make full use of the power of the machinery; to increase the productivity



MoALI minister and officials look around the Training school for Agricultural Mechanization in Yezin, Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

per acre and the productivity of individual farm workers; to expand agricultural equipment

research and technology services. The Ministry will speed up

the activities to carry out systematic procedures including soil development from ordi-

nary ploughing; crop production for livestock feed which is the main source of meat production; the full use of machinery in the post-harvest process and the practical demonstration of the use of equipment so that farmers can use the technology in the application of input pesticides effectively and economically and safely.

Similarly, it is also planning to expand agricultural machinery skills training, which will guarantee graduates with direct access to the workplace, including agricultural science and technology.

Agricultural equipment services are growing rapidly in Myanmar, and the current 135 agro-industrial service associations are being supported to be expanded into strong businesses and cooperatives.—MNA

Myanma Railways inspects capacity of railway systems and stations

MYANMA Railways is taking necessary steps to increase the capacity of railway systems and stations to resume the regular transportation services.

Heads of Department and officials from the Myanmar Railways Headquarters boarded the short-distance RBE train and inspected the strength of the railways and bridges, the communication and signal systems and the staffing duties at the stations within 59 miles of the Toungoo-Pyinmana section and within 62 miles of the Pyinmana-Pyawbwe section on 26 and 27 February.

Similarly, officials from the Myanmar Railways (Upper Myanmar) also inspected the

conditions of the railways and 22 stations within 78 miles of the Mandalay-Khinoo railway section with the facilitation of the regional military commands, the police force and general administration departments and relevant departments for the safety and necessary work.

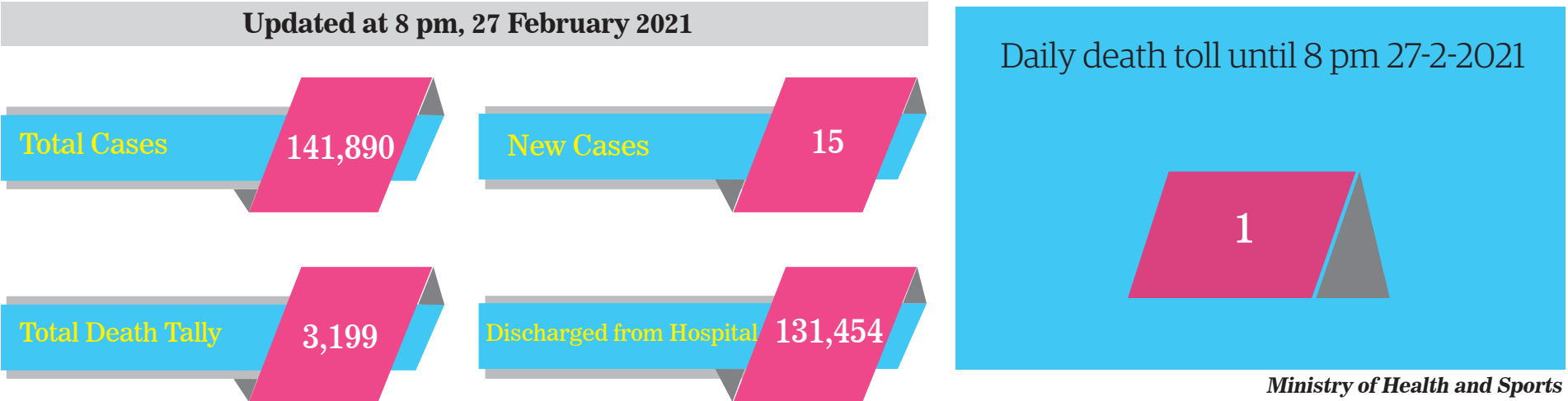
Myanma Railways will soon resume regular services for short-distance and long-distance passenger trains as well as freight trains depending on the strength and durability of important railway lines, transportation system and station conditions. All kinds of railway services in Myanmar have been reduced due to the outbreak of COVID-19.—MNA



Myanma Railways will soon resume regular services for short-distance and long-distance passenger and cargo trains. PHOTO: MNA

15 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 27 February, total figure rises to 141,890

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 141,890 after 15 new cases were reported on 27 February 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these confirmed cases, 3,199 died, 131,454 have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA



Padaung seizes illegal pyinkado lumber from vehicle

ILLEGAL logs were seized from a 10-wheel vehicle that stopped near Milepost 24/6 on Padaung-Taunggup main road, Nyaung Chaydauk village-tract, Padaung township, Bago region on 25 February.

According to the investigation, a combined group comprising the officials from the Forest Department and the village administrators searched a 10-wheel HINO vehicle, which stopped on Padaung-Taunggup main road and found illegal 65 Pyinkado lumber weighing 11.1354 tonnes. This Pyinkado lumber was carried on board the 10-wheel car illegally. The team could not find the vehicle's drivers and conductors.

The police attempted to arrest them. The loggers, the vehicle driver and the helpers, were charged under Section 42(A) of the Forestry Law. —Aung Myint (Padaung)/GNLM



The loggers, the vehicle driver and the helpers, were charged under Section 42(A) of the Forestry Law. **PHOTO: AUNG MYINT (PADAUNG)**

Farmers enjoy high yield of green gram



According to the local farmers, the green gram yields abundantly and has a fair price in Minbu (Sagu) township. **PHOTO: ZEYAR HTET (MINBU)**

ACCORDING to the local farmers, the farmers are happy with the high yield of green grams in U Yin Zin village, Minbu (Sagu) township in the Magway region, and their product's fair prices.

The green grams are being grown by many farmers in that village, and they can earn a good price in the local market. Some are raising the green gram after monsoon paddy cultivation. Some are growing their bean species by supplying the irrigating water.

The green gram needs water during its growing period, seed sowing period and blossoming period. However, the plant will grow well only with the right volume of water. Sufficient moisture should be available within two months of germination. There will be an abundant yield of the green gram if the soil is cool with a little soil moisture from blossoming to harvest season. The high temperature in the blossoming time may affect the yield.

This year, the green gram price has dropped slightly from K41,000 per basket to K38,000 per basket, said Ko Bo Gyi, a local farmer.

Although there are many bean commodity depots in Minbu town, the gap between the different green gram prices is about K500 from one another. According to the local farmers, the green gram yields abundantly and has a fair price in Minbu (Sagu) township.

Myanmar annually produced only over 300,000 tonnes of green grams earlier. Later, more than 600,000 tonnes of green gram were being produced. The country also exported green gram mostly to China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Europe. —Zeyar Htet (Minbu)/GNLM

Growers earn extra income from manageable bottle gourd cultivation



THE local growers earn extra income from a manageable scale bottle gourd cultivation in Kula village, Kyaukse township, Mandalay.

The bottle gourds are growing with natural fertilizer cow dung. The plants of calabashes are raised at least three feet away from each other to have fresh air and enough sunlight.

If the bottle gourds are to be cultivated, the seeds must be germinated to prevent death. Each acre of bottle gourd contains 1,000 plants. The fruits could yield 45 days after growing. The bottle gourds are sold for K300 or K500 per piece depending upon the size. The fruits could be harvested up to 2 months.

The bottle gourds are water-loving plants that need to be irrigated to keep the soil moist. The fruits could yield on alternate days, and the growers could earn daily family income. The bottle gourd is a crop that should be grown, said U Myo Myint, a local grower from Kula village. —Thet Maung (Kyaukse)/GNLM

The bottle gourds are sold for K300 or K500 per piece depending upon the size. The fruits could be harvested up to 2 months. **PHOTO: THET MAUNG (KYAUKSE)**

Request to Public

1. Democracy practices have granted the public freedom of speech, practices and living. Such freedoms should not harm others. Diverse views of others should be understood, but should not be disturbed or harassed. However, with the reason for human rights, some persons are now under pressure, harassed and threatened in breaching the laws. Undisciplined acts could lead to tarnishing the image of democracy.
2. For preventing destructive actions against the stability of the State, the safety of the public and the rule of law, it is also required to take proper actions in line with the law.
3. All the people who favour justice, freedom, equality and safety are requested to oppose breaching the laws and prevent such actions for the benefit of country and people.

UK's decision to focus on age, not occupation enrages police, teachers

BRITAIN'S next phase of novel coronavirus vaccines will be administered based on age rather than occupational risk, an advisory group said yesterday, sparking anger from police and teachers who said they should get priority.

Speaking at a televised press conference yesterday, Health Secretary Matt Hancock said Britain's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization (JCVI) had opted to offer the jab based on age "in order to save most lives".

"This is the fastest and simplest way to roll out the jab. Our moral duty is to put saving lives first, and that's what we've

done," he said.

Britain has vaccinated 19 million people, 35 per cent of all adults, with at least one dose and says it plans to finish the whole population by the end of July.

It is aiming to give a first dose to people over 50 and vulnerable groups by mid-April, before moving onto those in their 40s, followed by those in their 30s and the other over-18s, the JCVI announced earlier yesterday.

Professor Wei Shen Lim, a member of the committee, said it would be speedier to move through groups by age, rather than occupational risk.



Nurse Maggie Clark administers a dose of the AstraZeneca/Oxford COVID-19 vaccine to a patient at a vaccination centre set up at Fiveways Islamic Centre and Mosque in Nottingham, central England, on February 22, 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

"Following an age-based programme will be simple, and simplicity has been one of the cornerstones of the current programme in terms of speed and success," he said. —AFP ■

Mexico's overstretched doctors face another foe: long Covid



At least 1.6 million people are known to have survived Covid-19 in Mexico, but some have debilitating long-term effects. **PHOTO: AFP**

AFTER Areli Torres caught the coronavirus, the fever and headache disappeared in a few days, but she says it took seven months for Mexican doctors to correctly diagnose the debilitating long-term effects.

Her case illustrates the huge challenge that the country's already overwhelmed health system faces helping people with "long Covid" -- the symptoms that sometimes linger long after the infection.

Torres, a 31-year-old engineer, fell ill with the coronavirus last June but the worst of her initial symptoms lasted only four days.

She tested positive three times up to August but decided to try to return to her normal life.

A month after she was infected, however, parts of her body began to go numb.

Now, it is one of her legs that gives her the most discomfort.

"Everything's uncertain. Everything's been an ordeal. I've seen four doctors," Torres said.

The first doctor, from the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS), concluded that it was anxiety and prescribed antidepressants.

Two private doctors, including a neurologist, agreed with that diagnosis.

Torres tried therapy, yoga and exercise but still "half her body was numb," she said.

'Be patient'

It was in February that another doctor identified the problem as inflammation of the nervous system as a result of the coronavirus.

Among other things she was advised to "be patient," although by then she had already had to postpone her wedding.

At least 1.6 million people have survived Covid-19 and around 184,000 have died from it in Mexico, a country of 126 million, according to official figures. —AFP ■

Vanuatu looks to reopen borders with virus-free countries

CORONAVIRUS-free Vanuatu has announced plans to cautiously reopen its borders, starting with a safe travel bubble with its Southwest Pacific neighbour New Caledonia.

From April, the so-called "Tamtam Bubble" will allow access to Efate Island, Vanuatu's largest island and home to the capital Port Vila.

A government spokesman said Saturday that leaders would meet next week "to formalize the Tamtam Travel Bubble between Port Vila and Noumea", the capital of New Caledonia.

Vanuatu Prime Minister Bob Loughman told community leaders that priority would initially be given to people travelling on compassionate grounds for healthcare, education, employment, technical assistance



Children on the Pacific Ocean island of Vanuatu are learning, thanks to UNICEF, how to protect themselves against COVID-19 by proper hand-washing. **PHOTO: UNICEF**

and visiting family and friends.

New Caledonia was chosen because it is "a low-risk country with no active community cases for more than 28 days".

Plans were under way to ex-

tend the bubble to other countries which have been free of Covid-19 for at least a month, with the government spokesman saying Fiji was at the head of the list.

The bubble is named after the tamtam drum, which is common in Melanesian countries as a means of communication and is usually erected in a chief's "nasara" or compound. —AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Party's over: Covid-hit Hollywood cuts the award season glamour

THE weeks building up to Hollywood's awards season are usually a whirlwind of glitzy Los Angeles parties, lavish celebrity "gifting suites" and the raucous Golden Globes themselves -- but not this year.

Not even Tinseltown's glamorous galas could avoid being turned upside-down by the coronavirus pandemic.

"If a studio has a hot film, they will throw a lot of events, and invite people to attend to honour the filmmakers," said Variety awards editor Tim Gray. "Those films seem to become serious contenders because there's so much attention (given) to them."

"I haven't been to any events this year, in honour of a film."

Hopes of a return to the "normal" carousel of VIP Q&A sessions and elite soirees designed to entice voters were dashed long ago, as California was slammed by a staggering winter Covid-19 outbreak. —AFP ■

American incomes surge in January due to pandemic aid

AN injection of pandemic aid filled Americans' wallets last month, though spending rose modestly, according to government data released Friday, giving a boost to the economy as it claws its way back from recession.

A key inflation measure in the data showed prices also are starting to bounce back from the depths of the crisis, which could add to investor's fears about rising borrowing costs amid the recovery.

The \$900 billion Covid-19 stimulus package approved in late December sent \$600 checks to nearly all US workers and extended extra unemployment payments for those who lost their jobs.

As the checks started to roll in, personal incomes surged by 10 per cent -- the second biggest increase on record since the start of this data report began in 1959 -- the Commerce Department said. —AFP ■

For the health of people, restrict tobacco products

The number of deaths caused by cancer, hypertension, and respiratory diseases would be higher in the coming years if the current levels of consumption of tobacco products, including betel quid and cigarettes, do not reduce.

Smoking and consumption of tobacco products kill more than 60,000 people every year in Myanmar. Tobacco products, including cigarettes, can cause at least 16 different cancers of the body, including lung cancer, cancers of the mouth, larynx, pharynx, oesophagus, bladder, kidney, pancreas, liver, cervix, stomach, colon, and rectum.

Tobacco products consumption, including smoking, is the most preventable cause of premature death in our country.

It took researchers at least 50 years to understand that cigarettes cut the lifespan of smokers by 10 years.

Every year, more than 8 million people die from tobacco use, according to data from the World Health Organization. More than 7 million of those deaths are from direct tobacco use, while around 1.2 million are due to exposure to second-hand smoke.

Tobacco products, including cigarettes, can cause at least 16 different cancers of the body, including lung cancer, cancers of the mouth, larynx, pharynx, oesophagus, bladder, kidney, pancreas, liver, cervix, stomach, colon, and rectum.

According to a survey conducted by the WHO in 2014, the prevalence of risk factors for contracting non-communicable diseases was one for 94 per cent of the people and three to five for about 19.6 per cent of the people.

To make the tobacco-free policy — which is a good measure to improve people's health — realistic, we also need to impose fines on businesses that sell tobacco products to kids and in restricted areas.

Most important, we need to make young people understand how incredibly foolhardy it is to inhale and swallow chemicals whose effects we do not understand and which lead to an addiction many cannot escape.

UN Security Council demands COVID-19 vaccine ceasefires; WHO pushes for more action to speed up inoculations

The UN Security Council on Friday unanimously passed a resolution calling on all Member States to support a "sustained humanitarian pause" to local conflicts, in order to allow for COVID-19 vaccinations. Briefing journalists afterwards, World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus argued that more could be done.

While welcoming the historic resolution and upholding the importance of vaccine equity, he said that "concrete steps should be taken" to waive intellectual property rights to increase vaccine production "and get rid of this virus as soon as possible".

"The virus has taken the whole world hostage", Tedros said. "The UN Security Council can do it, if there is political will".

The Council resolution calls for review of specific cases raised by the UN, where access to vaccinations is being hampered and to "consider what further measures may be necessary to ensure such impediments are removed and hostilities paused."

Vaccine deliveries

Tedros noted that Côte d'Ivoire had received its first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine with more to be shipped to other countries in the days and weeks ahead — with the goal of getting vaccination underway in



Ventilators are one of the most important tools hospitals have for keeping Covid-19 patients in the most critical condition alive. **PHOTO: AFP**

all countries within the first 100 days of the year.

Crediting the UN-led vac-

cine initiative COVAX, he said that fragile progress has been made, but that vaccine supplies

and distributions must be accelerated.

However, he warned against

bilateral deals with manufacturers producing vaccines that COVAX is counting on.

"I understand full well that all governments have an obligation to protect their own people. But the best way to do that is by suppressing the virus everywhere at the same time", underscored the WHO chief.

"Now is the time to use every tool to scale up production, including licencing and technology transfer, and where necessary, intellectual property waivers. If not now, then when?", he added.

Yemen: 'Opportunity for peace'

In a bid for more funding, the WHO chief said that Yemen remained the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with more than 20 million people desperately needing assistance. Some five million are at risk of famine, while half a million children under-five risk death without urgent treatment and the continuing spectre of COVID-19.

"This current crisis comes at a time, after years of conflict, when there is now a real opportunity for peace in Yemen. We have to act on it", he said, urging donors to generously support the 2021 Response Plan for \$3.85 billion during a High-Level Pledging Event next Monday.

Strategic Preparedness

Meanwhile, on Wednesday, WHO officially launched its Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) for 2021.

It builds on achievements, focuses on new challenges, such as mitigating risks related to new variants, and considers the road towards the safe, equitable and effective delivery of diagnostics and vaccines as part of the overall strategy to successfully tackle the pandemic, according to the WHO chief.

"The 2021 SPRP outlines how WHO will support countries in meeting these objectives, and the resources we need to do it", he said.

SOURCE: UN News

US expert panel recommends authorizing J&J Covid vaccine

A US panel of independent experts voted unanimously Friday in favor of recommending Johnson & Johnson's one-dose Covid-19 shot for emergency approval, clearing the way for a third vaccine to soon begin shipping in the world's hardest hit country.

The committee's 22 members were convened by the Food and Drug Administration and included leading scientists as well as consumer and industry representatives.

Although their recommendations aren't binding, they are usually followed.

An emergency use authorization (EUA) will likely follow, probably in the coming days,

making the J&J vaccine the third to be greenlighted in the United States after Pfizer's and Moderna's were provisionally approved in December.

"We've all seen the news about (the) Johnson and Johnson vaccine today — (the) third, safe effective vaccine," President Joe Biden said from Houston shortly after the vote.

"We're going to use every conceivable way to expand manufacturing of the vaccine... and make even more rapid progress in getting (shots) to people's arms."

Administration officials said this week they hoped to deliver three to four million doses next week.

The recommendation fol-

lowed a day-long, live-streamed virtual meeting to decide if the known benefits of the drug outweigh its known risks for use in people aged 18 and over — which gave the public an inside look at the details of the scientific debate.

"Janssen's vaccine candidate will play a critical role in the global efforts to fight Covid-19," Johan Van Hoof, global head of vaccines research and development at J&J's Janssen subsidiary, had told the meeting, emphasizing the shot's high efficacy against severe Covid-19, including against new variants.

He also stressed the fact that it was proven to work with a single shot, and could be stored long term at fridge temperatures,

which "offers logistical and practical advantages."

Placebo crossover

In a global trial of almost 40,000 people, the vaccine's efficacy against severe disease was 85.4 percent, but it fell to 66.1 percent when including moderate forms of the disease.

This makes it slightly less protective than Pfizer and Moderna's two-shot regimens, which both have an efficacy of around 95 per cent against symptomatic Covid-19.

Nevertheless, experts say J&J's shot will bring to bear a powerful new weapon against the outbreak in the United States, where more than 500,000 people have died.

Van Hoof said that if authorized, J&J would apply to amend their trials so that people who received the placebo could now receive the vaccine.

The idea is to compare relative efficacy between people who were vaccinated earlier against later, to see if immunity wanes over time.

The company is also planning to soon begin testing its vaccine on children.

It is separately studying whether two doses might be more protective than one — which raised concerns among some panelists who felt people who got one dose might feel short-changed if two doses ends up proving more effective.

Anaphylaxis case

During J&J's presentation, company scientist Macaya Douguilh revealed that a case of anaphylaxis occurred in a health worker in South Africa — the first time this has happened for the shot.

Some rare anaphylaxis cases have been reported for the Pfizer and Moderna shots.

In almost 44,000 people studied for safety issues, the vaccine was well tolerated, with typical side-effects like injection-site pain, headache, fatigue and muscle pains. There were a handful of cases of people who developed hives, which could have been linked to the shot.

SOURCE: AFP

Objectives of 76th Anniversary Armed Forces Day

FOR the Tatmadaw to join hands with the entire nation to safeguard democracy, which is the aspiration of all the nationalities of the country, from deviating from its path, in accord with the basic principles of the Constitution, while observing Our Three Main National Causes, which is the national policy;

To protect the people from all dangers including natural disasters at any time and in any situation and to provide all-round assistance for ensuring social security of the people;

To restore eternal peace based on NCA, without deviating from Our Three Main National Causes, as the cessation of armed conflicts is the principal requirement in realizing democracy;

To build a strong and compact Standard Army, which has the combat prowess and combat power, to effectively safeguard the State peace and stability and sovereignty.

Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7: 00 pm Saturday 27 February 2021)

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL NOON OF THE 28 February 2021: Light rain or thundershowers are likely to be isolated in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin State. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Taninthayi Region and Shan, Chin, Kayah, Kayin and Mon states and generally fair in the remaining regions and states.

STATE OF THE SEA: Seas will be moderate in Myanmar waters. Wave height will be about (4-7) feet off and along Myanmar Coasts.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of isolated light rain or thundershowers in Kachin State.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 28 February 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 28 February 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 28 February 2021: Generally fair weather.

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Iran suspected in explosion on Israeli-owned ship in Arabia Sea



Israeli navy ships manoeuvre at the military port of Ashdod, southern Israel, on July 29, 2018. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

AN international intelligence firm pointed to Iran as possibly being behind an explosion that struck an Israeli-owned cargo ship sailing out of the Middle East on Friday, an unexplained blast renewing concerns about ship security amid escalating tensions between the US and Iran.

The crew and vessel were safe, according to the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, which is run by the British navy. The explosion forced the vessel to head to the nearest port.

The site of the blast, the Gulf of Oman, saw a series of explosions in 2019 that the US Navy blamed on Iran against

the backdrop of steeply rising threats between former US President Donald Trump and Iranian leaders. Tehran denied the accusations, which came amid heightened tensions over Tehran's tattered 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Dryad Global, a maritime intelligence firm, identified the vessel as the MV Helios Ray, a Bahaman-flagged roll-on, roll-off vehicle cargo ship.

Satellite-tracking data from website MarineTraffic.com showed the Helios Ray had been nearly entering the Arabian Sea around 0600 GMT Friday before it suddenly turned around and began heading back toward the Strait of Hormuz. It still listed

Singapore as its destination on its tracker.

A United Nations ship database identified the vessel's owners as a Tel Aviv-based firm called Ray Shipping Ltd. Calls to Ray Shipping rang unanswered Friday.

The US Navy's Bahrain-based 5th Fleet was "aware and monitoring" the situation, Cmdr. Rebecca Rebarich told The Associated Press. She declined to immediately comment further.

While the circumstances of the explosion remain unclear, Dryad Global, said it was very possible the blast stemmed from "asymmetric activity by Iranian military". —AFP ■

WHO-backed policy brief calls for action to address 'long COVID'

WITH one in 10 people still feeling ill 12 weeks after having COVID-19, authorities must do more to support them, a UN-backed policy brief issued on Thursday argues.

The document summarizes what is known so far about "long COVID" and how countries are addressing the condition, whose troubling symptoms include severe fatigue and increased damage to the heart, lungs and brain.

The policy brief was published by the World Health Organization's (WHO) Regional Office for Europe and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies.

Struggling to be taken seriously

Dr Hans Kluge, WHO's Regional Director, said long COVID is an extra cause for concern amid the pandemic, which has already caused immense suf-

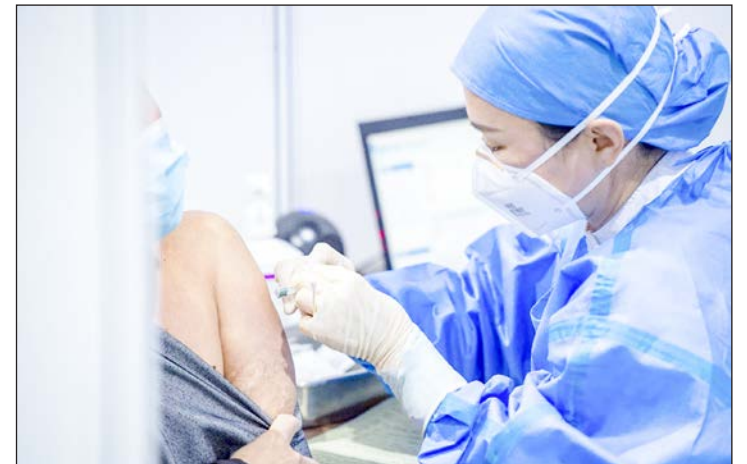
fering.

"It's important that patients reporting with symptoms of long COVID are included as part of the COVID-19 response to mitigate some of the longer-term health impacts of the pandemic", he said.

Long COVID is not fully understood, but available data indicate that roughly a quarter of people suffer from symptoms four to five weeks after testing positive for the coronavirus, and about one in 10 still experiences symptoms after 12 weeks.

Patients, who include medical professionals, struggle to be taken seriously. They report feeling stigmatized and unable to get a diagnosis, receiving "dis-jointed" care, while also facing problems in accessing health and disability benefits.

Involve patients in research and response. —UN News ■



A man receives the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccination at a temporary centre in Beijing. **PHOTO: AFP**

Airbus reveals carbon footprint of its planes

AIRBUS unveiled on Friday the carbon footprint of its aircraft, a move that will help measure progress made by the aviation industry towards its goal of reducing emissions.

It is the first time an aircraft manufacturer has released lifetime carbon emissions of its aircraft, and Airbus Executive VP Corporate Affairs Julie Kitcher said it was an opportunity to increase transparency in the sector. "We really want to demonstrate our commitment to driving decarbonization of the sector," she said.

The industry currently represents two per cent of global CO2 emissions, according to the International Civil Aviation Organization, but a

forecast rise in passenger air traffic means it could add more pollution to the skies unless measures are taken rapidly.

And between the "flyskam" movement, a Swedish neologism meaning "flight shame", to increasing social responsibility expectations among investors, the industry is under mounting pressure to meet its promise to cut its carbon emissions by half from 2005 levels by 2050.

Airbus calculated that the 863 planes that it delivered in 2019 will emit 740 million tonnes of CO2 during an estimated 22 years in service. As a point of comparison, France is estimated to have emitted 441 million tonnes of CO2 in 2019. —AFP ■

Norwegian Air posts record loss on pandemic, writedowns

LOW-cost Norwegian Air Shuttle, currently under bankruptcy protection as it battles for survival, posted a record loss in 2020 due to the pandemic and massive writedowns, the company said on Friday.

Placed under bankruptcy protection in both Ireland and Norway, the no-frills carrier

posted a net loss of 23 billion kroner (€2.2 billion) last year, or 15 times the loss registered a year earlier of 1.6 billion kroner.

Like other airlines, the company has been hard hit by the dramatic drop in air travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But it also registered a mammoth impairment loss of 12.8 billion

kroner in the fourth quarter to take into account the planned reduction of its fleet.

The company had 140 aircraft pre-pandemic, a number set to be slashed to 53 over the coming months providing Norwegian can find buyers, strike deals with leasing companies and cancel existing orders.

Teetering on the edge of collapse, the company is also trying to secure massive reduction of its debt from creditors, from around 67 billion kroner at the end of the third quarter to 20 billion kroner. It hopes to emerge as a slimmer airline and has already dropped its long-haul operations – where it was a pioneer in the low-cost segment – to instead focus on the Nordic market. —AFP ■



Norwegian Air Shuttle CEO Jacob Schram. **PHOTO: AFP**

New Zealand’s largest city back in lockdown as Covid lingers

PRIME Minister Jacinda Ardern ordered New Zealand’s largest city back into lockdown on Saturday as Covid-19 cases continued to be detected in the community.

The latest restrictions in Auckland will last at least seven days and come less than two weeks after a three-day shutdown in the city.

Ardern said a new coronavirus case confirmed on Saturday could not be directly connected to other positive tests over the last two weeks, although a school in South Auckland was a common link.

From Sunday morning the city’s 1.7 million residents must stay at home except for essential shopping and work.

Schools and non-essential shops will close, and entry in and out of the city will be restricted.

The remainder of the country will be under level two restrictions which include limits on the size of public gatherings.

Ardern said there was “cause for concern” that the latest case involved a person who had been infectious for a week but had not been in isolation.



The latest restrictions in Auckland come less than two weeks after a three-day shutdown in the city. PHOTO: AFP

Since the latest outbreak first emerged in a family of three, several people have reported symptoms, with the school in South Auckland the connecting factor. Ardern blamed the creeping spread of community infection on people not isolating when they should have been.

In the latest case the person visited a doctor on Friday and then went to the gym.

“It’s frustrating,” Ardern said.

Authorities have the ability to take enforcement action against rule breakers but that needed to be balanced with en-

suring people with symptoms came forward, the prime minister added.

“We will always weigh up, are we creating an environment where people will be open and honest?” she said.

“We are dealing with young people here and what we ask them to do is share with us their entire lives, and it’s very important that we have a situation where people are able and willing to do that.” New Zealand has been widely praised for its handling of the pandemic, with just 25 deaths in a population of five million. —AFP ■

South Africa receives second batch of Johnson & Johnson jabs



South Africa on Saturday received its second consignment of Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccines, the health minister said, as the continent’s hardest-hit country scrambles to shore up its inoculation drive. PHOTO: AFP

SOUTH Africa on Saturday received its second consignment of Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccines, the health minister said, as the continent’s hardest-hit country scrambles to shore up its inoculation drive.

The country of almost 59 million people, which has seen nearly 50,000 succumb to the vi-

rus, has been widely criticised for a slow procurement of vaccines and lack of strategy.

Health minister Zweli Mkhize tweeted that the second tranche of Johnson & Johnson vaccines had touched down at OR Tambo International airport.

“It comes as the majority of initial doses received two weeks

ago have been administered to healthcare workers,” Mkhize tweeted as the precious cargo landed in the financial capital Johannesburg.

According to the ministry over 63,600 healthcare workers have been vaccinated since inoculations began 11 days ago. —AFP ■

Ecuador’s health minister resigns over vaccine queue-jumping

ECUADOR’S health minister Juan Carlos Zevallos resigned Friday in the latest scandal to hit a South American government over well-connected citizens jumping the queue for coronavirus vaccines.

Zevallos has admitted that his mother, 87, and “several” others close to him had received a shot among the 42,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine the country has reserved for workers in health care and old age homes.

Announcing the resignation on Twitter, President Lenin Moreno thanked his now ex-minister for his work during the pandemic that he said “helped save hundreds of thousands of lives.”

Zevallos, now under investigation, occupied the health ministry for 11 months. He said he decided to resign “given the current political situation and in order to allow continuity” of the vaccination campaign that began in January. —AFP ■



Ecuador’s health minister Juan Carlos Zevallos resigned Friday in the latest scandal to hit a South American government over well-connected citizens jumping the queue for coronavirus vaccines. PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Brazil states tighten Covid restrictions as virus rages

Brazilian cities and states have been imposing a new round of restrictions in a bid to contain a surge of Covid-19 cases threatening to overwhelm their already stretched hospitals. Brazil, whose death toll passed 250,000 Thursday, is struggling to deal with a rising tide of infections that has pushed intensive care units close to the brink in a worrying number of flashpoints. The country continues to have a piecemeal response to the new coronavirus, with individual cities and states setting their own policies in the face of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro’s repeated attacks on restrictive measures and face masks. —AFP ■

Estonia tightens measures against ‘critical’ virus surge

The spread of Covid in Estonia is reaching critical proportions, a top health official warned on Friday, as the government tightened restrictions to fight one of Europe’s highest per capita contagion rates. Estonia’s infection rate is currently running at 887.75 per 100,000 inhabitants on a 7-day average and the pace is growing fast, officials said. “The situation is highly critical,” Ullar Lanno, head of Estonia’s Health Board, told reporters. Lanno said hospitals were working at the limits of their capacity and planned vaccination centres may have to be used as Covid-19 wards instead. Estonia, an EU member state of 1.3 million people, was largely spared during the first and second waves of the pandemic that have swept through the rest of Europe but has struggled during the current third wave. —AFP ■

US \$1.9 trillion COVID relief package clears US House, heads to Senate

THE US House passed an enormous, \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package early Saturday, hailed by Democrats as a critical step in funnelling new funding toward vaccinations, overburdened local governments, and millions of families devastated by the pandemic.

Four days after the Covid-19 death toll surpassed 500,000 in the United States, the sprawling measure backed by President Joe Biden and seen as a moral imperative by many now heads to the Senate for consideration next week.

“After 12 months of death and despair, the American recovery begins tonight,” congressman Brendan Boyle told the House chamber shortly before



A man walks down 34th Street in midtown Manhattan in New York City on February 26. **PHOTO: AFP**

lawmakers approved the package on a rare post-midnight vote of 219 to 212.

No Republicans voted for the bill.

The sharply partisan result

for Democrats, when a key Senate official ruled Thursday that the final version of the bill cannot include a minimum wage hike.

Biden had campaigned extensively on raising the national minimum wage to \$15 an hour, from a rate of \$7.25 that has stood since 2009.

He aimed to include it in the rescue plan, which directly provides \$1,400 checks to most Americans and allots billions of dollars to boost vaccine delivery, help schools re-open and fund state and local governments.

It extends unemployment benefits, set to expire mid-March, by about six months, as well as a moratorium on evictions for millions of people struggling to pay rent. —AFP ■

Britain says farewell to pandemic hero Captain Tom Moore



Soldiers from the British Army's Yorkshire Regiment carry the coffin of Captain Tom Moore during his funeral service at Bedford Crematorium in Bedford, north of London. **PHOTO: JOE GIDDENS/POOL/AFP**

BRITAIN bid farewell on Saturday to Captain Tom Moore with a televised funeral for the 100-year-old war veteran who

became a global hero for his extraordinary fundraising efforts during the pandemic.

Soldiers formed a guard of honour at the small ceremony held by Moore's family at a crematorium in Bedford in central England. Six soldiers from the Yorkshire Regiment, the successor to the one Moore served in during World War II, carried his coffin, draped with the Union Jack and his military cap and sword as 14 soldiers gave a firing salute. A World War II-era plane from a nearby RAF base flew over the crematorium and later a bugler sounded the Last Post, followed by a minute's silence.

“The Armed Forces are immensely proud to contribute to the celebration of his extraordinary life of service,” the defence ministry said in a statement.

Moore died on February 2 after being treated for pneumonia and testing positive for Covid-19.

He raised nearly £33 million (\$45 million, €37.4 million) for healthcare charities by completing 100 lengths of his garden before his 100th birthday in April last year. The image of the stooped but dapper veteran, leaning on his walking frame and rarely seen without shining military service medals pinned to his blazer, and a regimental tie, was a rare good news story in a gloomy year. —AFP ■

New protests over writer's death in Bangladesh jail

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Saturday shrugged off criticism of her government's rights record as hundreds marched in a second day of protests over the death of a prominent writer in prison.

Demonstrators marched at Dhaka University chanting slogans condemning the government's treatment of dissident Mushtaq Ahmed as well as other journalists and activists.

Another protest was staged at the National Press Club, while dozens of people carried a symbolic coffin to Hasina's office demanding the scrapping of the Digital Security Act (DSA) under which Ahmed was detained last May. The protests followed clashes between police and security forces in the capital on Friday night. Police said six people were arrested while activists said at least 30 were injured.

'Custodial murder'

The wide-ranging DSA has been used to crack down on dissent since it was enacted in 2018.

Speaking Saturday at a rare press conference to mark a UN recommendation that Bangladesh be reclassified as a 'developing' economy, Prime Minister Hasina -- who has been in office for 12 years -- brushed aside international concerns over the

law and Ahmed's death.

“No death is desired. It is also not desired that unrest will be created,” she said. —AFP ■



Protesters were out in the Bangladesh capital Dhaka on Saturday demanding the repeal of the country's Digital Security Act. **PHOTO: AFP**

NEWS IN BRIEF

Russians mark sixth anniversary of Kremlin critic's murder

SEVERAL thousand Russians along with Western diplomats gathered in Moscow on Saturday to mark the sixth anniversary of the assassination of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov.

Nemtsov was one of President Vladimir Putin's loudest critics until he was shot and killed on a Moscow bridge near the Kremlin on February 27, 2015.

The sixth anniversary of his death comes after Putin's current most prominent critic Alexei Navalny was sent to a penal colony this week to serve a nearly three-year term he denounces as politically motivated. Beginning Saturday morning, a steady stream of Russians and Western diplomats took turns laying flowers at a makeshift memorial at the spot where Nemtsov was felled with four bullets. —AFP ■

Dissident leader Ferrer released by Cuba: supporter

LEADING Cuban dissident Jose Daniel Ferrer was released late Friday after 10 hours in police custody and ordered by a judge to end his political activities, he said.

Ferrer denounced his “violent and arbitrary detention” in a video posted to the YouTube channel of the banned opposition organization he leads, the Patriotic Union of Cuba (UNPACU). Ferrer, one of the most recognizable dissidents who has chosen to stay in Cuba rather than go into exile, had been under house arrest before being taken into custody.

He was jailed in 2003 after leading calls for democratic political reforms.

Released in 2011 following pressure from the Roman Catholic Church, he formed UNPACU.

An activist said police had entered Ferrer's house -- the organization's national headquarters in Santiago de Cuba, around 550 miles (900 kilometres) southeast of Havana -- and taken him out through the back door. —AFP ■

G-20 finance chiefs agree on more aid to vulnerable nations, stimulus

THE finance chiefs of the Group of 20 advanced and emerging economies agreed Friday to continue supporting low-income nations and avoid a “premature” withdrawal of fiscal and monetary stimulus as economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic is still fragile and uneven.

After a virtual meeting, Italian Finance Minister Daniele Franco said the group agreed to bolster international coordination in tackling global challenges as the equitable distribution of vaccines is seen as critical in containing the COVID-19 crisis globally.

“The pandemic is hit-



Finance chiefs from the Group of 20 economies attend a virtual meeting on Feb. 26. PHOTO: KYODO

ting weaker economies more severely. This risks jeopardizing development prospects, especially in Af-

rican countries,” the Italian minister said in an on-line press conference after the meeting. Italy holds the

rotating G-20 presidency. The meeting of the G-20 finance ministers and central bank governors

was the first since U.S. President Joe Biden took office in January and shifted course from his predecessor Donald Trump, who shunned multilateral engagement in pursuit of national interests.

Multilateral coordination and cooperation are taking on greater importance to overcome the pandemic and chart a path to economic recovery. The rollout of vaccines has raised hope for further recovery of the world’s economy, which is now projected by the International Monetary Fund to grow 5.5 percent this year after a severe hit in 2020 from dras-

tic lockdown measures and travel restrictions to stop the spread of the virus.

“I called for further G-20 unity in supporting low-income countries as the gap is widening (with richer countries) in vaccinations in addition to their lagging economic recovery,” Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso told reporters.

Aso said the G-20 countries need to remain vigilant against uncertainties, noting that “competition” continues between progress in vaccinations and the emergence of new coronavirus variants. — AFP ■

ANA to offer digital in-flight magazines to cut carbon emissions

ALL Nippon Airways Co. has said it will offer digital in-flight magazines and newspapers from April to help reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Planes will be lighter as they will no longer carry printed versions, saving fuel and slashing carbon footprints by an estimated 10,690 tons per year.

The airline said the move is expected to cut annual paper usage by 1,540 tons and costs by 530 million yen (\$5 million) per year. The digitalization of in-flight pub-

lications comes as the company, hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, is planning to reduce its workforce by roughly 20 percent over the next five years through natural attrition, sources familiar with the matter have said. According to ANA, its Tsubasa Global Wings in-flight magazine will be available online and via the airline’s mobile application from the April issue. For passengers who prefer printed versions, the company will offer smaller-sized booklets.

Passengers will be able to download the in-flight magazines as well as newspapers through the app up to 24 hours prior to scheduled departure times and the content will remain available for download up to 24 hours after their scheduled arrival.

While all passengers will be able to access the digital magazines, the digital newspapers will not be available to those traveling in economy class, the airline said. — Kyodo News ■



Photo shows the cover of an All Nippon Airways Co. in-flight magazine displayed on a smartphone. PHOTO: ALL NIPPON AIR

Brazil unemployment dips, but sets record in 2020

BRAZIL’S unemployment rate dipped in the fourth quarter, but set an annual record in 2020 with a monthly average of 13.5 percent as the coronavirus pandemic battered Latin America’s biggest economy, officials said Friday.

The jobless rate was 13.9 percent for the period from October to December, said the national statistics institute, IBGE, which measures the indicator in sliding three-month intervals.

That was down from 14.1 percent for September-November and the all-time high of 14.6 percent for July-September.

But unemployment remains a major concern as Brazil struggles to bounce back from the economic havoc of Covid-19

and contain a second wave that threatens to be worse than the first.

The yearly average jobless rate was the highest since the current measurement was introduced in 2012. In 2019, the rate was 11.9 percent.

“For the first time

in the annual series, less than half the working-age population was occupied in the country,” IBGE analyst Adriana Beringuy said in a statement. “In 2020, the level was 49.4 percent,” including non-workers and those who had given up looking for work, she said.

Brazil’s death toll from Covid-19 passed 250,000 Thursday, the second-highest worldwide, after the United States.

President Jair Bolsonaro faces criticism for flouting expert advice on handling the pandemic. — AFP ■



In this file photo taken on June 11, 2019 unemployed people look for job opportunities at a governmental workers service department in Sao Paulo, Brazil. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V ISEACO GENESIS VOY. NO. (116N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V ISEACO GENESIS VOY. NO. (116N/S)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **28-2-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **HPT** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA LINES

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V KOTA HALUS VOY. NO. (KHLU0168N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V KOTA HALUS VOY. NO. (KHLU0168N/S)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **28-2-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **AWPT** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S ADVANCE CONTAINER LINES

Prince Harry: British press were ‘destroying my mental health’

BRITAIN’S Prince Harry said in a rare one-on-one interview that he left royal life because the British press was “destroying” his mental health, and revealed he watches “The Crown”.

Harry gave an intimate insight into his young family’s new life in Los Angeles during an open-top bus tour of the city with “The Late Late Show” host James Corden.

“We all know what the British press can be like, and it was destroying my mental health,” said Harry, who relocated to the United States with wife Meghan Markle last year.

“I was, like, this is toxic. So I did what any husband and

what any father would do. I need to get my family out of here.”

Harry and Markle’s shock announcement in January 2020 that they were stepping back from royal duties rocked Britain’s royal family, with British newspapers dubbing it “Mex-it”.

Earlier this month, Buckingham Palace announced that the couple had permanently quit royal duties following a one-year review of the new arrangement. Queen Elizabeth II ordered the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, as they are formally known, to relinquish their honorary titles and patronages.

—AFP ■



Britain’s Prince Harry said in a rare one-on-one interview that he left royal life because the British press was “destroying” his mental health, and revealed he watches “The Crown”. **PHOTO: AFP**

Victims of mid-February Nigeria school abduction freed

KIDNAPPERS have freed 42 people, including 27 children, snatched from a school in central Nigeria 10 days ago, officials said Saturday, a day after gunmen abducted more than 300 schoolgirls in the northwest.

“The abducted students, staff and relatives of Government Science College Kagara have regained their freedom and have been received by the Niger state government,” Niger state

governor Abubakar Sani Bello said on Twitter.

In mid-February, gunmen in military uniforms raided the college, killing one student and taking 42 others. They included 27 schoolboys, three teachers and other relatives of school staff, officials said.

Northwest and central Nigeria have seen a surge in attacks by heavily armed criminal gangs raiding villages, killing and ab-

ducting residents after looting and torching homes.

On Friday, in the Jangebe, a village in Zamfara state, a gang attacked the Government Girls Science Secondary School.

It was the country’s third school attack in less than three months -- a series that has revived traumatic memories of the “Chibok girls” kidnapped by jihadists nearly seven years ago. —AFP ■

Haiti prison breakout leaves 25 dead, 200 inmates on the run

MORE than 200 prisoners were on the run in Haiti on Friday, a day after they escaped from jail in a violent breakout that left 25 people dead including the prison director, officials said.

About 400 inmates fled on Thursday, with AFP photographs showing at least three dead bodies lying outside the prison and some captured prisoners under armed guard in the back of a truck.

“Twenty-five people died including six prisoners and Divisional Inspector Paul Hector Joseph who was in charge of the prison,” Secretary of Communication Frantz Exantus said of the mass escape from the jail in the suburbs of capital Port-au-Prince. “Among those killed



More than 200 prisoners were on the run in Haiti on Friday, a day after they escaped from jail in a violent breakout that left 25 people dead including the prison director, officials said. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

were some ordinary citizens who were killed by the prisoners during their escape.” About 200 prisoners were still at large, but “the police are working hard to get them back. Some are in handcuffs, they will not be able

to go far,” Exantus said. One of the prisoners who died was gang leader Arnel Joseph, who was gunned down on Friday at a police check 120 kilometres (75 miles) north of the prison. —AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Family of UK man held in India appeal to PM for help

THE son of a British man held in India -- in a case linked with a Dubai princess who claims she was kidnapped -- has appealed to Prime Minister Boris Johnson for help.

ARMS dealer Christian Michel, 59, has been detained in India since December 2018 after being extradited from the United Arab Emirates over a helicopter deal.

INDIA on Saturday dismissed calls by UN rights experts for him to be freed, rejecting suggestions that his detention had been politically motivated and without any legal basis.

THE UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) said Michel’s imprisonment lacked a legal basis.

AND it raised concerns that his extradition “was a de facto swap” for India’s capture and return of an unnamed high-profile detainee to Dubai in March 2018. —AFP ■

Indian rooster kills owner with cockfight blade

A rooster fitted with a knife for an illegal cockfight in southern India has killed its owner, sparking a manhunt for the organizers of the event, police said Saturday.

THE bird had a knife attached to its leg ready to take on an opponent when it inflicted serious injuries to the man’s groin as it tried to escape, officers said.

THE victim died from loss of blood before he could reach a hospital in the Karimnagar district of Telangana state earlier this week, local police officer B. Jeevan told AFP.

THE man was among 16 people organizing the cockfight in the village of Lothunur when the freak accident took place, Jeevan said. THE rooster was briefly held at the local police station before it was sent to a poultry farm.

“WE are searching for the other 15 people involved in organizing the illegal fight,” Jeevan said.

THEY could face charges of manslaughter, illegal betting and hosting a cockfight.

COCKFIGHTS are banned but still common in rural areas of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Odisha states -- particularly around the Hindu festival of Sankranti. —AFP ■

Flood-prone Miami to spend billions tackling sea level rise

THE US city of Miami is to invest billions of dollars to tackle its vulnerability to rising sea levels, a reality that already affects the daily lives of residents used to constant flooding.

Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine-Cava said Friday she will protect communities hardest hit by rising sea levels, which eat away at beaches and leave residents particularly vulnerable to flooding during hurricane season.

"We must continue to focus on restoration, preservation and protection of this sacred space," she told a news conference.

"And so we will be together investing billions of dollars... in our infrastructure so that we can lift this community and others that are so affected by sea level rise," she added.

She cited "adaptation action areas" as a first priority to be studied, which would include



The Arkup luxury floating villa docked at Star Island in Miami Beach, Florida, on February 5, 2021. It costs \$5.5 million and fits in with the rising sea levels that are threatening Florida. **PHOTO: AFP**

raising low-lying roads, and waterproofing and converting southern Florida's widely used septic tanks into sewage systems.

The area, with extensive wetlands and sitting on porous stone that acts like a sponge,

makes the state one of the most at risk from rising sea levels.

The problem is so visible that, during the summer rainy season, it is common to see Miamians kayaking along flooded avenues and cars sunk up to

their windows.

The city of Miami Beach -- which is part of Miami-Dade County -- invested millions of dollars in raising the level of many of its streets in 2016.

And some private entrepre-

neurs have proposed creative, if expensive, ways to adapt to the challenge.

For example, Miami residents are used to seeing a houseboat that often docks near the port, although it has also appeared in other waters around Biscayne Bay.

It is valued at \$5.5 million and adjusts to rising sea levels.

"It looks like a house, but technically it's a boat," said Nicolas Derouin, co-founder and managing director of Arkup, the Miami-based company that created this floating "villa" with a drop-down terrace over the sea.

The house, covered with a roof of solar panels, remains stable thanks to four hydraulic pillars that fix it to an underwater bed.

The Environmental Protection Agency says the sea level could rise by 30 cm to 120 cm over the coming century.

—AFP ■

Colombia's apiarists say avocado buzz is killing bees



Hundreds of hives have been killed off in Colombia in recent years, and some investigations have pointed to fipronil, an insecticide banned for use on crops in Europe and restricted in the United States and China. **PHOTO: AFP**

FOR the second time in two years, Gildardo Urrego is scooping up piles of dead bees after an invisible evil invaded his hives in northwest Colombia, wreaking havoc among his swarms.

Urrego has no proof, but he suspects the culprit is pesticides which have been fuelling a commercial avocado and citrus boom in the country.

Hundreds of hives have been killed off in Colombia

in recent years, and some investigations have pointed to fipronil, an insecticide banned for use on crops in Europe and restricted in the United States and China.

It is used to control all manner of insects, including ants and ticks, and has been blamed for several bee massacres around the world.

Urrego's apiary in Colombia's Antioquia Department produces honey flavored with

pollen from nearby passion fruit orchards. In 2019, he lost 10 of his 19 hives.

This time, he said, a third of his 12 hives were wiped out -- a loss of some 160,000 of the industrious little pollinators.

"There is a theory that, yes, this is due to poisoning, there are some crops around here that perhaps have not managed their agrochemicals well and so this area was affected," he told AFP. —AFP ■

Healthy and safe, Asiatic lion prides now search for new homes

THREE years after a deadly virus struck India's endangered Asiatic lions in their last remaining natural habitat, conservationists are hunting for new homes to help booming prides roam free.

The majestic big cats, slightly smaller than their African cousins and with a fold of skin along their bellies, were once found widely across southwest Asia.

Hunting and human encroachment saw the population plunge to just 20 by 1913, and the lions are now found only in a wildlife sanctuary in India's western Gujarat state.

Following years of concerted government efforts, the lion population in Gir National Park has swelled to nearly 700, according to an official census last year.

But just three years ago, the conservation success looked to be in danger when several lions started to die in one part of the 1,400 square kilometre (545 square mile) forest.

The canine distemper virus -- a highly infectious disease -- was detected among dozens of the royal beasts, killing at least 11 of them. —AFP ■



Three years after a deadly virus struck India's endangered Asiatic lions in their last remaining natural habitat, conservationists are hunting for new homes to help booming prides roam free. **PHOTO: AFP**

ONE Fist of Fury: Ilias beat Superlek via unanimous decision

ILIAS Ennahachi shaped a sweet victory over Superlek Kiatmoo9 via unanimous decision in the main card of the ONE Championship's Fist of Fury event held on 26 February in Singapore.

As the fight was the main bout under the category of Flyweight Kickboxing World Championship, both fighters launched with superb actions.

Ilias Ennahachi beat Superlek Kiatmoo9 via unanimous decision after the wonderful fight.

Also, in the Featherweight Kickboxing event of the ONE Championship,

Giorgio Petrosyan beat Davit Kiria via unanimous decision.

Next, in the Flyweight Kickboxing fight, Rodtang Jitmuangnon claimed his victory over Tagir Khalilov via a split decision.

In the Bantamweight Kickboxing fight, Hiroki Aki-moto beat Zhang Chenglong via unanimous decision.

In the Strawweight Muay Thai fight, Jackie Buntan defeats Wondergirl Fairtex via a unanimous decision.

In the Atomweight fight, Victoria Lee made a win over Sunisa "Srisen via submission (rear-naked choke) at 1:03 of round two.—GNLM ■



Ilias Ennahachi (right) lands a punch on Superlek Kiatmoo9 (left) during their Flyweight Kickboxing World Championship bout of ONE Fist of Fury event in Singapore on 26 February. **PHOTO: ONE CHAMPIONSHIP**

Man. City chase quadruple as Man Utd aim to spoil Tuchel's record

LONDON — Manchester City have set their sights on a clean sweep of the four major trophies as the runaway Premier League leaders prepare to host high-flying West Ham this weekend.

To have any chance of putting City under pressure, second-placed Manchester United must end Thomas Tuchel's unbeaten start as Chelsea boss.

AFP Sport looks at some of the main talking points ahead of the weekend action in the English top-flight.

Man City flex muscles



Manchester City have set their sights on a clean sweep of the four major trophies as the runaway Premier League leaders prepare to host high-flying West Ham this weekend. **PHOTO: AFP**

Manchester City's march to the top of the Premier League was not a surprise given their title-winning pedi-

gree, but their record-breaking surge has fuelled belief that they can achieve greatness. —AFP ■

Milan try to keep title push afloat in Rome as Inter host Genoa



Milan take their title push to Rome on Sunday looking to keep touch with leaders Inter in a top-four clash which could boost champions Juventus's hopes of a 10th consecutive crown. **PHOTO: AFP**

TURIN — Milan take their title push to Rome on Sunday looking to keep touch with leaders Inter in a top-four clash which could boost champions Juventus's hopes of a 10th consecutive crown.

Stefano Pioli's Milan are coming off back-to-back defeats and trail four points behind Inter who can hammer home their advantage against 11th-placed Genoa. Roma in fourth, five points behind Milan, were held

to a goalless draw last time out against Benevento.

Both Roma and Milan drew 3-3 in the reverse fixture.

It's a clash between a Roma side who have collected the most league points at home this season with 30, and a Milan team that boasts the best away record — picking up 28 points on their travels.

"It will be a very important match against a great team that is doing well," said Roma coach Paulo Fonseca.

The two teams advanced to the Europa League last 16 on Thursday, Roma easing past Portuguese side Braga 5-1 on aggregate, with Milan beating Red Star Belgrade on away goals after their tie finished 3-3. —AFP ■

Tokyo Olympics should have fans in stands: president

TOKYO — The Tokyo Olympics should take place before a live audience, Japan's new Olympics chief has said, despite concerns about hosting the Games during a global pandemic.

Seiko Hashimoto, who became the Tokyo 2020 president last week, told Japanese media the Games should have spectators just like other major sports hosting events before fans, although in limited numbers.

Any final decision will depend on the coronavirus pandemic, she said in an interview conducted Friday and published a day later.

"When we think about the possibility of holding the Olympics without fans in the stands, athletes will definitely wonder why there are no

fans just for the Olympics and Paralympics when other competitions are allowing in spectators," Hashimoto told reporters, according to the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

"Everyone wants an early decision about the direction to be taken regarding fans to prepare tickets and hotel accommodations," Hashimoto said, according to the daily.

The seven-time Olympian-turned-politician last week replaced Yoshiro Mori, 83, who stepped down after making sexist remarks about women with only five months left before the Games.

Olympic officials have said there could be separate decisions made in the coming months about spectators from inside Japan and spectators from abroad. —AFP ■



Seiko Hashimoto, who became the Tokyo 2020 president last week, told Japanese media the Games should have spectators just like other major sports. **PHOTO: POOL/AFP**