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THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Vol. VII, No. 335, 5th Waxing of Tabaung 1382 ME www.gnlm.com.mm Wednesday, 17 March 2021

Announcement of Union Election Commission
16 March 2021

1. Regarding the Multiparty General Election held on 8 November 2020, the Union Election Commission has inspected the voter lists and the casting of votes of Hlegu, South Okkalapa and Kyimyindine townships in Yangon Region.
2. According to the inspection, the previous election commission released 224,541eligible voters in Hlegu Township of the Yangon Region. The list of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population in November 2020 showed 94,996 eligible voters who had turned 18. The voter lists mentioned that there were 43,274 citizens, associate citizens, nationalized citizens, and non-identity voters, 507 persons repeated on the voter lists more than three times and 11,622 persons repeated on the voter lists two times.
3. The previous election commission released 136,155 eligible voters in South Okkalapa Township of Yangon Region. The list of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population in November 2020 showed 136,224 eligible voters who had turned 18. The voter lists mentioned that there were 5,234 citizens, associate citizens, nationalized citizens, and non-identity voters, 74 persons repeated on the voter lists more than three times and 3,622 persons repeated on the voter lists two times.

SEE PAGE-2

Healthcare services provided at military hospitals

THE Tatmadaw medics and nurses have provided medical services to the patients in regions and states at the military hospitals and temporary treatment centres to date.

The medical team offered treatments to a total of 72,778 outpatients and 4,013 inpatients since 5 February to date.

The surgeons performed 5,063 surgical operations -- 3,296 major operations and 1,767 minor operations. Moreover, the 4,709 expectant mothers who face difficulties were admitted to military hospitals and these hospitals managed for the birth of 4,709 babies.

The officials from the respective commands also provided the patients with foods and awarded the healthcare staff.

One of the local patients seen under good healthcare services by the Tatmadaw medics and nurse.

Tatmadaw medical team provides healthcare services to locals

The Tatmadaw medical teams currently provide healthcare services to the resident patients at the station hospitals and public hospitals in their respective military commands.

The Tatmadaw medical team provided healthcare-related services such as surgery, dental and oral healthcare, osteoporosis, obstetrics, gynaecology, hypertension and heart disease to the patients at the station hospitals in Thazi, Hanza, Yinmabin in Meiktila District of Mandalay Region, including at Tagaung station hospital in Thabeikkyin Township, Kyauktaga and Donzayit hospitals in Shwegyin Township of Bago Region and Latpadan township general hospital.

The commanders of respective region commands inspected the medical services for the local populace and comforted the patients. The military officials also provided food aids and instructed the necessary things. The residents are satisfied with the medical supports of Tatmadaw. —MNA

INSIDE TODAY

LOCAL BUSINESS

India-Myanmar border trade rises by $65.58 mln this FY

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LOCAL BUSINESS

Imports plunge by $2.18 bln as of 5 March, MOC reports

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LOCAL BUSINESS

Agro-exports remain to rise even private banks shut down

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Announcement of Union Election Commission
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4. The previous election commission released 88,180 eligible voters in Kyimyindine Township of Yangon Region. The list of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population in November 2020 showed 60,231 eligible voters who had turned 18. The voter lists mentioned that there were 10,674 citizens, associate citizens, nationalized citizens, and non-identity voters, 157 persons repeated on the voter lists more than three times and 3,900persons repeated on the voter lists two times.
5. Findings in respective townships were as follows:

Ballot papers seen under inspection.

Findings on voter lists of respective townships

Sr	Township and numbers of polling stations	Township sub-commission	List from Immigration department	Those involved in voting list without citizenship scrutiny cards	Those involved in voter list more than three times holding one CSC	Those involved in voter list more than two times holding one CSC
1	130 polling stations in Hlegu Township of Yangon Region	224,541	94,996	43,274	507	11,622
2	124 polling stations in South Okkalapa township of Yangon Region	136,155	136,224	5,234	74	3,622
3	71 polling stations in Kyimyindine Township of Yangon Region	88,180	60,231	10,674	157	3,900

6. The Union Election Commission has inspected the withdrawal/receipt/use/remaining of ballot papers used for Pyithu Hluttaw Election of Hlegu, South Okkalapa and Kyimyindine townships in Yangon Region, together with the respective township election sub-commission, head of police force, Immigration and Population and administrator according to the Hluttaw Election Law Section 53.
7. According to the ground inspection, a total of 325 polling stations of these three townships took out 488,743 ballots and used 320,888. It left 144,798 ballots instead of 167.855. A total of 30,401 ballots were missing and it also found 7,344 extra ballots. The extra/shortage ballots were found at the respective poll stations. The extra ballots were found and so it seemed to print the ballots illegally. The findings in each township are as follows:

Findings on ballots for Pyithu Hluttaw election in each township

Sr	Subject	Total polling station	Withdrawal	Used	Exact remaining	Remaining on the ground	Difference	
							Missing	Extra
1	Hlegu	130	241,265	160,476	80,789	64,837	21,960	6,008
2	South Okkalapa	124	151,195	98,155	53,040	48,707	4,986	653
3	Kyimyindine	71	96,283	62,257	34,026	31,254	3,455	683
	Total	325	488,743	320,888	167,855	144,798	30,401	7,344

Findings on ballot papers for Pyithu Hluttaw Election of Hlegu Township

Sr	Subject	Withdrawal	Used	Exact remaining	Remaining on the ground	Difference	
						Missing	Extra
1	Ward/Village-tract ballots	236,200	157,149	79,051	59,833	21960	2,742
2	Township advance ballots	3,272	3,327	-55	-	-	55
3	Township remaining ballots	1,793	-	1,793	2,300	-	507
4	Separate ballots	-	-	-	2,704	-	2,704
	Total	241,265	160,476	80,789	64,837	21960	6,008

8. According to the inspection, there were 130 polling stations in Hlegu Township and they took out 241,265 ballots and distributed 236,200 as ward/village-tract ballots, 3,272 as township advance ballots and 1,793 as township remaining (reserve) ballots. Findings were as follows.
9. Hlegu Township withdrew 236,200 ballots for ward/village-tract and used 157,149 ballots. It remained only 59,833 ballots instead of 79,051. According to the inspection, a total of 21,960 ballots were missing at 89 polling stations and it found 2,742 illegal extra ballots at 28 polling stations.
10. According to the inspection, there were only 3,272 township advance ballots, it found 3,327 used ballots and so they used 55 extra ballots. It also found 2,300 township reserve ballots instead of 1,793 and so there were 507extra ballots.
11. Although the ballots used in polling stations of Hlegu Township were sealed and returned to the officials, it found 2,704 ballots at the ward/village-tract sub-commissions and poll heads and the ward/village-tract sub-commissions returned these remaining ballots to township sub-commission later 8.11.2020 and so they were found as separate ballots.
12. Although there must be name and fingerprint (or) sign of voters on the advance ballot receipts in ward/village-tract, it found 60 ballots books used as advance ballots without any name and fingerprint (or) sign of voters.
13. The whole Hlegu Township withdrew 241,265 ballots and used 160,476. It found 64,837 unused ballots during the inspection.
14. Findings in Hlegu Township were as follows:

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The government wishes to appoint only the persons who win the majority respect and who are free from party politics to a possible degree

NEW ward and village administrators have been appointed as the term of the old ones had expired. But there are acts against the appointment of the ward and village administrators. The government wishes to appoint only the persons who win the majority respect and who are free from party politics to a possible degree.

(Excerpt from the speech to the 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 2 March 2021)

18th ASEAN Military Intelligence Meeting held online

THE 18th ASEAN Military Intelligence Meeting AMIM-18 took place online yesterday morning.

The meeting was attended by Lt-Gen Ye Win Oo, Colonel Haji Mohammad Muluddin Bin Awang Haji Latif of Brunei, Lt-Gen Hun Manith of Cambodia, Maj-Gen Andjar Airatma of Indonesia, Maj-Gen Thongvanh Chanthavong of Laos, Lt-Gen Datuk Ahmad Norihan Bin Jalal of Malaysia, Brig-Gen Charlton Sean Gaerlan of the Philippines, Brig-Gen Ng Chad-Son of Singapore, Lt-Gen Natee Wongissares of Thailand and Lt-Gen Pham Ngoc Hung of Viet Nam.

First, alternate chair of 18th AMIM Brunei's Colonel Haji Mohammad Muluddin Bin Awang Haji Latif made an opening remark.

Then, the meeting exchanged view on the theme "We Care, We prepare, We Prosper".

They also discussed the exchange visiting of ASEAN junior intelligence officers and establishing the ASEAN Military Intelligence Community.

The meeting was concluded after the 19th ASEAN Military Intelligence Meeting's chairmanship was handed over to Lt-Gen Hun Manith of Cambodia.—MNA

Lieutenant-General Ye Win Oo joins the 18th ASEAN Military Intelligence Meeting AMIM-18 online yesterday.

Myawady bank and MyTel tower attacked in Bago, Sagaing regions

RIOTERS attacked the Myawady bank beside the Christian church on Bandoola road in Shinsawpu ward of Bago yesterday with rocks and slingshots. Fence lightbulbs, windows, flower vases and windows of the car parked outside of the bank were also destroyed.

Similarly, MyTel's cell tower, built on the Moekaung-Tapaung roadside, Kani Township, Sagaing Region, was also burnt by kindling and petrol. MyTel installation cabinet, breaker AC/DC and power meter were destroyed, and phone lines were down.

Investigations are underway to take legal action against those who are responsible for violent acts. There has been an uprising in big cities in the country. The perpetrators, who do not want stability and security in the country, have been conducting anarchic acts daily by including blocking public roads, burning used tires, using sound bombs to startle the public, inciting, shouting, destroying state-owned buildings and vehicles, and stealing money from ATM while destroying those in some banks. —MNA

The Myawady bank seen after it was attacked by rioters.

Corrigendum

PLEASE read "Military Tribunal" in the Martial Law Order 3/2021 appeared on page 4 of the 16 March 2021 issue of the Global New Light of Myanmar instead of "court-martial".

In the number 4 (B) 2 of the same order, "… at summary courts-martial" should also be read as "by Military Tribunal in a summary way".

Lawsuit filed against Dr Sasa and arrest warrant issued

ACCORDING to a statement from the Myanmar Police Force, Dr Sasa (a) Sasa San (a) Tai Sa lived in Lailinpe town, Matupi Township, Chin State, has been charged under the law. The Dekkhina District Court has issued an arrest warrant on 15 March.

He was charged under Section 122 (2) of the Criminal Code for high treason as he had accepted the appointment of Myanmar Representative to the United Nations by the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH). So, he is committing treason. He also incites the Myanmar embassies' staff to join the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), urging for the imposition of international sanctions to Myanmar. He calls on the UN Security Council to exercise the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) policy, holding rounds of discussion with ethnic armed groups. His acts cause the escalation of internal conflicts and the overthrow of the constitutionally-governing State Administration Council (Government).—MNA

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Republic of the Union of Myanmar
State Administration Council

Martial Law Order 3/2021

3rd Waxing of Tabaung 1382 ME
15 March 2021

1. With the State Administration Council's Martial Law Order 1/2021 dated 14 March 2021 (2nd Waxing of Tabaung, 1382 ME) and the Martial Law Order 2/2021 dated 15 March 2021 (3rd Waxing of Tabaung, 1382 ME), the council has transferred the executive and judiciary power to the Commander of Yangon Command to exercise the Martial Law in accordance with Article 419 of the State Constitution to enforce security, the rule of law and community peace in Yangon Region's townships Hlinethaya, Shwepyitha, Dagon Myothit (South), Dagon Myothit (North), Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) and North Okkalapa.
2. Local administration bodies in the areas which have been placed under the Martial Law shall carry out the tasks concerned with them under the command of the Commander of Yangon Command.
3. The Commander of Yangon Command shall designate the martial law areas in the Yangon Command's region, and with the martial law orders, the Commander of Yangon Command can appoint commanders for the martial law areas with the approval of the State Administration Council.
4. The Commander of Yangon Command shall accomplish the following tasks by himself, or commanders of the martial law areas or an appropriate person or a body he transferred the power.
   (A) **Administration**
      (1) security issues
      (2) social issues
      (3) trade issues
      (4) transportation issues
   (B) **Judiciary**
      (1) **Formation of courts:** The Commander of Yangon Command shall decide criminal cases that occurred during the martial law period at courts formed under the existing law or Military Tribunal.
      (2) **Deciding cases at Military Tribunal**: Criminal cases can be heard and decided by Military Tribunal in a summary way.
      (3) **Punishment**: Following punishments shall be sentenced by a Military Tribunal in accordance with the existing laws for anyone who is found guilty for crimes mentioned in Appendix (A)
         (AA) Death Sentence
         (BB) Prison sentence with hard labour for unlimited years
         (CC) The highest punishment designated in accordance with respective crimes
      (4) **Approval:** The decisions and sentences handed down by Military Tribunal shall be final. However, a death sentence shall be approved only with the approval of the State Administration Council's Chairman. An unlimited years-prison sentence shall be approved with the approval of the Commander of Yangon Command. Following are the rights for exercising the rights for approval.
         (AA) Abolishing a decision of a case
         (BB) Commuting a sentence
         (CC) Changing a sentence to another lesser one
         (DD) Approving the conviction
      (5) **Appealing: No appeal for decisions or convictions handed down by Military Tribunal**
      (6) **Applying for reversal of decisions: If a death sentence is handed down by a Military Tribunal, applying to the State Administration Council's Chairman can be made for reversal of the decision within 15 days from the day of conviction. Reversal for other punishments can be applied to the Commander of Yangon Command within 15 days after the convictions.** The State Administration Council Chairman or the Commander of Yangon Command can reverse the decision. Following the rights for exercising power for reversal of the decision.
         (AA) Abolishing a decision of a case
         (BB) Commuting a sentence
         (CC) Changing a correction to another lesser one
         (DD) Approving the conviction
      (7) The Chairman of the State Administration Council or the Commander of Yangon Command not only can exercise the rights mentioned in the above sub-para (6) but also can increase the punishment.
5. The Commander of Yangon Command can form an advisory body for martial law to get assistance for performing his duties.
6. The Commander of Yangon Command shall report to the Chairman of the State Administration Council on the situation of the martial law areas.

By Order,
Aung Lin Dwe
Lieutenant-General
Secretary
State Administration Council

Crimes to be heard by Military Tribunal

1. High Treason (Section 122 of the Criminal Procedure Code)
2. Attempt to excite disaffection towards the Government (Section 124-A of the Penal Code)
3. Sabotage or hinder the performance of the Defence Services of the Union or law enforcement organizations (Section 124-C of the Penal Code)
4. Disrupts or hinders Defence Services and Government employees (Section 124-D of the Penal Code)
5. Section 505 of the Penal Code
6. Cause fear, spread false news, agitate directly or indirectly criminal offence against a Government employee (Section 505-A of the Penal Code)
7. Cases against unlawful associations act
8. Cases against weaponry act
9. Murder cases
10. Death cases
11. Rape cases
12. Robbery cases
13. Banditry cases
14. Corruption cases
15. Cases against Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law (1993)
16. Cases against protection of public properties act
17. Cases against protection of public properties law (1963)
18. Cases against press and media law
19. Cases against printing and publishing law
20. Cases against Myanmar Immigration (provisional) act (1947)
21. Cases against electronic communications law
22. Cases against ward or village-tract administration law
23. Cases against anti-terrorism law

Announcement on resumption of Road Transport Administration Department's services for licences

ROAD Transport Administration Department has been providing initial licences for vehicles since 1 December 2020 at its offices. Now, with the permission of the Central Committee on Prevention, Containment and Treatment on COVID-19, the department will resume its services for annual registration for vehicles as of 22 March 2021 (Monday).

- Vehicles/motorcycles are needed to extend their licences during the periods underneath without fail regarding the month when their vehicle licences are expired.

(A) The vehicles with the licences which expired in June 2020 and the vehicles with licences that expired in September 2020 are needed to extend their licences from 22 March 2021 to 31 May 2021.

(B) The vehicles with licences that expired in October 2020 and in November 2020 are to extend their licences from 22 March 2021 to 30 June 2021.

(C) The vehicles with licences expired in December 2020, and January 2021 are needed to extend their licences from 22 March 2021 to 31 July 2021.

(D) The vehicles which licences which expired in February 2021 and in March 2021 are needed to extend their licences from 22 March 2021 to 31 August 2021.

Vehicles with licences that will expire from April 2021 to September 2021 extend their licences in the designated period.

Those vehicles which extend the licences during the designated periods will be granted free from fines. Besides, the department will provide vehicles, except public transport vehicles, with services for extending their licences without inspecting the cars.

The vehicles with registration licences that would be abolished due to failure to extend the licences for five consecutive years can extend their licences during the following periods. If they fail to do during the designated periods, the licences will be abolished in accordance with the Road Safety and Vehicle Management Law.

The vehicles with licences that expired on 30 June 2015 and 30 September 2015 can extend the licences from 22 March 2021 to 31 May 2021 (Except vehicles with licences that expired in July 2015 and August 2015)

(B) The vehicles with licences expired on 31 October 2015 and 30 November 2015 are needed to extend licences from 22 March 2021 to 30 June 2021.

(C) The vehicles with licences expired on 31 December 2015 and 31 January 2016 are needed to extend the licences from 22 March 2021 to 31 July 2021.

(D) The vehicles with licences that expired on 29 February 2016 and on 31 March 2016 are needed to extend the licences from 22 March 2021 to 31 August 2021.

The vehicles with licences expired on 30 April 2016, 31 May 2016, 30 June 2016, 31 July 2016, 31 August 2016 and 30, September 2016 are needed to extend the licences during the designated period.

Road Transport Administration Department

Monks, nuns, civil service personnel get immunized against COVID

TATMADAW has been working together with civilian doctors who did not participate in the CDM campaign to conduct COVID-19 immunization across the country.

On 15 and 16 March, the vaccination was conducted to the people over the age of 65, including monks, nuns and civil service personnel in Lashio, Laukkai, Taunggyi, Ayethayar, Hopong, Kalaw, Aungban, Pinlaung, Pindaya, Ywangan, Langkho, Kunhing, Mongnai, Maukmai, Loilem, Namsang, Kengtawng, Kengtung, Tachilek, Monghsat, Mongphyat and Mongkhat townships in Shan State; Loikaw, Demawso and Bawlake townships in Kayah State; Hmawby, Taikkyi, Hlegu townships in Yangon Region; Mandalay city, Toungoo township in Bago.

Tatmadaw medical team seen administering COVID jabs to monks, nuns and civil service personnel.

Region. Chairpersons of the respective region administration councils and officials from the respective regional commands encouraged and donated offertories to the monks and nuns. —MNA

Fire breaks out in industrial zone 1 in Hlinethaya township

ACCORDING to a statement from the Myanmar Police Force, a fire broke out in Industrial Zone 1 in Hlinethaya Township, and firefighters were able to put out the fire yesterday afternoon.

According to the statement, security forces and firefighters extinguished the fire in a two-storey steel structure building of Winco Bag Industrial Co., Ltd Factory in Block 81 on U Tun Nyo Street in Industrial Zone (1) Hlinethaya Township, Yangon Region. They managed to prevent the fire from spreading to residential buildings and other factories near the building.

The fire is believed to be arson. A total of 7 fire trucks, 30 firefighters and ten reserved firefighters completely put the fire out until 5:40 pm yesterday.—MNA

Roadblocks removed in Mingala Taungnyunt township

Tatmadaw members, township police force and township development administration office led by the township administration committee collectively demolished the roadblocks. They cleared the area in Mingala Taungnyunt Township, Yangon Region, on 15 March.

They removed sandbags, bamboo mattings, poles, woodblocks, used tires, stones, and bricks blocking on U Aung Myat road, corner of Satyone road and Kanpat, corner of Satyone road and Bominyaung road, Bominyaung road, and Theinphyu road.

Due to the disturbance on public roads, people in the neighbourhood were worried that cars, fire trucks and ambulance could not pass. They expressed their desire for such collective clearing by the government on social media and in newspapers. —MNA

17 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 16 March, total figure rises to 142,179

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to **142,179 after 17 new cases** were reported on 16 March 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these confirmed cases, **3,203 died, 131,748** have been discharged from hospitals.—MNA

Announcement of Union Election Commission

FROM PAGE-2

Sr	Ward/Village-tract	Issued	Findings			Missing	Extra
			Used	Remaining	Total		
1	Thathana Yeik Tha Ward	11,500	5,663	2,320	7,983	3,517	
2	Aung Mingala Ward	9,650	6,516	2,833	9,349	401	110
3	Mayan Chaung Village	2,250	1,556	724	2,280		30
4	Min Gone Village	11,750	8,248	2,337	10,585	1,165	
5	Phaung Gyi East Village	7,700	4,247	2,029	6,339	1,361	
6	Phaung Gyi West Village	6,350	4,707	1,541	6,248	102	
7	Poke Thin Nyo Village	1,700	1,213	385	1,598	102	
8	Gway Tauk Aine Village	3,350	2,251	701	2,952	398	
9	Hine Kuu Village	6,850	4,928	1,219	6,147	703	
10	Nanti Village	4,200	2,654	865	3,519	731	50
11	Ngar Suu Taung Village	4,250	2,346	1,301	3,647	603	
12	Kyar Inn Village	9,800	6,042	3331	9,373	501	74
13	Sar Buu Taung Village	9,400	6,703	2,582	9,285	215	100
14	Kyauk Ku Din Village	2,350	1,865	485	2,350		
15	Kali Htaw East Village	2,600	1,634	516	2,150	450	
16	Kali Htaw West Village	3,100	2,329	771	3,100	50	50
17	Sakhan Gyi Village	4,550	2,092	1,158	3,250	1,300	
18	Tharyar Gone Village	5,100	3,611	1,409	5,020	80	
19	Khayaung Village	650	455	145	600	50	
20	Nyaung Ta Chan Village	1,000	712	182	894	106	
21	War Net Kone Village	4,100	3,030	1,020	4,050	150	100
22	Thu Nge Chaung Village	3,700	2,715	985	3,700	350	350
23	Myo Ma Ward	6,650	4,756	1,642	6,398	252	
24	Zay Gyi Ward	1,300	932	368	1,300		
25	Pyi Taw Tha Ward	7,900	4,553	2,161	6,714	1,386	200
26	Kyun Ka Lay Village	8,200	5,134	3,164	8,298	48	146
27	Zee Pin Wal Village	1,650	1,235	415	1,650		
28	Ye Mon Village	9,650	6,511	2,957	9,468	403	221
29	Inn Tine Village	9,500	6,844	2,377	9,221	329	50
30	Alan Kapo Village	3,200	2,661	579	3,240		40
31	Saing Di Kone Village	1,000	733	217	950	50	
32	Kyee Kan Thike Village	400	248	102	350	50	
33	War Yone Soon Village	2,150	1,706	346	2,052	98	
34	Swal Lat Village	300	155	93	248	52	
35	Phal Kha Mae Village	1,500	1,061	335	1,396	104	
36	Thanat Pyin Village	2,700	2,173	427	2,600	100	
37	Sar Talin Village	3,400	2,716	632	3,348	357	305
38	Dar Pane Taung Village	11,650	8,287	3,213	11,500	400	250
39	Dar Pane Myauk Village	3,900	2,797	1,052	3,849	101	50
40	Tha Koot Pin Village	1,600	1,180	370	1,550	50	
41	MaU Village	2,950	926	364	1,290	1,660	
42	Shan Tae Gyi Upper Village	2,300	1,906	745	2,651		351
43	Kyun Gone Village	1,550	1,145	349	1,494	56	
44	Tagun Tine (Hlegu) Village	700	403	195	598	102	
45	Lat Pan Village	850	663	87	750	100	
46	Pike Gyi Wal Village	2,250	1,714	585	2,299		49
47	Musoe Nyaung Bin Village	2,100	1,549	200	1,749	351	
48	Boe Yin Kalay Village	2,650	1,486	460	1,946	704	
49	Awine Village	1,650	893	166	1,059	591	
50	Sit Pin Myauk Village	950	740	160	900	50	
51	Malit West Village	2,250	1,701	397	2,098	152	
52	Sin Phone Village	2,900	2,336	590	2,926		26
53	Bar Lar Village	2,700	2,335	415	2,750		50
54	Tagun Tine (Insein) Village	2,650	1,525	1,025	2,550	100	
55	Ngwe Nantha Village	1,450	1,110	490	1,600		150
56	Ohne Hne Kone Village	4,000	2,193	1,207	3,400	600	
57	Zayet Kwin Village	9,750	5,325	3,046	8,371	1,379	
	Total	236,200	157,149	59,833	216,982	21,960	2,742

Findings on ballot papers for Pyithu Hluttaw Election in South Okkalapa Township

15. According to the inspection, 124 polling stations in 13 Wards of South Okkalapa Township of Yangon Region withdrew 151,195 ballots and used 98,155 ballots. It left only 48,707 ballots instead of 53,040. The shortage/extra ballots were found at each polling station. Findings were as follows:

Sr	Subject	Withdrawal	Used	Exact remaining	Remaining on the ground	Difference	
						Missing	Extra
1	Ward/Village-tract ballots	147,550	96,121	51429	46446	4,986	3
2	Township advance ballots	2,034	2,034	-	-	-	
3	Township remaining ballots	1,611	-	1611	2,261	-	650
Total		151,195	98,155	53040	48,707	4,986	653

16. A total of 4,986 ballots were missing at 124 polling station in 13 Wards of South Okkalapa Township and it also found 3 extra ballots. Although the township sub-commission must have 1,611 ballots, they have 2,261ballots. The ballot receipts used at No (2) polling stations of No (3) Ward were missing.

17. Findings in South Okkalapa Township were as follows:

Sr	Subject	Withdrawal	Used	Exact remaining	Remaining on the ground	Difference	
						Missing	Extra
1	No (3) Ward	3,200	1,327	1,873	1,117	756	
2	No (4) Ward	14,400	9,929	4,471	4,321	150	
3	No (5) Ward	14,050	9,728	4,322	4,121	201	
4	No (6) Ward	10,350	6,729	3,621	3,370	251	
5	No (7) Ward	16,450	10,580	5,870	5,678	192	
6	No (8) Ward	1,950	838	1,112	862	250	
7	No (9) Ward	10,100	6,668	3,432	3,042	390	
8	No (10) Ward	12,500	8,699	3,801	3,660	141	
9	No (11) Ward	6,650	4,582	2,068	2,071		3
10	No (12) Ward	13,100	8445	4,655	4,273	382	
11	No (13) Ward	18,700	12356	6,344	4,941	1,403	
12	No (14) Ward	19,550	11682	7,868	6,998	870	
13	No (15) Ward	6,550	4558	1,992	1,992	-	
Total Ward		147,550	96121	51,429	46,446	4986	3
Township advance ballot		2,034	2034	-	-	-	
Township remaining ballots		1,611	-	1,611	2,261	-	650
Total township		151,195	98155	53,040	48,707	4,986	653

Findings on ballot papers in Kyimyindine Township

18. A total of 71 polling stations in Kyimyindine Township took out 96,283 ballots and used 62,257 ballots. It left 31,254 ballots instead of 34,026. Findings were as follows:

Sr	Subject	Withdrawal	Used	Exact remaining	Remaining on the gound	Difference	
						Missing	Extra
1	Ward/Village-tract ballots	90,350	61,024	29,326	26,254	3,455	383
2	Township advance ballots	1,233	1,233	-	-	-	-
3	Township remaining ballots	4,700	-	4,700	5,000	-	300
	Total	96,283	62,257	34,026	31,254	3,455	683

19. According to the inspection, there were 71 polling stations in Kyimyindine Township and they took out 96,283 ballots and distributed 90,350 as ward/village-tract ballots, 1,233 as township advance ballots and 4,700 as township remaining (reserve) ballots.
20. According to the inspection, of 90,350 ward/village-tract ballots, they used 61,024 and it left only 26,254 ballots instead of 29,326. The ward sub-commission failed to return the 3,455 ballots and they were found missing. The polling station also used 383 extra ballots.
21. There were no differences in township advance ballots but it found 5,000township reserve ballots instead of 4,700 and so there were 300 illegal extra ballots.
22. Kyimyindine Township used 62,257 ballots out of 96,283 and it found 31,254 unused ballots.
23. Findings in Kyimyindine Township were as follows:

Sr	Ward	Issued	Findings			Difference	
			Used	Remaining	Total	Missing	Extra
1	Thayet Taw (north)	2,150	1,585	515	2,100	50	
2	Thayet Taw (south)	3,000	2,007	993	3,000		
3	Thardu (east)	2,600	1,851	746	2,597	3	
4	Thardu (west)	2,450	1,713	777	2,490		40
5	Ma Kyee Tan North East	3,900	2,661	1,178	3,839	61	
6	Ma Kyee Tan North West	1,300	832	467	1,299	1	
7	Ma Kyee Tan South East	2,100	1,341		1,341	759	
8	Ma Kyee Tan South West	3,000	1,904	1,084	2,988	12	
9	Zay Gyi (east)	4,550	2,972	1,362	4,334	216	
10	Zay Gyi (west)	5,250	3,327	1,913	5,240	10	
11	Ohbo	4,300	2,875	1,430	4,305		5
12	Bawga	2,400	1,655	690	2,345	55	
13	Zay Kalay	4,600	2,966	1,404	4,370	230	
14	Pan Hlaing	3,750	2,645	1,058	3,703	47	
15	Htee Tan Set Myay	3,250	2,036	1,112	3,148	102	
16	Kayin Amyo Tha	2,550	1,853	693	2,546	4	
17	Say Yoe Tan Nyein Chan Yay	3,800	2,103	936	3,039	761	
18	Thida Ward	3,100	1,959	1,143	3,102		2
19	War Yone Sate/Aye Ywar (west)	5,500	4,393	825	5,218	282	
20	Aye Ywar Ba Lote Nyunt Set Kalay	8,600	6,348	2,588	8,936		336
21	Set San Auk Yone Alat Chaung	11,350	7,765	3,047	10,812	538	
22	Seik Kyi U Mya Ngar Sin	6,850	4,233	2,293	6,526	324	
	Ward/Village-Tract+ total polling station	90,350	61,024	26,254	87,278	3,455	383
	Township advance ballots	1,233	1,233		1,233		
	Township remaining ballots	4,700		5,000	5,000		300
	Total township	96,283	62,257	31,254	93,511	3,455	683

Union Election Commission

Mob destroys fire station, holds 4 firefighters in Mayangon

A mob destroyed the township fire station and arrested four firefighters in Mayangon Township, according to the statement of the Myanmar Police Force.

The fire truck with four firefighters from Thamine fire station was stopped by a group of about 200 rioters near Thamine Junction in Mayangon Township. The truck key, camera and speaker were taken, and the firefighters were tied up with ropes and taken away around 8:45 pm on 15 March. When the security forces searched for the arrested firefighters, three of them were found with the fire truck around 10:30 pm in front of "Swal Sone" loan business, on upper Baho road in Mayangon township on the same day, and one returned to the fire station with facial injuries due to the deadly beating by the rioters at 10:35 pm.

While the security forces continued searching for the remaining one taken away by the rioters, four rioters from Mayangon Township attacked the security forces and were detained.

During the incident, three windshields of the Thamine fire station building and the fire truck shattered due to the destruction of the rioters and the arrested rioters, Wai Linn Soe, 34, son of U Kyi Soe; Saw Naing, 43, son of U Moe Sein; Myo Ko Ko, 28, son of U Myo Win and Aung Htet, 30, son of U Aung Lin will be punished under the law. —MNA

Four rioters were detained after the riotous destruction attempt on Thamine Fire station.

17 MARCH 2021
THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Agro, livestock-based special zones to act as springboard for poverty alleviation

THE Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation have taken steps to boost farmers' earnings by establishing agricultural and farming zones nationwide.

With announcing its plan on Monday, the ministry said it would take steps to facilitate the establishment of food processing industries and value-added units in the special zones with the aim of narrowing the poverty gaps between the urban and rural areas and creating job opportunities.

When it comes to drawing the master plan, sustainable availability of water with good irrigation system, the protection of farmland against flood, enforcing Good Agriculture Practices-GAPs, good farming practices, biosecurity for animals, the construction of sub-surface dykes to improve the groundwater table and the modernization of canals should be among the measures that the government should focus on simultaneously.

> We are confident that investing in the agriculture and livestock farming sector plays an essential role in poverty alleviation and would lift the living standard of farmers.

The new thinking has arisen to tackle the challenges concerning producing value-added products and finished food products that come from agriculture-led industrialization and animal farming in our country.

Food-based products from neighbouring countries are entering our domestic market, despite the abundance of rice, beans, corn, edible oil crops, vegetables, and fruits in Myanmar. Why? One reason is that although we are a food producer nation, we are weak in manufacturing finished food products.

We are confident that investing in the agriculture and livestock farming sector plays an essential role in poverty alleviation and would lift the living standard of farmers.

The development of agriculture and livestock farming-based special zones will help bring about the local breeders' socio-economic development, market potentials for the livestock products and revenue for the country.

Myanmar has already set the goal of turning itself into an agro-based industrial country. We have huge swathes of vacant and fallow land, plenty of labour, and ready internal and external markets. Besides, 60 per cent of our domestic industries are involved in food-manufacturing. But, about 90 per cent of them are small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Domestic food producers, especially SMEs, cannot guarantee their products' safety, and the quality of their goods is much lower because they have less capital and lag in technology. They are also weak in packaging.

When it comes to establishing the special zones, we need to take into consideration the said points.

The time is ripe for transforming the country's agricultural sector and livestock breeding sector by switching from a traditional system to mechanized farming and mass production of finished food products as part of efforts to boost the economy.

WHO experts to meet on AstraZeneca shot as virus cases surge

WHO safety experts prepared to meet Tuesday over the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine whose rollout has been halted in several European countries over blood clot fears, imperilling the pandemic fight as infection rates surge.

The three largest EU nations -- Germany, Italy and France -- joined others in suspending the shot Monday, dealing a blow to the global immunisation campaign against a disease that has killed more than 2.6 million people.

The World Health Organization, AstraZeneca, and the European Medicines Agency have insisted the shot is safe, and that there is no link between the vaccine and reported blood clots.

"We do not want people to panic and we would, for the time being, recommend that countries continue vaccinating with AstraZeneca," WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan said Monday.

"So far, we do not find an association between these events and the vaccine."

WHO and EMA experts on Tuesday will separately discuss data from AstraZeneca vaccinations, and the European regulator will hold an extraordinary meeting two days later to decide on any further action.

AstraZeneca's shot, among the cheapest available, was billed as the vaccine of choice for poorer nations and the clot reports have had an impact beyond Europe.

Indonesia delayed its AstraZeneca rollout on Monday, and Venezuela announced it would not authorise the jab over fears of "complications".

The vaccine was developed by AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford in Britain, where more than 11 million doses have been administered apparently without any major problems. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Monday also urged Canadians to get the AstraZeneca shot after reports of hesitancy based on the suspensions in Europe.

Critical situation

The AstraZeneca crisis comes as a number of countries battle worrying surges in coronavirus infections, a grim reminder that the battle against Covid-19 is far from over.

Norway's capital Oslo announced tougher measures to stop the spread of the virus, including closing secondary schools, as it reported a record number of cases last week.

"These will be the most intrusive measures taken by Oslo during the pandemic," said mayor Raymond Johansen.

"It's tough, it's difficult but it's necessary".

And a fresh spike pushed the main Covid-19 hospital in Bosnia to the edge, forcing it to declare a state of emergency.

"The staff is exhausted," hospital director Sebija Izetbegovic wrote on Facebook.

"We will continue to do what is possible to save lives, but the situation is really critical. More and more of our employees are sick." Most of Italy re-entered lockdown on Monday, with schools, restaurants, shops and museums closed, while intensive care doctors in Germany issued an urgent appeal for new restrictions to avoid a third wave in the country.

A nurse shows a package of the Astrazeneca coronavirus vaccine at a doctor's surgery in Senftenberg, Brandenburg, eastern Germany, on 3 March, 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro -- widely panned for his coronavirus scepticism -- appointed a new health minister Monday as the South American nation reeled from another deadly surge in infections and deaths.

Vaccine options

The pandemic spurred unprecedented efforts to develop vaccines, with a number of successful options now available. Rollouts have been hampered, however, by export controls, bitter diplomatic spats and production issues -- in addition to the AstraZeneca suspension.

But a new agreement for Germany's IDT Biologika to help produce the single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine would offer Europe greater certainty, Germany's economy minister said Monday. And the developers of Russia's successful Sputnik V vaccine said Monday they had reached production agreements in key European countries.

China, where the virus first emerged in late 2019, has also developed Covid-19 vaccines and begun exporting them across the world -- including to Europe, the Middle East and South America.

Source : AFP

Lethal pollution high in 2020 despite lockdowns: report

DEADLY small particle pollution in four of five nations exceeded World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations last year despite Covid lockdowns, according to a report released Tuesday.

The partial or complete shutdown of transport and industry for months at a time in 2020 reduced average levels of so-called PM2.5 pollution across the world, including in major cities, the IQAir quality report found.

Concentrations of the life-shortening particles -- cast off by traffic pollution and burning fossil fuels -- dropped 11 per cent in Beijing, 13 per cent in Chicago, 15 per cent in New Delhi, 16 per cent in London, and 16 per cent in Seoul.

At least 60 per cent of India's cities were more breathable last year than in 2019, and all of them had cleaner air than in 2018.

"Many parts of the world experienced unprecedented -- but short-lived -- improvements in air quality in 2020," said Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) and co-author of the report.

People cross a road on a polluted day in Beijing on October 10, 2020. **PHOTO: AFP**

"This meant tens of thousands of avoided deaths from air pollution." But only 24 of 106 countries monitored met WHO safety guidelines, said the report, based on the world's largest database of ground-level air pollution measurements.

China and many South Asian nations experienced PM2.5 pollution several time greater than WHO recommended thresholds, and in some regions the concentration was six to eight times higher. Twenty-two of the world's more polluted cities are in India.

Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Mongolia and Afghanistan averaged annual PM2.5 concentrations between 77 and 47 micrograms per cubic metre (mcg/m3) of air.

Deep into the lungs

The UN says PM2.5 density should not top 25 mcg/m3 in any 24-hour period, or 10 mcg/m3 averaged across an entire year.

The most polluted capital cities in the world last year were New Delhi (84 mcg/m3) and Dhaka (77), with Jakarta, Kathmandu, Islamabad, Hanoi and Beijing all in the top 20.

About half of all European cities exceed WHO's suggested limits.

Air pollution levels were made worse in 2020 -- tied for the hottest year on record -- by climate change, the report noted.

Wildfires fuelled by scorching heatwaves led to extremely high pollution levels in California, South America and Australia.

Air pollution shortens lives worldwide by nearly three years on average, and causes more than eight million premature deaths annually, earlier studies have found.

The WHO calculates 4.2 million deaths from outdoor air pollution, but has underestimated the impact on cardiovascular disease, recent research has shown.

Average lifespan is cut 4.1 years in China, 3.9 years in India, and 3.8 years in Pakistan.

In Europe, life expectancy is shortened by eight months.

PM2.5 particles penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream. In 2013, the WHO classified it as a cancer-causing agent.

"This report highlights that urgent action is both possible and necessary," said IQAir CEO Frank Hammes.

Compared to other causes of premature death, air pollution worldwide kills 19 times more people each year than malaria, nine times more than HIV/AIDS, and three times more than alcohol.

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 4:00 pm Tuesday 16 March, 2021)

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL MORNING OF THE 17th March, 2021: Light rain or thundershowers are likely to be isolated in Taninthayi Region and Kachin, Kayin, Mon States. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Upper Sagaing, Bago, Yangon, Ayeyarwady Regions and Northern Shan, Rakhine 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 increase of day temperatures in Naypyitaw, Lower Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway, Bago, Yangon Regions.

FORECAST FOR NAYPYITAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 17th March, 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 17th March, 2021: Partly cloudy.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 17th March, 2021: Generally fair weather.

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Agro-exports remain to rise even private banks shut down

THE agricultural exports unexpectedly surge over the past five months even though traders face transaction problems due to the closure of private banks.

The agricultural exports have topped US$2.49 billion as of 5 March 2021 in the current financial year since 1 October 2020. The figures reflect a significant rise of $765.74 million this FY. The agro-exports soared from $1.72 billion in the corresponding period of the 2019-2020 FY. According to the trade figures released by the Ministry of Commerce.

Myanmar's agricultural exports rose regardless of the coronavirus's impact on foreign demand for other export groups and political instability.

Private banks' closure forced the traders to turn to the operators running 'hundi', an informal money transfer system, to make transactions in the border trade.

In the exports sector, the agriculture industry performed the best, accounting for over 22 per cent of overall exports. **PHOTO : GNLM/ FILE**

At present, some ocean liners suspended cargo transport from Myanmar in recent days. The cargo transport will double or triple if we conduct the trade with small ships. It could harm the export sector somehow, according to Myanmar Mercantile Marine Development Association.

In the exports sector, the agriculture industry performed the best, accounting for over 22 per cent of overall exports. The agricultural sector's top export items are rice and broken rice, pulses and beans, and maize. Fruits and vegetables, sesame, dried tea leaves, sugar, and other agro-products are also shipped to other countries.

Myanmar agro products are primarily exported to China, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. Sometimes, the export market remains uncertain due to unsteady global demand.

The country requires specific export plans for each agro product, as they are currently exported to external markets based upon supply and demand. Contract farming systems, regional and state agriculture departments, exporters, traders, and some grower groups are required to meet production targets, said an official from the Agriculture Department.

The Commerce Ministry is working to help farmers deal with challenges such as high input costs, procurement of pedigree seeds, high cultivation costs, and unpredictable weather conditions. -- HH/GNLM

Imports plunge by $2.18 bln as of 5 March, MOC reports

The value of imports in the consumer, capital, intermediate goods, and CMP businesses groups dropped in the current FY. **PHOTO : GNLM/ FILE**

THE value of Myanmar's imports between 1 October and 5 March in the current financial year 2020-2021 stood at US$6.89 billion, which reflected a severe drop of $2.18 billion from $7.67 billion registered in the year-ago period, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce.

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

Over the past five months of the current FY, capital goods, such as auto parts, vehicles, machines, steel, and aeroplane parts, were brought into the country. Their import value was estimated at $2.5 billion. The figure was $947 million lower compared to the same period in the previous FY.

Meanwhile, Myanmar imported consumer products worth $1.38 billion, including pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and palm oil. The imports of consumer products showed a slight decrease of $122.57 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 $2.19 billion from $3.09 billion registered during the year-ago period.

During the same period, raw materials worth $772 million were also imported for the Cut-Make-Pack (CMP) garment sector, showing a decrease of $212 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 due to the cancellation of order from the European countries and suspension of the trade by western countries amid COVID-19 and current political instability.

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. — KK/GNLM

India-Myanmar border trade rises by $65.58 mln this FY

THE value of border trade between India and Myanmar jumped to US$133.599 million between 1 October and 5 March period of the current financial year amid the closure of border gates by India in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

The figures reflected an increase of $65.58 million as against a year-ago period.

India closed the border crossings in Mizoram and Manipur on account of COVID-19, and traders suffered the outbreak's negative impact.

The cross-border trade between Myanmar and India has stopped, and the reopening of the border checkpoints have been put off for now.

Myanmar conducts border trade with neighbouring India through Tamu, Reed, and Htantalan border posts.

Between 1 October and 5 March in the current budget year, trade values have registered at over $27.95 million at Tamu and $105.64 million at Reed. There was no trade recorded at the Htantalan post.

Myanmar exports mung beans, pigeon peas, green grams, areca nuts, ginger, saffron, turmeric, bay leaves, fishery products, fruits, and vegetables to India. At the same time, it imports pharmaceuticals, oil cakes, electronic appliances, motorbikes, steel and other construction machines and building materials from the neighbouring country. — MM/GNLM

Thai PM gets AstraZeneca jab as country resumes rollout despite concerns

THAILAND'S prime minister on Tuesday received the AstraZeneca vaccine as the Southeast Asian nation began the drug's rollout, lifting a suspension that was triggered by European nations raising safety concerns.

The country became the first outside of Europe to temporarily delay the Covid-19 vaccine after several EU nations -- including Ireland, the Netherlands and Denmark -- moved to delay it due to reports that some recipients had suffered blood clots.

Thailand is already administering China's Sinovac vaccine, with millions more imported doses expected in the coming months.

But it was expected to add the Oxford/AstraZeneca injection to its vaccine options on Friday, before health authorities abruptly suspended it as a precaution.

By Monday, it had cleared its use after the World Health Organization, the European Medicines Agency and many countries, including Britain and Canada. —AFP ■

Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha received the AstraZeneca Covid-19 coronavirus vaccine despite reports of blood clots in some who have taken the jab. **PHOTO: AFP**

Working on travel bubble with Singapore

AUSTRALIA is "working with Singapore" to create a travel bubble between the two nations as early as July, officials said Sunday, in an effort to restart tourism and travel put on hold by Covid-19.

Early in the pandemic Australia effectively closed its international border to slow the spread of the coronavirus, with non-citizens banned from visiting except in special circumstances.

Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack said Australia was "working with Singapore at the moment potentially for a bubble (beginning) in July".

"As the vaccine rolls out, not only in Australia but in other countries, we will reopen more bubbles," he told public broadcaster ABC.

The Sydney Morning Herald reported the deal would allow Singaporeans and Australians who had been vaccinated to travel between the countries without quarantining.

The newspaper said Canberra is also hoping that people from third countries -- such as international students, business travellers and returning citizens -- could complete two weeks' quarantine in Singapore before flying to Australia.

But Singapore, which has already opened its border to a handful of countries that have controlled the virus, including Australia, said it was "not in discussion on the concept of a quarantine centre or vaccination hub". "Singapore is currently in discussions with Australia on the mutual recognition of vaccination certificates and resumption of travel with priority for students and business travellers," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement Sunday. —AFP ■

Travellers walk into the departure hall of Singapore's Changi International Airport on May 12, 2016. **PHOTO: AFP**

Novavax Covid vaccine highly effective against severe Covid

US biotech firm Novavax's Covid-19 vaccine was shown to be 100 per cent protective against severe cases of the disease, including hospitalization and death, the company said Thursday following trials.

But its efficacy against the South African variant fell markedly when including mild and moderate cases, results showed. The results announced Thursday were from final analyses, following interim results that were announced in late January.

In a Phase 3 trial in Britain that included 15,000 participants aged 18-84, including 27 per cent over the age of 65, efficacy against mild, moderate and severe Covid was 96.4 per cent against the original strain.

This fell to 89.7 when including people infected with the B.1.1.7 variant, which has been shown to be more transmissible and cause more severe disease. In South Africa, a smaller Phase 2b trial of some 2,600 people found it was 48.6 per cent effective, though the figure rose to 55.4 per cent among HIV-negative volunteers. Across both trials, the vaccine known as NVX-CoV2373 demonstrated 100 per cent protection against severe disease.

Unlike the Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines, which deliver the genetic instructions that make human cells create a key protein of the virus, the Novavax shot injects synthetic versions of these proteins directly into the body to evoke an immune response. —AFP ■

Blood clot cases probed after jab suspension

NORWEGIAN health officials reported three more cases of blood clots or brain haemorrhages in younger people who received the AstraZeneca Covid-19 jab, but said they could not yet say they were vaccine-related. The Norwegian Medicines Agency said similar incidents had been reported in other European countries. While there was no proof of a link to the vaccine, anyone under 50 who felt unwell and developed large blue patches after vaccination should seek medical attention.

The World Health Organization said no causal link had been established between the vaccine and blood clotting after Denmark, Norway and Iceland on Thursday temporarily suspended the use of the vaccine over concerns about patients developing post-jab blood clots. A number of other countries have also suspended use of vaccines from one batch.

The manufacturer and Europe's medicines watchdog have meanwhile insisted that the vaccine is safe.

Denmark was first to announce its suspension, although it stressed that the move was precautionary, and that "it has not been determined, at the time being, that there is a link between the vaccine and the blood clots".

On Saturday, the Norwegian Medicines Agency said it had "received several adverse event reports about younger vaccinated people with bleeding under the skin (tiny dots and /or larger blue patches) after coronavirus vaccination.

"This is serious and can be a sign of reduced blood platelet counts," it said. "Today, we received three more reports of severe cases of blood clots or brain haemorrhages in younger people who have received the AstraZeneca vaccine.

These are now receiving hospital treatment," it added

Geir Bukholm, director of Infection Control and Environmental Health at the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, said that following the decision to suspend the jab, it was now "the Norwegian Medicines Agency's role to follow up on these suspected side effects and take the necessary measures".

AstraZeneca, an Anglo-Swedish company which developed the vaccine with Oxford University, has defended the safety of its product.

"The safety of the vaccine has been extensively studied in phase III clinical trials and peer-reviewed data confirms the vaccine has been generally well tolerated," a spokesman for the group told AFP. —AFP ■

Mallorca braces for German Easter influx as flights boom

The Spanish island of Mallorca was on Tuesday bracing for an Easter influx of sun-starved German tourists, as demand for Mediterranean holidays soared despite virus curbs and warnings from Berlin against foreign travel. **PHOTO: AFP**

THE Spanish island of Mallorca was on Tuesday bracing for an Easter influx of sun-starved German tourists, as demand for Mediterranean holidays soared despite virus curbs and warnings from Berlin against foreign travel.

Germany's Robert Koch Institute disease control agency removed the Balearic islands from its list of risk areas last weekend, prompting numerous airlines to schedule extra Easter flights to Mallorca -- a popular holiday destination among Germans sometimes jokingly called the country's "17th state".

TUI, a package holiday provider, said that it had received more bookings for Mallorca in recent days than in the same period in 2019, and would be doubling the number of its flights plying the route to the island to 300.

German flag carrier Lufthansa also said Friday it would double flights to Spain during Easter to meet a surge in demand, with three times more connecting Frankfurt and Palma, the capital of Mallorca.

Similar announcements have followed in recent days, with Lufthansa subsidiary Eurowings announcing 300 extra flights from Germany to the Balearics and Ryanair adding an additional 200 flights between Germany and Spain over Easter.

Foreign tourists can continue to arrive at Spanish airports, as long as they provide proof of a negative PCR test for coronavirus carried out within 72 hours of their arrival. —AFP ■

Moderna announces start of Covid-19 vaccine trials for children

US manufacturer Moderna on Tuesday said it has started Covid-19 vaccine trials for children aged from 6 months to under 12 years old, with plans to enroll about 6,750 participants.

"We are pleased to begin this Phase 2/3 study of mRNA-1273 in healthy children in the US and Canada," said CEO Stephane Bancel in a statement. "This pediatric study will help us assess the potential safety and immunogenicity of our Covid-19 vaccine candidate in this important younger age population."

US health authorities say that fewer children have been sick with Covid-19 compared to adults, but they can be infected and can spread the virus. Most infected children have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. School officials across the US are under pressure to fully reopen as soon as possible, but many say they need portable classrooms or shorter school days to meet social distancing rules. Moderna said 17.8 million adults in the United States have received its vaccine, as the country seeks to step up its innoculation programme against the coronavirus pandemic that has killed over 535,000 people in America. —AFP ■

Covid roller coaster adds to Blackpool's decline

IT'S ghost train ride stands idle and the golden beach is deserted. For seaside resort Blackpool, the Covid roller coaster has dealt another hammer blow to one of England's most deprived towns.

Windswept Blackpool, on England's northwest coast, was a thriving holiday destination before package holidays to sunnier climes took off in the 1980s.

But even with 18 million visitors a year before the pandemic, it is a shadow of its former self.

There is still its famous illuminations light show, Victorian tower and ballroom, plus its Pleasure Beach theme park featuring giant roller coasters and carousels. Boarded up shops, though, highlight the town's decline in recent years, a legacy of the effects of government austerity measures imposed after the 2008 global financial crisis.

And now Covid has made the situation worse, leaving struggling Blackpool businesses and people between a rock and a hard place. The town's vital tourism industry is shut for at least another month under government plans to gradually ease the lockdown restrictions, having remained closed for most of the year last year due to the virus fighting measures. Residents not previously reliant on emergency government support have suddenly found themselves dependent on soup kitchens and food banks for meals.

Blackpool, on England's northwest coast, was once a thriving holiday destination before package holidays took off. **PHOTO: AFP**

"It's just been so hard," says Ali Alian, a 50-year-old chef, who lost his job making fast food. He told AFP he did not come to food banks before the pandemic, as he set off on an hour-long walk home in the dark with a large sports bag filled with food handed out by the charity Street Angels. "Now I feel like I'm in a hole. I'm going down and I don't know how I'll get out of that hole," he added. —AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

EU regulator 'firmly convinced' of AstraZeneca benefits

THE EU's drug regulator said Tuesday it remained "firmly convinced" of the benefits of AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine despite several countries suspending its use over blood clot fears.

"We are still firmly convinced that the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine in preventing Covid-19 with its associated risk of hospitalisation and death outweigh the risk of these side effects," European Medicines Agency chief Emer Cooke told an online press conference. —AFP ■

Covid-19 deaths in Europe pass 900,000

THE number of deaths from Covid-19 across Europe passed 900,000 on Tuesday, according to an AFP tally of official figures provided by health authorities.

As of 0845 GMT, the 52 countries and territories of the region -- which includes Russia and Turkey -- had officially registered 900,185 coronavirus deaths since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, out of a total of 40,083,433 confirmed cases. This makes Europe the deadliest region, ahead of Latin America and the Caribbean (721,581 deaths), Canada and the United States (558,110 deaths) and Asia (263,250).

Last week Europe saw an average of 3,000 Covid deaths a day, a 2.3 per cent drop on the previous week. For a month now the region has seen less than 4,000 daily deaths -- a figure which it had been surpassing since November -- with a grim new record, 5,700 deaths in 24 hours, reached at the end of January.—AFP ■

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Germany meets emission target in 2020 thanks to COVID-19 lockdown

Lignite plant Neurath: Germany's coal power use has dropped substantially in 2019. **PHOTO: RWE/AFP**

GERMANY'S greenhouse gas emissions in 2020 fell by 8.7 per cent year-on-year to around 739 million metric tons, the Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) announced on Tuesday.

The reduction was the largest annual decrease since German reunification around 30 years ago, according to data from the German Environment Agency (UBA). Compared to 1990, emissions in Germany dropped by 40.8 per cent, just meeting the government target of 40 per cent.

"With the climate balance 2020, Germany is making progress in climate protection for the third year in a row," Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety Svenja Schulze said in a statement. Effects from the COVID-19 restrictions also contributed to the development, in particular in the transport sector.

Greenhouse gas emissions in the transport sector in Germany fell by 11.4 per cent year-on-year as fewer cars were on the road during the first COVID-19 lockdown, particularly on long-distance routes, according to BMU. There was also a "significant coronavirus effect" for national air traffic, which produced almost 60 per cent less CO2 in 2020. — Xinhua ■

US industrial production falls 2.2% in February amid winter storms

Bad weather in Texas knocked out power across the state in February and caused an unexpected plunge in industrial production. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

US industrial production fell 2.2 per cent in February, the Federal Reserve said on Tuesday, a worse-than-expected figured caused by winter storms that knocked factories offline in parts of the country.

"The severe winter weather in the south central region of the country in mid-February accounted for the bulk of the declines in output for the month," the central bank said.

Manufacturing output fell 3.1 per cent in the month, mining lost 5.4 per cent, the report said. But utilities output increased 7.4 per cent compared to January.

And overall production remains 4.2 per cent below the February 2020 level.

Severe and unusual winter storms shuttered businesses and knocked out power in Texas, the country's second most-populous state.

"Most notably, some petroleum refineries, petrochemical facilities, and plastic resin plants suffered damage from the deep freeze and were offline for the rest of the month," the Fed said.

The central bank noted that without that storm, manufacturing would have fallen only around 0.5 per cent nationwide, while mining would have increased by the same amount.

February's decline was the worst since the Covid-19 pandemic began last year and also partly fueled by the global shortage in semiconductors, said Oren Klachkin of Oxford Economics.

But he predicted government stimulus spending and the deployment of Covid-19 vaccines would restore growth in months ahead, though its pace could moderate as the service sector reopens later in the year.

"Healthy goods demand, healing business investment and historic fiscal stimulus are set to propel solid industrial sector growth," he said. —AFP ■

Freefalling Lebanon currency hits new low

LEBANON'S currency hit a new low against the dollar on the black market Tuesday, continuing its freefall in a country gripped by political deadlock and an economic crisis.

The latest plunge means the Lebanese pound has lost almost 90 per cent of its value on the informal market in just 18 months.

The Lebanese pound has been pegged to the dollar at 1,500 since 1997, but the country's worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war has seen its unofficial value plummet.

The slide has picked up speed over the past two weeks, with the exchange rate soaring from 10,000 Lebanese pounds to the dollar on March 2 to around 15,000 on Tuesday.

Three money changers said they were buying dollars for 14,800 to 14,900 Lebanese pounds, while a customer told AFP they had sold the foreign currency at 15,000 pounds to the dollar.

The pound's fall has led to soaring food prices in a country where more than half of the population now lives below the poverty line.

The smell of burnt tyres wafted over Beirut on Tuesday after gaggles of protesters took to the streets in the capital and elsewhere in the country, in the latest such demonstrations in recent weeks.

"Lebanon exchange rate reaches 15,000LL to the 1$. Last night it was 13,250," tweeted analyst Maha Yahya. —AFP ■

Demonstrators burn tyres at a makeshift roadblock in Zouk Mosbeh north of Lebanon's capital Beirut on 8 March, 2021 in protest at the deteriorating value of the local currency. **PHOTO : AFP**

NEWS IN BRIEF

US stimulus checks could end up in stock markets, bitcoin

President Joe Biden's $1.9 trillion stimulus will start flooding into the US economy soon, and some analysts say much of that money could end up invested in stocks or even bitcoin.

Over the weekend, the government began sending the $1,400 direct payments that will go to nearly everyone in the United States.

About $400 billion in payments will flow directly to households, going to individuals earning less than $75,000 a year or married couples making up to $150,000, as well as their children.

And that does not count child tax credits or unemployment benefits in the massive package, which also includes funds to contain Covid-19, accelerate vaccinations, help reopen schools and aid businesses and state and local governments.

The direct payments amount to $5,600 -- tax free -- for a typical family of four, funds officials hope will boost the US economy.

But the majority of Americans say that rather than spend, they will use the money to pay off debts, add to savings or to invest, according to one survey by Bank of America, which interviewed 3,000 people.

The bank found that 30 per cent will use the money to repay their debt, 25 per cent will save it and nine percent will invest. —AFP ■

UK to increase nuclear stockpile: reports

The Guardian and The Sun said in their online editions that the country would look to raise the number of warheads from 180 to 260 by the middle of the decade. **PHOTO: AFP**

BRITAIN is to announce an increase to its nuclear weapons stockpile as part of a wide-ranging review of security, defence and foreign policy, two newspapers said on Monday.

The Guardian and The Sun said in their online editions that the country would look to raise the number of warheads from 180 to 260 by the middle of the decade.

Both dailies said details were contained in a leak they had seen of the government's long-awaited Integrated Review, due to be published on Tuesday.

The review is also said to state clearly that Russia under President Vladimir Putin poses an "active threat" but describes China as providing a more "systemic challenge".

London has increasingly locked horns with both Moscow and Beijing in recent years, on issues ranging from espionage and cyber-attacks to human rights.

Britain's Trident nuclear programme is a thorny political issue domestically, with repeated calls for it to be scrapped, given global moves towards disarmament after the end of the Cold War.

Opponents for its abolition include the main opposition Labour party and the Scottish National Party (SNP). Britain's nuclear submarine fleet is based in the west of Scotland.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) called the reports "shocking" given the pressures of the global coronavirus pandemic and climate change.

"We don't want any more nuclear weapons. In fact, we don't want any," it added.

The executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Beatrice Fihn, accused Britain of "pushing for a dangerous new nuclear arms race".

She said it was "irresponsible, dangerous and violates international law", adding: "This is toxic masculinity on display."

Strategic 'tilt'

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is due to set out the conclusions of the year-long review -- entitled "Global Britain in a Competitive Age -- to parliament on Tuesday.

His Downing Street office billed the 100-page report as the government's "most comprehensive articulation of a foreign policy and national security approach" in decades. —AFP ■

33 years after Iraq chemical attack, survivors still seeking justice

HAWKER Saber is one of the survivors of the chemical attack Saddam Hussein ordered on the Kurdish town of Halabja 33 years ago but he needs a respirator to stay alive.

Saber, who is hooked to the machine for more than 20 hours a day, was just three at the time but he still has terrible memories of March 16, 1988.

On that day, for five hours, Iraq's air force rained down a deadly cocktail of chemical weapons, including mustard gas, on Halabja in the mountains of northeastern Iraq, according to experts.

In retribution for Kurdish peshmerga fighters backing Iran in its eight-year war with Iraq, around 5,000 Iraqi Kurds, the majority women and children, were killed in the largest ever chemical weapons attack on civilians.

The attack still haunts Halabja as its residents, now estimated at around 200,000, still fight for justice, care for the ill and hunt for missing relatives.

"There are still 486 people who are seriously ill from the chemical attack in Halabja," Loqman Abdelqader, president of an association for victims of the attack, told AFP.

"They have respiratory difficulties and eyesight problems," said Abdelqader, who himself lost six family members in the massacre.

"Neither the federal authorities nor the Iraqi Kurdish authorities have set up a care programme to help them," he added.

'None have kept their word'

Up until the start of the coronavirus pandemic, it was Iran that each year took on the care of several patients, but always on a piecemeal basis. Halabja families are also still trying to find children that went missing amid the chaos of the attack, with many having been sheltered and treated in Iran, just 10 kilometres (6 miles) away. —AFP ■

A memorial in Halabja based on a photograph of a father and baby killed the chemical attack. **PHOTO: AFP**

Greece, Turkey, meet for fresh talks on maritime dispute

At the height of last year's tensions, Greek warships took part in exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean. **PHOTO:AFP**

DIPLOMATS from NATO members Greece and Turkey met in Athens Tuesday to try once more to settle their standoff over eastern Mediterranean borders and energy rights.

Ankara ratcheted up the pressure a notch on Monday with a diplomatic note to Israel, Greece and the European Union, Turkish media reported.

It told them to seek its permission before proceeding with work on a proposed undersea power cable in disputed eastern Mediterranean waters, Turkish state media reported Monday.

Both sides cite a range of decades-old treaties and international agreements to support their conflicting territorial claims.

Hostilities flared last year when Ankara sent a research ship accompanied by a navy flotilla into waters near the Turkish coast that Greece asserts are theirs -- a claim the EU supports.

Those waters are thought to be a possible source of natural gas reserves.

Turkey is furious that Athens is using its web of islands to lay claim to huge swathes of the Aegean and Mediterranean seas.

Tuesday's meeting follows one in Istanbul in January, the first direct talks between the two sides on the dispute in nearly five years -- and which happened only after pressure from the EU.

But the discussion will also be the 62nd such meeting since 2000, a long series that so far has little to show for it. —AFP ■

Israel unearths pieces of 2,000-year-old biblical scroll

ISRAEL said Tuesday it had discovered pieces of a biblical scroll dating back some 2,000 years, describing the find as one of the most significant since the Dead Sea Scrolls.

"For the first time in approximately 60 years, archaeological excavations have uncovered fragments of a biblical scroll," the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) said in a statement.

Following a years-long dig in caves and cliffs in the Judean desert, the authority said it had also discovered a cache of rare coins, a six-millennia-old skeleton of a child and basket it described as the oldest in the world, at over 10,000 years.

The finds are a result of survey of some 80 kilometres (50 miles) of cliffs in a desert area spanning southern Israel and the occupied West Bank.

Using drones, mountain climbing gear and rappelling equipment, Israeli archaeologists searched caves they said were used by Jews rebelling against the Romans during the failed second-century Bar Kochba revolt —AFP ■

The mystery of Tanzania's missing president

WHERE is Tanzania's President John Magufuli?

Tuesday marks 17 days since the 61-year-old has been seen in public, and despite a clamour of rumours of ill-health, the Tanzanian authorities have yet to provide clear answers as to his whereabouts.

The mere question is now leading to arrests, as the government seeks to contain the rumours.

And analysts say the silence is telling.

"I think whatever happens ... it is clearly true the regime is trying to buy time," said Nic Cheeseman, professor of democracy at the University of Birmingham.

"And it only really makes sense that the regime is trying to buy time if the president is very ill, incapacitated, or dead."

Magufuli last appeared in public on February 27, and the fervent Catholic has missed three Sunday services, where he would often address the congregation.

Just days before, Finance Minister Philip Mpango appeared coughing and gasping at a press conference outside a hospital, to dispel rumours he had died of Covid-19.

President John Magufuli had for months insisted the coronavirus no longer existed in Tanzania, but later conceded it was still circulating. **PHOTO: AFP**

Fended off by prayer

Magufuli's absence comes amid a string of high-profile deaths and illnesses attributed to "respiratory problems" or "pneumonia".

Magufuli had for months insisted the virus no longer existed in Tanzania, and had been fended off by prayer. He refused to wear a face-mask or take lockdown measures. The country stopped releasing case data in April 2020. But a week before he was last seen, Magufuli conceded the virus was still circulating, after the vice-president of semi-autonomous Zanzibar was revealed to have died of Covid-19.—AFP ■

China to issue visas to foreigners who have taken Chinese jab

Chinese embassies in several countries have issued notices saying the country will open visa application to select people who have taken a China-made jab. **PHOTO: AFP**

CHINA is poised to ease border restrictions to allow some foreigners -- including from the US, India and Pakistan -- back in, provided they have taken a Chinese-made Covid-19 vaccine.

The country has been closed to most foreigners since last March to stem the spread of coronavirus which it has largely brought under control at home, stranding many foreigners with jobs and family inside China overseas.

But Chinese embassies in several countries have issued notices saying the country will open visa applications to select people who have taken a China-made jab.

The Chinese Embassy in the US said in a statement dated Monday that it would begin to process "visa applicants inoculated with Chinese Covid-19 vaccines".

This would apply from this week to those visiting the Chinese mainland for work resumption, business travel, or for "humanitarian needs", such as reuniting with family members.

Beijing is driving forward its inoculation plan for its vast domestic population with four domestically produced vaccines approved so far. But it has yet to approve any foreign-made jabs.

China has also shipped its vaccines overseas as it works to blunt foreign criticism of the initial spread of the virus from its shores. The embassy statement said this applied to those who had either had two doses of the vaccine or a single-dose at least 14 days before applying for the visa. —AFP ■

'Amityville Horror' killer dies in US custody at 69

THE American murderer Ronald DeFeo -- whose 1974 killings of his parents and four siblings inside their home near New York inspired "The Amityville Horror" movie -- has died, prison officials said Monday. DeFeo, who was serving a 25 years-to-life sentence at Sullivan Correctional Facility in northern New York state, died on Friday aged 69, the state prisons department said in a statement.

He was pronounced dead around 6:35 pm (2335 GMT) at Albany Medical Center, which is located around 150 kilometres (93 miles) from the jail, the statement added. The cause of death was not immediately known and is pending a coroner's report.

The prison's department did not say whether DeFeo had been ill before he died. He was due for a parole hearing in July, according to prison authorities. DeFeo was convicted of killing his mother, father, two brothers and two sisters on November 13, 1974 at their home in the coastal town of Amityville on Long Island about 40 miles from New York City.

DeFeo, who was only 23 years old at the time shot each of his parents twice and his siblings once. The victims were all found in their beds.—AFP ■

'The fighting continues': A Tigray town reels from drawn-out war

KIBROM Hailu wasn't too worried when his 15-year-old son stepped out to play volleyball one morning last month near their home in Wukro, in Ethiopia's conflict-hit Tigray region.

There had been protests in town that week -- young men burning tyres and denouncing Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed -- but his son, Henok, wasn't involved and promised not to go far.

Only when he heard gunfire did Kibrom realise the danger, and by then it was too late: Henok's body lay dead in the dirt road right outside the gate of their compound.

Henok was one of 18 civilians shot and killed that day by Ethiopian soldiers, according to a tally provided by St Mary's College in Wukro, which has documented abuses by security forces against civilians in the town since fighting erupted last November.

For Kibrom, though, the timing was just as revealing as the toll: the killings came around two and a half months after Abiy announced military operations in Tigray had "ceased" and life would return to normal.

In fact the opposite is true, Kibrom and other Wukro residents told AFP journalists who reached the town earlier this month.

"The war is escalating. Now it is focused on the civilians," Kibrom said.

"How can we live like this?"

Every phase of the four-month-old conflict in Tigray has brought suffering to Wukro, a fast-growing transport hub once best-known for its religious and archaeological sites.

Ahead of federal forces' arrival in late November, heavy shelling levelled homes and businesses and sent plumes of dust and smoke rising above near-deserted streets.—AFP ■

Many buildings in Wukro were blasted apart by shelling as government forces arrived. **PHOTO: AFP**

AFC Women's Asian Cup 2022 to be held in India

THE AFC Women's Asian Cup 2022 will be held in India from 20 January to 6 February in 2022 following a confirmation made by Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) last week.

The AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022 will feature Asia's top 12 teams, which will be put into three groups of four.

Ahead of the tourney, AFC General Secretary Dato' Windsor John said: "Women's football in Asia is world-class, and with the next FIFA Women's World Cup to be staged in Australia and New Zealand, there has never been a more exciting time for women's football in the Continent.

"India has seen incredible growth in recent years, in both the men's and women's game, and we are confident that the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022 will present another historic step in the incredible journey of Indian football – one that will strengthen the passion for the game and leave a lasting impact for future generations of women footballers and passionate fans. "Today's announcement highlights the great steps that are being made in terms of development, planning and execution by the Local Organizing Committee, and we are confident that Asian and global football will witness a truly unforgettable spectacle," the AFC General Secretary added. —GNLM ■

Ramos returns amid doubts over future as Madrid face Atalanta

Sergio Ramos returned for Real Madrid on Saturday but the bigger question is whether he is back for good. **PHOTO: AFP**

MADRID— Sergio Ramos returned for Real Madrid on Saturday but the bigger question is whether he is back for good.

After two months out with a knee injury, Ramos played an hour in Madrid's win over Elche, with the plan to blow away the cobwebs ready for a start against Atalanta in the second leg of the Champions League on Tuesday.

His availability should be a significant boost for Madrid, who have a 1-0 advantage from last month's first leg in Italy and will be confident of being Spain's first, and perhaps only, survivor in the tournament's quarter-finals.

And yet Ramos's reemergence has been pinpointed less as a boost to his team than a bolstering of his case to stay, every week he was absent another blow to his hope for a contract extension beyond the summer.

Madrid president Florentino Perez has reportedly offered Ramos a two-year deal with a 10 per cent pay cut or a second option, the continuation of his current wages but for only one more year.

Ramos wants two more years on the same wages, with the possibility to add a third. "There is a lot of uncertainty," Ramos said on Thursday. —AFP ■

Murray handed Miami Open wildcard

MIAMI — Three-time Grand Slam champion and former world number one Andy Murray is among five players handed a wildcard into the main draw of next week's Miami Open, tournament officials said Monday. Murray, who skipped this week's Dubai Tennis Championships after becoming a father for the fourth time with wife Kim Sears, returns to the Miami Open field for the first time since 2016. The two-time Wimbledon and Olympic champion, who is on the comeback trail after hip surgery two years ago, won the Miami Open in 2009 and 2013 and reached the final of the event in 2012 and 2015. "It is exciting to see Andy back in Miami," said Miami Open tournament director James Blake. "As someone who has had to battle back from injury during his career, I understand and respect all the hard work Andy has put in to get back on tour."

Murray is joined in the main draw by Spain's Carlos Alcaraz, Michael Mmoh of the United States, Hugo Gaston of France and Britain's Jack Draper. Anna Kalinskaya, Ana Konjuh, Storm Sanders, Katrina Scott, Mayar Sherif, Wang Xiyu and Wang Xinyu were granted main draw wildcards in the women's tournament. On Sunday, two-time Miami Open champion Kim Clijsters withdrew from the tournament. —AFP ■

Man. City's rich resources make 'impossible' quadruple quest a reality

LONDON — Two seasons ago as Manchester City won the first ever domestic treble of trophies in England, Pep Guardiola branded the possibility of ever doing a quadruple "almost impossible". A season characterized by injuries, fixture congestion, player fatigue, coronavirus infections, and for City no pre-season, should have made the feat more improbable than ever. Yet, City remain on course to prove Guardiola's prediction wrong. A commanding 14-point lead at the top of the Premier League means it is a matter of when not if a third title in four years is sealed. On Tuesday, Guardiola's men head to Budapest for what should have been the home leg of their Champions League last 16 tie holding a 2-0 first leg advantage over Borussia Monchengladbach.

Next weekend they travel to Everton in the FA Cup quarter-finals, while a League Cup final with Tottenham awaits in April.—AFP ■

Joshua, Fury sign two-fight heavyweight unification deal: promoter

Anthony Joshua and Tyson Fury have signed a deal for two all-British world heavyweight title unification fights, Joshua's promoter Eddie Hearn said on Monday. **PHOTO: AFP**

LONDON — Anthony Joshua and Tyson Fury have signed a deal for two all-British world heavyweight title unification fights, Joshua's promoter Eddie Hearn said on Monday.Confirming the agreement, Hearn told ESPN: "The hard part is always getting everybody to put pen to paper.

"But this was a major effort from all parties to get this over the line. You had rival promoters, rival networks and rival fighters." Hearn said a venue for the fights, in which Joahua's WBA, IBF and WBO titles and Fury's WBC belt will be on the line, is set to be confirmed "within the next month".According to reports, Saudi Arabia, where Joshua won a rematch against Andy Ruiz Jr in December 2019, is the frontrunner to host both fights.But Hearn told ESPN he "already had approaches from eight or nine sites" across the Middle East, Asia, Eastern Europe and America. "We'd like to get a site deal confirmed in the next month," he said.—AFP ■