Yadanabon Hall with facilities gives seats to 1,200 guests for holding various kinds of ceremonies as well as regional development tasks, market fests and international expositions: Senior General

THE ceremony to commission Yadanabon Hall in Mandalay into service aims to contribute to the growth of the State economy and the socio-economic development of the local people, hold economic, social, educational and cultural ceremonies, including State-level gala ceremonies, and polish the prestige of the city, said State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at the inauguration of Yadanabon Hall in Mahaaungmyay Township of Mandalay yesterday morning.

The Senior General unveiled the signboard of the hall and sprinkled scented water on the plaque.

Speaking on the occasion, the Senior General said that the newly-opened Yadanabon Hall is a building giving better services for economic, social and cultural sectors with enhancing the living standard of the local people from Mandalay and its environs.

Mandalay City, located in the centre of transportation, is a commercial hub in upper Myanmar with the economy's growth. Alinkakawswa Sayagi Myoma Nyein is a symbol of Mandalay. Sayagi Myoma Nyein and Myoma Band are inseparable. The Senior General expressed thanks to Myoma Band for its entertainment at the ceremony.

In his tenure, King Mindon settled various persons in their respective plots under their jobs Yadanabon Hall is a building giving better services for economic, social and cultural sectors with enhancing the living standard of the local people from Mandalay and its environs.

SEE PAGE-3
MYANMAR’S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 143,097 after 32 new cases were reported on 17 May 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these confirmed cases, 132,123 have been discharged from hospitals. Death toll stands at 3,213 after one died. — MNA

Tatmadaw provides treatment to over 200,000 outpatients

TATMADAW keep providing healthcare services for the patients at the military hospitals and temporary treatment hospitals in the townships of regions and states. The Tatmadaw medical teams comprising Tatmadaw doctors, specialists, medical assistants and nurses, have been giving medical treatments to the people to solve their difficulties in healthcare services. A total of 207,240 outpatients and 63,566 inpatients reached these hospitals from 5 February to date. Senior medical experts, medical assistants and nurses have conducted 9,682 major operations and 4,913 minor operations. The senior doctors gave intensive treatment to the severe cases. These hospitals managed for the birth of 12,412 babies to date. Of those, 5,014 cases are done in the caesarean section and 7,398 cases in ordinary delivery.

In addition to providing medical care to patients in need of hospitalization, Tatmadaw is making arrangements for the well-being of hospitalized patients and caregivers. — MNA

Five special appeal cases for crime heard

THE special appeal court comprising Chief Justice of the Union U Tun Tun Oo and Supreme Court Judges U Myint Aung, U Kyi Thein, U Khin Maung Gyi and U Tin Hong heard five exceptional appeal cases for crime at office 1 of the Supreme Court of the Union at 9 am yesterday. — MNA

32 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 17 May, total figure rises to 143,097

MYANMAR’S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 143,097 after 32 new cases were reported on 17 May 2021 according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Among these confirmed cases, 132,123 have been discharged from hospitals. Death toll stands at 3,213 after one died. — MNA
It is necessary to manufacture sufficient products of foodstuffs at home . . .

IN undertaking the agriculture and livestock tasks in the country, animal feedstuffs are imported abroad for breeding farms. As raw agricultural products are abundant in the country for animal feedstuff production, sufficient production of the feedstuffs can reduce foreign exchange spending. It is necessary to manufacture sufficient products of foodstuffs at home to distribute the foodstuffs to the people at fair prices.

State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and party are making a tour in the Yadanabon Hall.

Yadanabon Hall with facilities gives seats to 1,200 ...
Participation of education staff and administrative bodies will ease tensions of students in learning: Senior General

STATE Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing yesterday met members of Mandalay Region Administration Council and departmental personnel at the office of Mandalay Region Council Office.

Mandalay Region Administration Council Chairman U Maung Ko reported to the Senior General on social and economic affairs, health and regional development tasks undertaken in Mandalay Region, the progress of COVID-19 vaccination, and general matters. Chairman of Mandalay City Development Committee Mayor U Kyaw Hsan reported on undertakings of development tasks, electrification, water supply and future tasks.

Speaking on occasion, the Senior General recognized that Mandalay City gains all-round development after having progress for the last ten years. Public participation is of importance in undertaking municipal tasks for sanitation and the beautifying of the city.

With regard to the underground water supply, the Senior General urged officials not to tap the underground water as much as possible and pump the water from Ayeyawady and Myitnge rivers for consumption. The electricity that will need in implementing the river water pumping projects must be applied through the solar system. As Mandalay Region faces 68 per cent of rice sufficiency, local people buy rice outside the city. Paddy must be cultivated with increasing per-acre yield and cultivation of summer paddy to have 40 per cent of rice sufficiency based on the purchase of rice outside the city.

Moreover, the Senior General stressed the need to set motorcycle ways on local roads and disseminate agricultural knowledge for increasing per-acre yields of crops. The Senior General noted that the literacy campaigns must be drawn to solve the education problems for teaching 3-Rs education to those who never learned. Currently, the State Administration Council is striving to reopen basic education schools while some unscrupulous persons are committing the disturbance not to reopen the schools through ways and means. All need to solve the losses caused by brainless persons without focusing on the interests of the State, and these losses were not based on natural disasters. The participation of education staff and administrative bodies will ease the tensions of students in learning. If the education sector lagged behind the development, it would cause much loss to the State in the long run.

The Senior General discussed the establishment of agriculture and livestock institutes, colleges and universities in the long term plan.

The Council will strive for improvement of the sports sectors of the country. A plan is underway to forge the nationalistic spirit through success in sports. As such, the Senior General instructed officials to build the stadiums comprising 400 metres tracks in regions and states as well as townships.

Then, the Senior General and party inspected Bahtoo Stadium in Chanayethazan Township and instructed officials to upgrade the stadium.

— MNA
Every Tatmadaw member must take training to be healthy and strong, follow military discipline and order for capacity building: Senior General

THE Tatmadaw’s main duty is to defend the State, and academic and skill training, as well as suitable training for respective ranks, are being given at respective training schools for the capacity building of every Tatmadaw member. And they need to serve dutifully as good soldiers in shoulderling their duties, said State Administration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in meeting with officers and other ranks from Thabeikkyin Station and trainees from the local advanced military training depot yesterday afternoon.

Speaking on occasion, the Senior General said when it comes to Tatmadaw training, such training courses are being conducted to promote the capacity of individual soldiers and to ensure that they are fully skilled and qualified in serving their duties. The Tatmadaw’s advanced military training depots are upgrading the skills of soldiers individually and in groups. Only if they can study the skills being taught during the course in a systematic manner will they be able to apply them correctly in a practical field. Without enough strength in serving battlefield duties, they will not be able to perform their tasks dutifully. By undergoing correct training in individuals and groups, they need to stay as healthy and robust as they should as Tatmadawmen, the Senior General stressed.

Speaking about the soldiers and the Tatmadaw trying to become skilled and qualified, the Senior General said every Tatmadaw member is voluntarily serving in the Tatmadaw with their noble aim of protecting the State and the people without persuasion from anyone. As the skills and knowledge taught by the training schools are mainly theoretical, they should try to come to terms with the difficulties facing on the ground with their own initiatives. They need to review the difficulties they are facing and use their initiatives and wisdom to overcome them. Being able to do this requires knowledge, so they need to read knowledgeable books in their spare time. Discipline is the backbone of the Tatmadaw, and they must follow the discipline even in small things. They must follow the rules and disciplines adopted for the capacity building of individuals and their respective military units and act correctly. As they can work only when they are healthy, every soldier must train to be healthy and robust and endure hard work.

Speaking about the country’s political changes, the Senior General said that Tatmadaw had to take over State responsibilities as entrusted by the Pro Tem President due to the political situations. The Tatmadaw officially and legally requested those responsible for resolving massive vote-rigging in the 2020 multiparty democracy election. But there was no solution, and what’s more, there were attempts to grab State power. Consequently, the country has reached such a situation. The Tatmadaw is assuming State responsibilities just temporarily as the call for a demand. It is necessary to understand that the Tatmadaw is just controlling the country according to the 2008 Constitution. Except for seven townships with martial law imposition, other townships are under civilian rule. They are going with the government administrative machinery. So, everyone needs to shoulder their duties assigned. As the Tatmadaw is part of the State and the people, they must try to live and act as good soldiers trying their best to serve the interests of the country and the people, the Senior General commented. — MNA

Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice-CCPCJ holds 30th meeting

THE Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice-CCPCJ held its 30th meeting in Vienna of Austria yesterday afternoon through video-conferencing, attended by Deputy Director-General U Kyaw Kyaw Naing of the Office of the Attorney-General of the Union. Representatives of the global countries also attended the meeting organized by UNODC.

It will last from 17 to 21 May to focus on preventive procedures depending on crime, practical works and cooperation measures. — MNA
State Administration Council Member Lt-Gen Soe Htut, Union Ministers from relevant ministries meet local authorities

UNION Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Soe Htut, State Administration Council member, currently in Mandalay, met civil servants from Mandalay Region General Administration Department, administrators from townships and wards in Mandalay district at the meeting hall of the Mandalay Region Administration Council office yesterday afternoon.

At first, U Myint Lwin, the commissioner of Mandalay Region, clarified the department’s progress with the help of PowerPoint, and those present put forward reports on administrative matters to be fulfilled. After hearing the reports, the Union Minister gave directions to necessary tasks.

Similarly, Dr Nyunt Pe, Union Minister for Education, met district education officers, township education officers and school heads from Mandalay Region at the meeting hall of No 16 Basic Education High School in Chanayethazan Township. The Union minister explained the reopening of schools mentioning that CDM teachers can get back to work. Then he attends to the needs after hearing the reports.

Likewise, Dr Thet Khaing Win, Union Minister for Health and Sports, met officials from 550-bed children’s hospital and 300-bed teaching hospital in Chanayethazan Township.

Union Minister Dr Pwint San conducts field visit to Magway Region

UNION Minister for Commerce Dr Pwint San conducted a field visit to the domestic production sector sites and facilitated trade in Magway Region on 15 May.

First, officials from Good Brothers Company explained the establishment of a cattle-breeding farm in Yae Pyae village, Myothit Township, Magway District.

Next, Union Minister Dr Pwint San discussed preparing necessary arrangements in order to facilitate the flow of goods and foreign trade, export agricultural products and cattle to foreign countries, have food safety and necessary health recommendations for cattle export, and systematically obtain relevant certificates. The Union Minister also called for disseminating technology and support to those who want to carry out modern livestock farming in the region.

Next, Union Minister Dr Pwint San visited the Anway Htwar groundnut oil mill in Magway. The Union Minister said that he would make arrangements to support the improvement of domestically produced oil.

Afterwards, the Union Minister and party met with traders and industrialists in Magway Region.

First, the Magway Region Administration Council Member (2) stated that the production of oilseeds like sesame, the plans to establish livestock breeding zones, and further plans to develop livestock farming and manufacture value-added local products of regional trade and flow of goods and finding methods to grow more oilseeds in the oil industry were also discussed.

Then, Union Minister Dr Pwint San coordinated the necessary measures to increase the production of oilseeds.

Next, the Union Minister and party visited the Sesame Powder Mill of the Myay Latt Thar General Trading Cooperative Society in Magway and coordinated the necessary matters. — MNA/ GNLM

Training courses to polish skills of staff officers, senior auditors

UNION Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Soe Htut, State Administration Council member, currently in Mandalay, met civil servants from Mandalay Region General Administration Department, administrators from townships and wards in Mandalay district at the meeting hall of the Mandalay Region Administration Council office yesterday afternoon.

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Likewise, Dr Thet Khaing Win, Union Minister for Health and Sports, met officials from 550-bed children’s hospital and 300-bed teaching hospital in Chanayethazan Township.

The training courses were organized at the hall of the Office of the Auditor-General of the Union under the guidance of the State Administration Council Chairman in order to understand and apply the economics and law subjects, said Auditor-General of the Union Dr Kan Zaw at the ceremony to open the staff officer refresher course 1/2021 and senior auditors’ capacity building course 36 yesterday.

The training courses were conducted in line with the human resource development programme of the Office of the Auditor-General of the Union under the guidance of the State Administration Council Chairman in order to understand and apply the economics and law subjects, said Auditor-General of the Union Dr Kan Zaw at the ceremony to open the staff officer refresher course 1/2021 and senior auditors’ capacity building course 36 yesterday.

The Union minister urged officials and staff to carry out healthcare tasks in full swing and follow the rules of civil servants.

He also mentioned that actions would be taken against those threatening the health workers not to go to work and inspected the construction site to extend the 550-bed children’s hospital.

Similarly, U Maung Maung Ohn, Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism, visited Pullman Hotel and inspected preparatory tasks for reopening the hotel according to the directives issued by the ministry. The Union minister gave necessary instructions after being conducted by the officials inside the hotel.

The hotel has 368 rooms where national-level ceremonies, international ceremonies and meetings can be held on a grand scale. — MNA/ GNLM

ACCOUNTS proficiency courses are conducted in line with the human resource development programme of the Office of the Auditor-General of the Union under the guidance of the State Administration Council Chairman in order to understand and apply the economics and law subjects, said Auditor-General of the Union Dr Kan Zaw at the ceremony to open the staff officer refresher course 1/2021 and senior auditors’ capacity building course 36 yesterday.

The training courses were organized at the hall of the Office of the Auditor-General of the Union through a virtual system. The Auditor-General of the Union stressed the need for the trainees to notice that they all are service personnel. The Public Service Personnel Law, handbook and rules prescribe entitlements, duties and social security for service personnel meeting the international standard. He urged them to stay away from party politics as they are service personnel. He called for serving the duty to accomplish the plans adopted for the State, citizen and government.

A total of 109 trainees are attending the staff officer refresher course 1 and 58 at the senior auditors’ capacity building course 36. The courses last for two months till 16 July. — MNA
Teachers urged to teach pupils without discrimination

THE Ministry of Education will accept teachers who delayed joining their jobs for various reasons within six months, said Union Minister for Education Dr Nyunt Pe in meeting education officers at different levels and school heads of basic education schools in Mandalay Region yesterday.

The Union minister urged teachers to teach pupils without discrimination. He reminded the teachers to teach pupils without discrimination by giving an equal term of education families to report plans to reopen seven schools for reopening of pre-primary education families to report plans to reopen seven schools.
Despite almost half a million death toll, misinformation still fuelling concerns

False claims that COVID-19 vaccines can cause infertility are discouraging Americans from receiving the shots and leaving health professionals to persuade patients that scare stories they read online are unfounded.

Oliver Cambell, Jr. gets a shot of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at the First Baptist Church of Pasadena on May 14, 2021. (Photo: Global Times/China Daily)

Indian Covid variant sparks concern, and questions

The coronavirus strain first linked to the Covid epidemic in India has now spread to at least 44 countries and been classified as a “variant of concern”, but health authorities still know relatively little about it.

S POTTED for the first time in October 2020 in India, it this week joined the Brit- ish, South African and Brazilian variants in the World Health Organisations (WHO)’s highest threat category. Here is what we do and do not know about the strain.

One variant or three?

The name “Indian variant” describes a strain – B.1.617 – that in fact groups together three distinct subvariants sharing some, but not all, of mutations. These subvariants are detected in dozens of countries and their overall spread in the world has not spread much beyond In- dia.

The WHO said on Tuesday that although there “may be important differences among the three subvariants”, there is currently not enough evidence to tease out individual classifications, so it grouped them together as a single “variant of concern”.

More transmissible?

In India, where the number of officially reported Covid deaths has passed a quarter of a million, there are concerns that the new variant may have accelerated the virus spread. But it is more complicated than that, according to the WHO. It said there were potentially several factors driving the exploding epidemic, including variants that could be more transmissible; religious or political mass gatherings that increased social mixing; and reduced use of public health measures.

The exact contributions of each of these factors on increased transmission in India are not well understood, the WHO said. It did say that the three subvariants “appear to have higher rates of transmission”. They have been observed, for example, to spread more rapidly in other countries once they gain a foothold.

Other health bodies around the world have also warned about signs of heightened contagion.

Greater transmissibility

Indeed, all three subvariants contain mutations that associate with greater transmissibility.

In a report released on Thursday, Public Health England looked at one of the sublinesages – B.1.617.2 – which has “grown rapidly in England”, with more than 1,300 cases identified across the United Kingdom.

It said this version of the coro- navirus is “at least as transmissi- ble” as the so-called English vari- ant, which itself is faster-spreading than earlier versions.

But assessments of transmissibil- ity depends a lot on who is and is not being tested. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control has warned that targeted genetic testing of travellers from India may have caused an “overrepr- esentation” of the Indian variant in the UK and the EU surveillance.

More dangerous?

The CDC says there is no information available on the se- verity of symptoms caused by the Indian variant.

There is also only very lim- ited data on how well the variant protects the body’s immune re- sponse, and the WHO says the potential impact on vaccine effi- cacy and the risk of re-infection remains unclear.

A recent study that has not yet been peer reviewed noted a reduction in the efficacy of Biof- Tech/Pfizer and Moderna vaccines on the B.1.617.2 sublineage.

This sublineage has a muta- tion in a spike protein, E484Q, that is similar to the one found in the South African variant. Both variants, both of which are suspected of being responsible for the spread of the Indian variant in the US and the UK, has increased the risk of re-infection.

But the CDC points to small studies suggesting that B.1.617.2 is unlikely to be neutralised by monoclonal antibodies, as well as lack of data on how the variant spreads from previously infected or vacci- nated people.

It said there was no data for the second sublineage, which does not include the E484Q mutation. So far “we are pretty confident overall that the vaccines generally will be covering this vari- ant”, Marco Cavaleri, the Euro- pean Medicines Agency head of vaccine strategy, said this week.

But faced with a host of uncertain- ies over the variant’s impact on the virus itself and how this affects society, the WHO said further robust studies are “urgently needed.”

Oliver Cambell, Jr. gets a shot of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at the First Baptist Church of Pasadena on May 14, 2021. (Photo: Global Times/China Daily)
**Files opened against health staff who participated in CDM activity with attempts to deteriorate peace and stability of the State**

The following nurses have been charged under Section 505-A of the Penal Code for inciting State service personnel and health staff to participate in CDM activities, themselves participating in it, supporting CDM activities and CRPH unlawful association with the aim of deteriorating the State administrative machinery.

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<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Hospital</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Section of Penal Code</th>
<th>Photo</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Daw Aye Aye Soe</td>
<td>Pyinnama Hospital</td>
<td>Tungoo Town, Bago Region</td>
<td>505-a</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daw Khin Shwe</td>
<td>Aungban Station Hospital</td>
<td>Aungban Town, Shan State (South)</td>
<td>505-a</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Daw Sint Sint Win</td>
<td>Thaninthayi Hospital</td>
<td>Thaninthayi Town, Taninthayi Region</td>
<td>505-a</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Daw Ann Seng Kong</td>
<td>Kuthai Hospital</td>
<td>Kuthai Town, Shan State (North)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Daw Thein Htar Wai</td>
<td>Zalun Hospital</td>
<td>Zalun Town, Kayinwady Region</td>
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</tbody>
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As tasks are being carried out to arrest those nurses charged, people are urged to inform nearby police stations about those nurses who admitted them under the law for admitting those nurses who participated in CDM and CRPH activities. —MNA

**Files opened against education staff who participated in CDM activity with attempts to deteriorate peace and stability of the State**

The following teachers have been charged under Section 505-A of the Penal Code for inciting State service personnel and education staff to participate in CDM activities, themselves participating in it, supporting CDM activities and CRPH unlawful association with the aim of deteriorating the State administrative machinery.

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<td>U Myo Min Ko</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daw El El Myint</td>
<td>Myikyina Town, Kachin State</td>
<td>Myikyina Town, Kachin State</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>U Chan Tha</td>
<td>Myikyina Town, Kachin State</td>
<td>Myikyina Town, Kachin State</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>U Thiha Kyaw</td>
<td>Myikyina Town, Kachin State</td>
<td>Myikyina Town, Kachin State</td>
<td>505-a</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Daw Thae Su Hlaing</td>
<td>Meiktila Town, Mandalay Region</td>
<td>Meiktila Town, Mandalay Region</td>
<td>505-a</td>
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</tbody>
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As tasks are being carried out to arrest those education staff charged, people are urged to inform nearby police stations about those education staff, action will be taken against the persons under the law for admitting those education staff. —MNA
Myanmar rice export down by US$ 30 mln in seven months of this FY

MYANMAR has exported over 1.28 million tonnes of rice and broken rice as of 7 May this financial year (2020-2021), generating US$490.45 million, stated the Ministry of Commerce.

However, Myanmar rice export has dropped by 512,589 tonnes in the seven months of this FY compared to last year. The export value of rice has also declined by US$33.92 million this FY.

According to an announcement of the Ministry of Commerce, the volume of rice and broken rice between 1 October and 7 May in the last financial year 2019-2020 reached over 1.79 million tonnes, worth US$524.4 million. The country exported over 700,000 tonnes of rice, generating an income of US$198.870 million and over 500,000 tonnes of broken rice, earning US$191.584 million this FY. The Philippines, Côte d’Ivoire and Cameroon and Guinea are the second, third, fourth and fifth largest buyers of Myanmar rice, respectively.

Countries in the European Union account for over 20 per cent of Myanmar’s rice exports. In comparison, 25 per cent of the rice produced by the nation goes to African countries. Myanmar mainly exports broken rice to Belgium, followed by Indonesia, China, UK, and the Netherlands.

Last FY, Myanmar exported rice and broken rice to more than 60 countries worldwide. China is the largest buyer of rice from Myanmar. However, demand from the Philippines, Malaysia, Madagascar, Poland, Guinea, Belgium, Senegal, Indonesia, the Netherlands, and the UK has risen through the years.

Around 16 per cent of exports are conducted at the border while the remaining is exported by sea.

— ZYA/GNLM

YGEA attempts to control gold price under special investigation team

YANGON Region Gold Entrepreneurs Association (YGEA) made an effort to stabilize the gold price as per the instructions of the special investigation team.

During the investigation period, some social media users reportedly shared unidentified fake news referencing mainstream news media to intentionally damage the association’s reputation. That info and the fake news are not associated with the association, and the YGEA is not liable for any problem incurred. They are subject to those users who shared the fake news, according to the YGEA's notification dated 17 May.

At present, YGEA has restricted buying from regions and state other than Yangon. Additionally, YGEA has urged the members to run cash only for the gold transaction.

Moreover, the illegal importers and the person who practises overtrading with negligence will face serious legal action.

On 12 May, the price of precious yellow metal hit the all-time highest of K1,709,000 per tical (0.578 ounces, or 0.016 kilograms) in history. The pure gold price has decreased to K1,595,000 per tical on 17 May, dropping significantly by K110,000 per tical within a week.

Meanwhile, international gold price stood at US$1,852 per ounce on 17 May. The dollar exchange rate against Kyat is valued at K1,675. – NN/GNLM

Sino-Myanmar bilateral trade exceeds US$4.85 bln in five months

THE value of Myanmar’s trade with China through maritime and sea trade channels totalled over US$4.85 billion in October and February of the 2020-2021 financial year; including $2.54 billion worth of exports and $2.31 billion for import, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce.

Myanmar primarily exports agro products to China through the border gates. However, the trade of agricultural products is frequently halted on account of China clamping down on illegal trade at the border checkpoint. Furthermore, China has been stepping up border control measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19, hindering the border trade at present.

In a bid to lower trade barriers and offer relief to Myanmar traders, the border trade channel, the Ministry of Commerce, the related departments and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry have been negotiating with China counterparts.

The two countries are making efforts to set up more border economic cooperation zones and promote border trade. The value of bilateral trade with China stood at $12 billion in the 2019-2020FY, $11.36 billion in the 2018-2019FY, $6 billion in the past mini-budget period, $1.78 billion in the 2017-2018 budget year and $10.8 billion in the 2016-2017FY respectively.

Rice, various types of peas, sesame seeds, corn, fruits and vegetables, dried tea leaves, fishery products, rubber, minerals and animal products are exported to China, whereas machinery, plastic raw materials, consumer products and electronic tools flow into Myanmar. – GNLM

The pure gold price has decreased to K1,595,000 per tical on 17 May, dropping significantly by K110,000 per tical within a week.
A major cyclone packing ferocious winds and threatening a storm surge bore down on India on Monday, disrupting the country’s response to its devastating Covid-19 outbreak.

At least six people died over the weekend in torrential rains and winds as Cyclone Tauktae, according to press reports the biggest to hit western India in 12 coastal districts where the storm was expected to hit hard.

In waterlogged and wind-swept Mumbai, where authorities on Monday closed the airport for several hours and urged people to stay indoors, authorities, on Sunday shifted 580 Covid patients “to safer locations” from hospitals with five kilometres in radius near the airport.

In Gujarat, where on Sunday and overnight more than 100,000 people from 17 districts were evacuated, all Covid-19 patients in hospitals with five kilometres of the coast were also moved.

Authorities there were scrambling to ensure there would be no power cuts in the region reported its biggest surge yet in deaths and infections.

The overnight bombardment also included a third round of strikes on what the army calls the “Metro,” its term for a Hamas underground tunnel network.

504 fighter jets pounded 15 kilometres (nine miles) of tunnels, which the army has previously acknowledged runs in part through civilian areas.

Israel’s army said in a statement that it hit the homes of nine “high-ranking” Hamas commanders, without providing details on casualties.

The overnight bombardment came a day after a Hamas underground tunnel network.

ISRAELI air strikes hammered the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, after a week of violence between the Jewish state and Palestinian militants left more than 200 people dead as international calls for de-escalation went unheeded.

Gaza pummelled by fresh Israeli strikes, more than 200 dead in a week

Israel’s army said in a statement that it hit the homes of nine “high-ranking” Hamas commanders, without providing details on casualties.

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Gazan Mani Qazaat said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu “should realize we’re civilians, not fighters”, adding “I felt like I was dying”. "Legitimate".

The renewed strikes come a day after 42 Palestinians in Gaza — including at least 58 children and two doctors, according to the health ministry — were killed in the worst daily death toll in the enclave since the bombardments began.

In total, 197 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, including at least 58 children, and more than 1,200 wounded since Israel launched its air campaign against Hamas on May 10 after the group fired rockets. The heaviest exchange of fire in years was sparked by unrest in Jerusalem.

In Gaza, 10 people, including one child, have been killed and 294 wounded by rocket fire launched by armed groups in Gaza. — AFP
Chinese retail sales slow, raising economic recovery concerns

Chinese retail sales grew at a slower pace than expected last month, data showed Monday, raising concerns about the recovery in the world’s number two economy.

China was the first major economy to bounce back from the coronavirus pandemic thanks to tight lockdowns and mass testing, with factories doing most of the heavy lifting as companies producing everything from protective gear to electronics and other goods sold around the world.

There is a general consensus that as they slowly returned to their normal lives, the country’s army of cashed-up consumers would then take over the reins, and while data in recent months has suggested that was the case the latest figures showed the rebound will not be smooth.

Retail sales expanded 17.7 per cent on-year in April, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), well below the 25 per cent forecast in a Bloomberg survey and almost half the previous month’s reading. The exceptionally high figures are mostly down to the fact they have a very low base of comparison owing to the economy essentially shutting down last year.

The companies did not disclose the expected value of the new farm, but said the combined past valuation of Gojek and Tokopedia was $18 billion based on historical fundraising.

The combination of two of Indonesia’s top unicorns — start-ups with a valuation of more than $1 billion — will be led by Gojek’s Andre Soelijato as GoTo Group CEO and Tokopedia’s Patrick Cao serving as GoTo Group president.

The deal will form an Indonesian tech giant combining e-commerce and financial services with on-demand offerings such as ride-sharing in what will be the first such platform in Southeast Asia.

The GoTo Group will tap into the huge potential of Southeast Asia’s largest economy with its fast-growing middle class and young, tech-savvy population,” the statement read.

Private consumption is expected to pick up going forward, but the April data shows it is still lagging,” she said, adding that consumer caution due to virus-related uncertainties was likely behind this.

Analysts expect faster retail sales growth in May, as China’s army of consumers came out in force during the Labour Day holiday.

But Nomura chief China economist Lu Ting cautioned: “The recent small virus outbreak in Anhui and Liaoning provinces may have some small impact on recovery momentum of the hospitality services sectors.”

Urban jobless rate falls

There are also concerns that surging inflation could dent the economic recovery, with prices expected to spike over the next few months as life gets back to normal and people spend.

The country’s factory prices rocketed at their fastest pace in nearly four years last month, driven by a sharp rise in demand for key commodities such as copper and iron ore, and observers say those rises could seep through to consumers.

Meanwhile, industrial output rose 9.8 per cent, in line with forecasts but also slower than March.

“Production demand continued to grow… and the economy continued to stabilize and resume development,” said NBS spokesman Fu Linghui, though he cautioned that the global epidemic situation remained “complicated, and the recovery of the world economy is very uneven”.

Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics, added that month-on-month changes showed “momentum in industry continued to soften”, partly due to supply constraints.

Still, there was more positive news on unemployment, with the urban jobless rate falling to 5.1 per cent, which UOB’s Ho said was the most positive of Monday’s data, given it is the “lowest since November 2019”.

“If the labour market continues to improve, there are prospects for retail sales to improve further,” she said.

With vaccines being rolled out around the world, especially in the key US market, and economically painful lockdowns being eased, demand for China’s goods picked up this year after falling off a clip in 2020.

Analysts say that April’s data points to a more moderate growth outlook in the second quarter.

Indonesian unicorns to merge, creating tech giant

TWO of Indonesia’s most successful start-ups are to merge, the companies announced on Monday, creating the largest tech firm in the world’s fourth most populous country.

Ride-hailing and payments giant Gojek and e-commerce firm Tokopedia — which generated transactions worth a combined $22 billion in 2020 — agreed to form the GoTo Group, they said in a statement.

The deal will form an Indonesian tech giant combining e-commerce and financial services with on-demand offerings such as ride-sharing in what will be the first such platform in Southeast Asia.

“The GoTo Group will merge, creating tech giant

Asian markets mixed as traders weigh recovery and new infections

Asian markets were mixed Monday as optimism about the global recovery was offset by concerns about a spike in new infections in several countries that have officials battling to avert new lockdowns.

Wall Street provided another strong lead after data showed US retail sales were flat last month, which helped ease traders’ fears that a surge in inflation could force the Federal Reserve to backtrack on its ultra-loose monetary policies sooner than expected.

However, a fall in consumer confidence owing to rising prices indicated the issue was unlikely to go away any time soon, and analysts said central bank officials had to tread a fine line between getting the economy back on its feet and keeping inflation under control.

“On the one side, we have the Fed’s view, apparently embraced by equity investors, implying there is nothing to see here, given that base effects and reopening dynamics mean we should expect volatility in the data and no one said reopening was going to be cheap,” said National Australia Bank’s Rodrigo Catril.

“On the other side of the argument is rising concerns that inflation is becoming unanchored with a decline in consumer sentiment a reflection of the negative impact inflation is having on disposable income. So at what point does higher inflation become problematic for policy?”

Focus this week is on the release of minutes from the Fed’s latest policy meeting at the end of last month, which will be pored over for an idea about members’ views on inflation in light of surging commodity prices, supply bottlenecks and economic reopening.

“Record highs in copper prices and fears over extended oil price gains will be hard to ignore” heading into the second half of the year, said Eric Robertson at Standard Chartered. “The Fed believes this is part of the economic reopening narrative” and will hold off making any moves now, he added. “But it might start looking over its shoulder if prices stay high.”

— AFP
Britain proposes G-7 to agree on ending coal-fired power generation

A coal-fired power plant under construction in Yokosuka. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

BRITAIN has proposed that the Group of Seven nations call for ending coal-fired power generation as soon as possible in a joint statement when their leaders gather next month, Japanese and foreign sources said Monday.

The move comes as G-7 summit host Britain apparently seeks to increase momentum toward reducing global greenhouse gas emissions.

While Japan seeks to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 like many other countries do, it could be left behind other G-7 members in departing from coal-fired power as it heavily relies on it, especially since the Fukushima nuclear crisis in 2011 that has halted nuclear plants for safety checks.

Among the G-7 members, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Canada have already said they will abandon coal-fired power. The United States has also called the abolition a top priority issue.

Britain has also proposed suspending finances to developing nations’ use of coal fuels, including natural gas, but multiple countries have expressed opposition to the plan, according to the sources. The proposals are expected to be discussed at the online G-7 climate and environment ministers’ meeting to be held from Thursday, in which Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and industry minister Hiroshi Kajiyama are scheduled to take part.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has urged members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to gradually abolish coal-fired thermal generation by 2030 and G-7 members to present concrete plans for realizing it by the June summit. — Kyodo News □

Macron hosts summit to boost Sudan post-Bashir

FRENCH President Emmanuel Macron on Monday hosts African leaders, diplomats and lenders at a summit aimed at helping Sudan after years of conflict-riven authoritarian rule.

Several heads of state will gather in Paris to discuss investment in Sudan and negotiate its debt to help the government of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in the transition after his state visit in late 2020 enraged rights activists.

The meetings will both mark a return to in-person top-level gatherings after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hamdok told AFP ahead of the summit to send a signal of the help African countries can receive if they embrace democracy and turn their backs on authoritarianism.

“The Sudanese transition is considered by us — but also by the entire international community — as an example of democratic transition in Africa and as such deserves special attention,” said a French presidential official who asked not to be named.

Sudan’s debts to the Paris Club, which includes major creditor countries, is estimated at $60 billion foreign debt.

“We are going to the Paris conference to let foreign investors explore the opportunities for investing in Sudan,” Hamdok said.

“We are not looking for grants or donations,” he added.

Hamdok and his government have pushed to rebuild the crippled economy and end Sudan’s international isolation under Bashir, whose three-decade iron-fisted rule was marked by economic hardship and international sanctions.

Africa summit

Sudan was taken off Washington’s blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism in December, removing a major hurdle to foreign investment. But many challenges still lie ahead.

Also attending will be President Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia, whose country has been locked in a long dispute with Sudan over water resources that has sometimes threatened to erupt into open conflict.

Africa has so far been less badly hit by the Covid-19 pandemic than other global regions — with a total of 130,000 dead across the continent. — AFP □

India’s capital to keep coronavirus lockdown for over 1 month

INDIA’S capital region of Delhi announced Sunday a one-week extension of its coronavirus lockdown until 24 May, keeping the tight measure in place for over a month, local media reported.

The lockdown, originally imposed on 19 April, was set to end Monday. The capital region saw an acute shortage of hospital beds and medical oxygen. Kejriwal indicated later that the oxygen shortage has eased, but according to local reports about 90 per cent of intensive-care-unit beds remain occupied, leaving the region in the throes of a health care crisis.

On Sunday, India reported about 311,000 new infections, with the number of confirmed daily cases exceeding 300,000 since 22 April and the cumulative number of infected people reaching about 24.68 million.

Over 4,000 COVID-19 deaths were also recorded, bringing the total to over 270,000 fatalities. — Kyodo News □

An Indian medical personnel prepares to fit an oxygen mask for a coronavirus patient, as the patient’s son helps, at a government hospital in Rajasthan, India on 15 May 2021. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

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Online bookings for elderly people to receive COVID-19 shots at large state-run vaccination centres in Tokyo and Osaka started Monday, as Japan tries to accelerate its vaccine rollout amid a fourth wave of infections.

Residents of the capital’s 23 wards aged 65 in the current fiscal year through March or older were able to make appointments via the Defence Ministry’s website and the Line messaging app service at around 11 a.m., before the launch of the centre in central Tokyo on 24 May. According to the ministry, 21,000 bookings were made in just 45 minutes.

Bookings for the vaccination center in the city of Osaka, also set to open on May 24, started from around 1 p.m. All 25,000 slots were booked within 25 minutes, the ministry said.

Both facilities will be predominantly staffed by the Self-Defense Forces doctors and nurses.

Elderly people living in Tokyo and the neighbouring prefectures of Saitama, Chiba, and Kanagawa as well as in Osaka and nearby Kyoto and Hyogo prefectures will be eligible for inoculation at the state-run vaccination centres, provided they have not already received a vaccine shot.

Japan began inoculating its elderly population of about 36 million in mid-April, after its vaccination campaign for health care workers started in February, but only around 2 per cent of its population of 126 million has received at least one shot of vaccine, the slowest vaccination rate among major economies.

The government of Prime Minister Yoshide Suga has set a target of completing vaccinations of the elderly by the end of July. At present, local municipalities are in charge of the inoculation campaign.

“It will be the first operation of its kind in SDF history. Please give it your best to complete the mission,” senior vice defense minister Yasunori Nakayama told doctors and nurses at the Tokyo vaccination center as staff training began Monday.

To avoid overwhelming the system, online bookings will be restricted to residents of Tokyo’s 23 wards and Osaka city until next Sunday.

Some municipalities in Japan that run group inoculation venues have experienced problems processing appointments as phone lines and computer systems have become overloaded.

The Defence Ministry said it had secured sufficient internet server capacity and implemented cyberattack countermeasures to avoid problems. The ministry plans to expand booking eligibilities each week, accepting appointments from all seven prefectures from 31 May.

Daily vaccination capacity at the large centers has been initially set at 5,000 shots in Tokyo and about 2,500 in Osaka, as staff get used to procedures. Inoculation capacity will later be increased to a maximum 10,000 in Tokyo and 5,000 in Osaka, according to the ministry. —Kyodo News

Singapore warns new virus strains infecting more children, shuts schools

The government has been tightening restrictions following a recent rise in local transmissions after months of near-zero cases. At a virtual news conference late Sunday, authorities announced that primary and secondary schools as well as junior colleges would shift to full home-based learning from Wednesday until the end of the school term on 28 May.

Hours before Sunday’s news conference, Singapore confirmed 38 locally transmitted coronavirus cases, the highest daily count in eight months. Some of the cases involved children linked to a cluster at a tuition centre.

Health Minister Ong Ye Kung, citing a conversation he had with the ministry’s director of medical services Kenneth Mak, told a news conference Sunday that the B.1.617 strain “appears to affect children more”.

The strain was first detected in India.

“Some of these mutations are much more virulent and they seem to attack the younger children,” Education Minister Chan Chun Sing said at the news conference.

“This is an area of concern for all of us,” he said, adding however that none of the children who had been infected were seriously ill.

The government is “working out the plans” to vaccinate students under the age of 16, Chan said in a Facebook post.

The financial hub joins Taiwan in shutting down schools to stem the surge in infections.

Taiwan’s capital Taipei and adjacent New Taipei City announced Monday that schools would suspend classes from Tuesday until May 28. —AFP

A state-run, large-scale vaccination centre in Tokyo, to be predominantly staffed by the Self-Defense Forces, is shown to the press on 17 May 2021, a week before its opening. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

China takes Covid-19 controls to Everest with climber ban

CHINA has banned attempts to scale Everest from its side of the world’s highest peak, as Beijing takes its unflinching Covid-19 controls to the Roof of the World.

The block on climbing was announced over concerns of the risk of Covid-19 infection by climbers starting out in Nepal, where the pandemic is raging.

China was the first country hit by the pandemic in late 2019, and has since largely contained the disease with strict border controls. —AFP

Indonesia suspends AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine batch after death

THE Indonesian government said Sunday it has suspended the distribution and use of a batch of AstraZeneca Plc’s coronavirus vaccine following the death of a 22-year-old man a day after his inoculation with the vaccine.

The Ministry of Health called the suspension “a prudent effort by the government to ensure the safety of the vaccine,” and said it plans to continue to use other batches of the vaccine it has received.

The results of sterility and toxicity tests by the Drug and Food Monitoring Agency are expected to come out within one to two weeks. —Kyodo News

Thai economy shrinks 2.6% in first quarter

THAILAND’S economy shrank in the first quarter, official data showed Monday, as it was battered by coronavirus restrictions that have hit the key tourism sector hard.

The kingdom last year suffered its worst full-year performance since the Asian financial crisis of 1997 with a 6.1 per cent contraction.

The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) said gross domestic product shrank 2.6 per cent on-year in the first three months. —AFP
AFC postpone draw programme for Women’s Asian Cup 2022 qualifiers

THE Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has postponed the AFC Women’s Asian Cup India 2022 Qualifiers Draw Programme, set initially to hold on 27 May 2021 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the football confederation source said.

“Taking into careful consideration current challenges and logistical arrangements, AFC agreed that the draw postponement was a necessary step due to rising COVID-19 cases in the host nation as well as across the Continent in order to keep in mind the well-being and safety of all teams, players, officials and relevant stakeholders. More details on the new arrangements for the draw for Asia’s flagship women’s tournament will be announced in due course,” AFC officials said.

“Meanwhile, the draw for the qualifying matches of both the AFC U20 Women’s Asian Cup Uzbekistan 2022 and the AFC U17 Women’s Asian Cup Indonesia 2022 will proceed as planned on the same day. The details will be confirmed closer to the draw date,” officials added.—GNLM

Djokovic admits ‘long shot’ to beat Nadal at Roland Garros

NOVAK Djokovic admitted Sunday that he’s “a long shot” to win Roland Garros where he would likely have to dethrone rival and 13-time Paris champion Rafael Nadal.

Djokovic may be world number one, but it’s Nadal who is the undisputed king of clay in the French capital where he has lost just twice in 162 matches since 2005.

On Sunday, Djokovic again felt the raw power of Nadal on clay as the Spaniard clinched a 10th Italian Open title with a 7-5, 1-6, 6-3 win in the final.

In the pair’s 57th meeting, the victory also took Nadal level with his Serb rival on 36 Masters 1000 titles.

“Going into Paris brings me a good sensation,” insisted Djokovic despite a roller-coaster clay court swing which yielded a round-of-16 exit in Monte Carlo and a semi-final loss on home ground in Belgrade.

Nadal, by comparison, has two titles in Rome and Barcelona but suffering quarter-final losses in Monte Carlo and Madrid.

“Of course it’s a long shot,” Djokovic has 18 Grand Slam titles to his name — two behind the record of 20 shared by Nadal and Roger Federer.

However, only one of those has been captured at Roland Garros, in 2016 when Nadal withdrew with a wrist injury after the second round.

Djokovic was swept aside by Nadal in the 2020 final. Before that, he had lost three other finals in Paris, two also to Nadal and one against Stan Wawrinka.

‘Perfectionist’ Swiatek on high before Roland Garros title defence

FRENCH Open champion Iga Swiatek warned she would not be satisfied with just one Grand Slam as she heads for Paris after claiming her first WTA 1000 trophy in style in Rome on Sunday.

The 19-year-old demolished world number nine Karolina Pliskova 6-0, 6-0 in just 45 minutes on the red clay of the Foro Italico.

“I’m surprising myself actually when I’m not doing well because I’m pretty ambitious,” said the player from Warsaw, who was unknown a year ago, before winning her first career title in Paris. “There are many players that regress after winning their first Grand Slam. “I always though try to be different. I’m a perfectionist.”

Swiatek has now won three titles, following on from Roland Garros with Adelaide in January and now Rome, and will move into the top 10 for the first time on Monday.

She showed no fatigue after back-to-back matches on Saturday, when she defeated two-time Rome winner Elina Svitolina and American teenager Coco Gauff and nearly three-and-a-half hours on court. — AFP

Angers that we will have to win if we want to be champions.”

PSG meanwhile were gifted a perfect start to the Parc des Princes when Yannis Abdelhamid handled Kylian Mbappe’s shot in front of an empty goal, conceding a penalty and being sent off in the process. Neymar slotted home the spot-kick in the 13th minute and 11 minutes later Mbappe pounced on a wayward pass across the area by Thomas Poket to tap home the second.

Monaco close gap

Monaco are also still in with a potential shout for the title after their 2-1 home win over Rennes moved Niko Kovac’s third-placed side three points behind Lille with one to play. — AFP

French title chase down to wire after PSG move point behind Lille

PARIS Saint-Germain’s French forward Kylian Mbappe (front) is challenged by Reims’ Serbian goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic during the French Ligue 1 football match at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on 16 May 2021. PHOTO: AFP

PARIS Saint-Germain defender Marquinhos made it three in the 68th minute with a thumping header from Neymar’s corner. Moise Kean rounded off an easy win for PSG one minute from the end.