BEWARE OF COVID-19 IN FURTHER POSSIBLE WAVES PAGE-8 (OPINION)

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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Five-Point Road Map of the State Administration Council

1. The Union Election Commission will be reconstituted and its mandated tasks, including the scrutiny of voter lists, shall be implemented in accordance with the law.
2. Effective measures will be taken with added momentum to prevent and manage the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Actions will be taken to ensure the speedy recovery of businesses from the impact of COVID-19.
4. Emphasis will be placed on achieving enduring peace for the entire nation in line with the agreements set out in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.
5. Upon accomplishing the provisions of the state of emergency, free and fair multiparty democratic elections will be held in line with the 2008 Constitution, and further work will be undertaken to hand over State duties to the winning party in accordance with democratic standards.

State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attends Mini Gems Emporium 2021

CHAIRMAN of the State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attended the Mini Gems Emporium 2021 which would showcase pearl and jade lots at Mani Yadana Jade Hall in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning.

Also present at the emporium were State Administration Council members Lt-Gen Moe Myint Tun, Jeng Phang Naw Taung, U Sai Lon Hsai and Lt-Gen Soe Htut, Joint Secretary of the Council Lt-Gen Ye Win Oo, Union ministers, the chairman of Nay Pyi Taw Council, the governor of Central Bank of Myanmar, the commander of Nay Pyi Taw Command, officials of Myanmar Gems Entrepreneurs Association and guests.

The Senior General viewed the documentary video clip on preparation to hold the Mini Gems Emporium.

The Senior General and party viewed around the lots of pearl and jade displayed at the emporium.

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State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing looks into the pearl display at the Mini Gems Emporium 2021 at Mani Yadana Jade Hall in Nay Pyi Taw on 17 December 2021.

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Myanmar reiterates its objection against the country-specific resolution on Myanmar

THE Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar recalls its press release dated 19 November 2021 that categorically rejected the adoption of the resolution entitled "Situation of Human Rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar" at the Third Committee of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. The Ministry reiterates its objection against the adoption of the said resolution at the Plenary Session of the 76th United Nations General Assembly on 16 December 2021.

In the past, Myanmar used to call for a vote. However, this year resolution was adopted without a vote due to the misrepresentation of an illegitimate representative, who was dismissed from civil service and has been facing the charge of high treason, at the United Nations. His treasonous act jeopardizes the national interests.

Myanmar always opposes the targeted country-specific resolutions which are adopted against the United Nations' principles of universality, objectivity and non-selectivity in consideration of human rights issues. As the modalities of formulating the resolutions and organizing the dialogues are fundamentally flawed, it is unacceptable to see that the said resolution against Myanmar is full of distorted and erroneous elements, including the term "Rohingya", which has never existed in any legal and historical context of Myanmar and has never been recognized by the people of Myanmar. In this connection, Myanmar strongly rejects and dissociates itself from the adoption of the resolution.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Nay Pyi Taw
17 December 2021

Announcement on COVID-19 mutation surveillance process through Genome Sequencing

DEPARTMENT of Public Health, Department of Medical Services and Department of Medical Research under the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Tatmadaw Medical Research Unit, are continuously conducting "Genome Sequencing" as part of the COVID-19 Disease Surveillance Programme.

According to the process, 12 laboratory samples were taken from returnees from Thailand, Singapore China and Malaysia who had been exposed to the COVID-19 virus and those who were at high risk for mutation.

The Department of Medical Research found that only 12 people were diagnosed with the Delta virus in Myanmar and Omicron was not found.

Ministry of Health

Pearl & Jade lots displayed at Mini Gems Emporium 2021 in Nay Pyi Taw

THE first day of the Mini Gems Emporium was held yesterday at Mani Yadana Jade Hall in Nay Pyi Taw under the COVID-19 prevention guidelines. Myanmar held its first gems emporium in 1964, with 95 emporiums sold in foreign currency and 19 in Myanmar kyats. This is the 96th Pearl and Jade Emporium sold in foreign currency.

On the first day of the emporium, local and foreign jewellers observed pearl and jade lots on display in the hall and designated areas outside of the hall from 9 am.

The minimum sale price for pearl lots at the emporium is US$1,000 and the minimum price for jade lots is 5,000 Euro. The pearl lots will be auctioned by an open tender system on 18 and 19 December and the jade lots will be displayed from 17 to 19 December and will be auctioned on 20 and 22 December. —MNA

Myanma pearls are seen displaying at the Emporium 2021.

MoC oversees daily imports of anti-COVID-19 equipment

THE Ministry of Commerce is making efforts to ensure people have access to the essential medical supplies that are critical to the COVID-19 prevention, control and treatment activities, including liquid oxygen and oxygen cylinders, by arranging continuous importation through trading posts, international airports and seaports.

The three companies imported 25 home use oxygen concentrators, 1,957 Covid test kits, three tonnes of gloves and 50 tonnes of masks using eight vehicles. Officials from the relevant departments are cooperating to facilitate and expedite the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) including online registration for the import process.

It is reported that the Ministry of Commerce is coordinating with relevant departments, treatment of COVID-19, as well as contact persons for inquires can be reached through the Ministry's Website – www.commerce.gov.mm. — MNA

Lorries carrying anti-Covid equipment are seen transporting them to states and regions.

Political maturity

POLITICAL maturity and unity of stakeholders and the entire people play a crucial role in building the Union based on democracy and federalism. It is necessary to take lessons that Myanmar could not achieve the deserved development due to requirements in political maturity in successive eras. We must try hard to overcome such challenges. We need to build political maturity and unity with wise mental faculty for ensuring the peace of the nation.

(Excerpt from the Message sent by Chairman of the State Administration Council Prime Minister Chairman of the National Unity and Peacemaking Central Committee Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to mark the Sixth Anniversary of signing the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement-NCA on 15 October 2021)

State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attends Mini Gems Emporium 2021

State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing viewed the documentary video clip on preparation to hold the Mini Gems Emporium yesterday.

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A total of 330 lots of pearl and 780 lots of jade will be showcased at the Mini Gems Emporium. The lots of pearls will be sold through an open tender on 18 and 19 December and the lots of jade from 20 to 22 December. The Mini Gems Emporium is being held in accord with the COVID-19 restrictions. —MNA

The Senior General pays an observation tour around the jade display at the emporium.

217 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 17 December, total figure rises to 527,931

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 527,931 after 217 new cases were reported on 17 December 2021 according to the Ministry of Health. Among these confirmed cases, 504,856 have been discharged from hospitals. Death toll reached 19,208 after 7 died.—MNA

All the people themselves need to foster the spirit of valuing independence and sovereignty and sharpening strong and dynamic spirit of safeguarding the sovereignty: Vice-Senior General

AS a gesture of hailing the New Year, all the people themselves need to foster the spirit of valuing the independence and the sovereignty and sharpening the strong and dynamic spirit of safeguarding the sovereignty, said Chairman of the Central Committee for Organizing the 74th Anniversary of Independence Day 2022 Vice-Chairman of the State Administration Council Deputy Prime Minister Vice-Senior General Soe Win at the third meeting of the central committee at the Office of SAC Chairman in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday afternoon.

State Administration Council Vice-Chairman Deputy Prime Minister Vice-Senior General Soe Win addresses the third meeting of the Central Committee on Organizing the 74 th Anniversary of Independence Day 2022 in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Vice-Senior General said relevant subcommittees have discussed matters related to successful marking the 74th Anniversary of Independence Day at the first and second meetings. Today's meeting focuses on the latest accomplishment of the assignments and remaining tasks and needs to fulfil the requirements.

The Vice-Senior General gave supplementary instructions over the reports presented by officials from the respective subcommittees.

In his conclusion, the Vice-Senior General urged all to cooperate with each other in marking the ceremony at the national level as it would be the first ceremony in 2022. As a gesture of hailing the New Year, all the people themselves need to foster the spirit of valuing independence and sovereignty and sharpening the strong and dynamic spirit of safeguarding the sovereignty. — MNA

NUPCC holds talks with 6 EAOs, non-signatories of NCA, in Mongla

THE National Unity and Peace Coordination Committee (NUPCC) held an informal meeting on regional development, peace processes and health issues with six armed ethnic groups which are yet to sign Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in Mongla, Shan State (East) on 15 and 16 December.

The meeting was attended by Chairman of the NUPCC Lt-Gen Yar Pyae and committee members, peace negotiators, officials from the Triangle Region Command, representatives from United Wa State Army (UWSA), National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Union League of Arakan (ULA/AA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Shan State Progress Party (SSPP/SSA).

During the discussion, Committee Chairman Lt-Gen Yar Pyae explained the purpose for the meeting and further peace processes. Representatives from each of the six ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) openly and cordially discussed their views on the peace processes, suggestions for further action, and issues related to COVID-19 vaccination, and the Committee Chairman and members added necessary suggestions.

The committee also met each group that attended the meeting and Chairman U Sai Lin of NDAA Mongla and party separately and discussed ways to reduce armed conflicts, issues in connexion with ongoing peace processes, mutual trust-building, health and regional development, drug control and border peace and tranquillity.

Afterwards, the committee chairman offered the attendees Tatmadaw-made food.— MNA

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New Community Centre (Thandwe) opened marking 47th Anniversary of Rakhine State Day

THE opening ceremony of the new Community Centre constructed in Thandwe Township of Rakhine State by the Information and Public Relations Department under the Ministry of Information was organized yesterday marking the 47th Anniversary of Rakhine State Day.

During the ceremony, State Administration Council members Mahn Nyein Maung, Daw Aye Nu Sein and U Moung Har, Union Minister U Maung Maung Ohn, Rakhine State Ethnic Affairs Minister U Tin Hla and Town Elder U Phoe Yi Aung unveiled the signboard of the new Community Centre by pressing the electric button, and they posed for a group commemorative photo.

State Administration Council Member Daw Aye Nu Sein remarks the opening ceremony of the new Community Centre (Thandwe) in Rakhine State yesterday.

They also viewed the small museum featuring photos of well-known Rakhine people, traditional festivals, photos of picturesque views and beaches, including famous MraukU ancient cultural zone and pagodas, local products and ancient artworks. Next, they inspected the kid reading room, playground, art room, public library, computer room, stadium, hall and multisectoral hall.

The SAC members and Union ministers look around the Community Centre.

During the second session of the ceremony, SAC member Daw Aye Nu Sein said the Community Centre in Thandwe District is the very first one in Rakhine State and it was so proud to be able to establish on the occasion of Rakhine State Day. The Community Centre is essential in undertaking measures for the interests of the region and country such as public gatherings, holding of talks and discussions. As there are the meeting hall and multisectoral hall in the centre, the people at any age can discuss collectively for the sake of the region. The computer and art rooms can also offer opportunities to open technical, language, vocational and art-related kinds of training for the youths to develop the human resources and they can make efforts to improve their respective areas with their skills after they complete the training courses.

She also urged Thandwe people and town elders to understand the goodwill of the government and cooperate in the activities of the ministry.

Union Minister for Information U Maung Maung Ohn also said that the ministry is working with modern programmes in discharging three main duties of providing information, education and entertainment. On the other hand, it opens public libraries to provide information and knowledge to the people. It also upgrades libraries into community centres as well as recreational places where the people seek knowledge, collect information and discuss the interests of the country and regions.

The current community centre was constructed using more than K464 million of government funds and the Rakhine state government provided K220 million worth of materials for the centre.

The Union Minister then highlighted the advantages of establishing the Community Centre.

Rakhine State Ethnic Affairs Minister U Tin Hla gave a remark on behalf of the state government and Town Elder of Thandwe U Tun Thant Kyaw expressed words of thanks.

Then, Union Minister U Maung Maung Ohn handed over 500 MRTV DVD-T2 Set-Top Boxes to the Thandwe district deputy administrator and other officials also provided books and journals for the centre to the respective IPRD officials.

The current Community Centre is the second centre constructed with the government fund and the centre resources are free for the people and students.

Then, the SAC members and Union ministers paid homage and made donations to the Thandwe Township Sangha Nayaka Committee Chairman Sayadaw.

They also visited Relic Hair, Relic Tooth, Relic Rib pagodas and inspected the Shwewady Rakhine sarongs and bamboo tablecloths manufacturing industry of Thandwe Township. — MNA

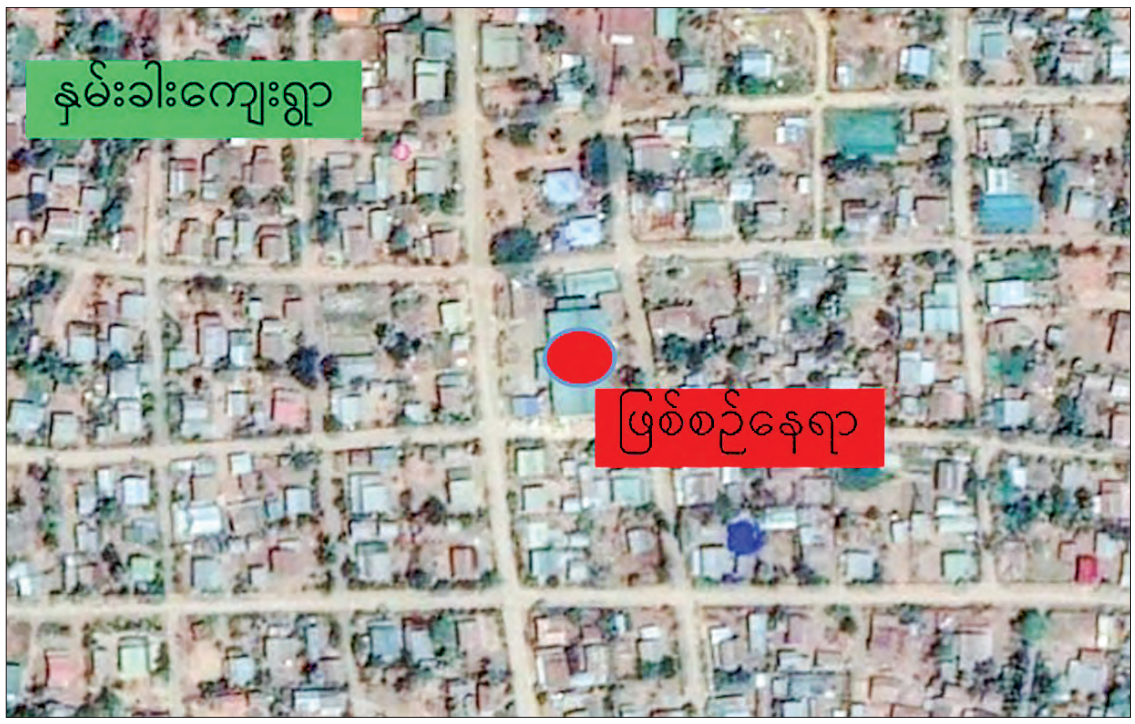
Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Ministry of Health
Order No 535/2021
14th Waxing of Nadaw 1383 ME
17 December 2021

THE Ministry of Health hereby announced the order by exercising the authority stipulated in Sub-Section (b) of Section 21 of the Prevention and Control of Communicable Diseases Law.

1. The Ministry of Health has taken preventive measures against Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in real-time. Therefore, the orders were issued for the people from some townships of Nay Pyi Taw, regions and states to stay at home in order to more effectively control the infection of the pandemic.
2. However, as the people from these townships exactly abide by the disciplines of preventing the COVID-19, further finding of decreasing confirmed patients within 14 days, declining of group-wise infection among the patients, the emphasis of the relevant governments, organizations and people in raising the health awareness during the stay-at-home period, further finding of decreasing confirmed patients and contact persons in laboratory tests within 14 days, and active participation of township administration bodies, health staff, those from relevant departments and organizations and volunteers as well as the people in the prevention and control of the pandemic were seen.
3. Hence, the people residing in the following townships of Mandalay Region were removed from the list of those from stay-at-home programmes as of 4 am on 18-12-2021.
   (a) Thazi Township
   (b) Natogyi Township

The people must strictly abide by the disciplines related to the prevention and control of the COVID-19 issued by the Ministry of Health after removing these townships from the list of stay-at-home programmes.

Terrorists arrested while holding meeting in Hnamkhar village of Gangaw, Magway region



Incident site.

TERRORISTS under the names of CNF, PDF and YDF were arrested while holding a meeting, after locals reported to the nearest security forces near Hnamkhar village in Gangaw Township, Magway Region, yesterday afternoon.

A group of 100 terrorists organized a meeting in the village although villagers requested not to hold the meeting in the village in various ways. However, terrorists ignored the village's request and forced the meeting to take place at around 1 pm.

Villagers reported the meeting to the nearest security forces. The venue was raided at around 2:40 pm and terrorists fled in disarray across the Myittha River, east of the village, after a clash.

As the security forces were careful not to injure innocent civilians and their homes, no one was injured in the incident, and 6 bodies wearing sports suits were found, and two pistols, eight guns and ammunition were confiscated from the terrorists.

It is reported that security forces are stepping up security in the area to ensure peace and stability for the local people, and the people are requested to work together for the stability and peace of the region by secretly reporting the movements of terrorist groups, according to MPF.— MNA

PDF terrorists brutally kill Khumi ethnics in Kanaung Village of Paletwa Township

THE terrorist groups CRPH, NUG and their subordinates PDF terrorists ignored the lawless activities of the party that they support and they killed the innocent civilians who do not support them and committed arson and mine attacks on houses and buildings.

In such doing, they think of making enemies with others who have different opinions and kill honest ethnic people.

On 16 December, PDF terrorists arrested Khumi people in Kanaung Village in Paletwa Township in Chin State and killed them without any reason.

At about 5 pm on that day, armed terrorists arrived at Kanaung Village riding motorcycles and abducted seven people, including U Nay Lin Oo, senior engineer and another six Khumi ethnics, including U Wah Yaung, without any solid reason. They took them about the one-furlong distance to the north of the village and the victims were shot to death.

Due to the brutal shooting of PDF terrorists, six villagers, including U Nay Lin Oo died on the spot. U Wah Yaung arrived at the village with gunshot wounds at about 4 am yesterday and he was taken to Samee station hospital for medical treatment.

Security forces accelerated security measures to arrest terrorists who brutally killed honest ethnic people without any reason and to ensure community peace. — MNA

Four people slain; one house ravaged in Taze Township

ONE man and four women were killed and a house was set on fire by terrorists in Taze Township (in pictures).

The incident took place at 12:20 am on 15 December in Taze Township. Most of the villagers fled the area as terrorists entered the village.

U Kyaw Soe and his family members, who are elderly and have difficulty moving, fled the scene. While hiding in their homes, armed terrorists broke into their homes and shouted with anger.

Next, they were brutally shot and the house was set on fire.

U Kyaw Soe and his family members, including Daw Khin Hlaing, were killed in the brutal killings. Daw Hlaing Soe and three others died in a house fire, while Daw Gyan Taw and Daw Khin Swe Myint died of gunshot wounds on their bodies.

A wooden house owned by U Kyaw Soe was destroyed by fire.

Security measures are underway to identify and arrest the terrorists. — MNA

Daily newspapers available online

FOR those who would like to read the Myanma Alinn, the Kyemon and the Global New Light of Myanmar, published daily by the Ministry of Information, please visit www.moi.gov.mm/mal, www.moi.gov.mm/km, www.moi.gov.mm/nlm and www.gnlm.com.mm/e-paper.

News and Periodicals Enterprise

Exotic orchid species grown successfully in Pindaya Township

TAW Win Cherry Orchid Farm in Pindaya city of the Danu Self-Administered Zone in southern Shan State runs successful cultivation of orchid species originated from Thailand, allowing the locals to have job opportunities and earn for living in the difficult times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pindaya Township is located at 3,880 feet above sea level and the region is suitable for fruits and flowers cultivation. Apart from local origins, foreign orchid species are experimentally grown in the region.

Vanda, Denardo, Mokara and Gore orchid species are cultivated in Taw Win Cherry Orchid Farm. The prices move in the range of K3,500-8,000 per seedling depending on the species, whereas a flower is priced at K500. They are highly demanded when there is wedding, convocation, festive celebration and donation events. They can be available throughout the year.

"I aim to create job opportunities for young people. Those who are enthusiastic can also observe the orchid farming and the farms also distribute the seedlings at a fairer rate," said Daw San San Aye, the owner of Taw Win Cherry Farm.

In addition to orchids, organic fruits such as passion fruit, dragon fruit, avocado, guava, pomegranate, jack fruit and drumstick trees are also found on the farm. The products are also delivered to the regions nearby and City Mart outlets in Yangon Region. — (Pindaya IPRD)/GNLM

Low quality watermelon/muskmelon disallowed exporting to China

THE low quality watermelon and muskmelon are not allowed to export to China, according to the Muse 105th-mile fruit trade zone.

Regarding the export of Myanmar melon to China, it is taking about 20 days from harvest to sale time. Consequently, the fruits have perished.

This is the reason, the traders from the Muse 105th-mile fruit trade zone informed melon growers on 16 December that the quality of the fruits should be checked before those are exported to China due to the restriction of the Chinese Health Department.

Besides, the commodity depot urged the fruit truck drivers to bring the COVID-19 Vaccination certificate together with them to transport fruit trucks faster.

"Due to the current delays on the Chinese side, only good quality fruits are loaded on the trucks before entering to China due to high transport cost. Of 1,100 watermelons on the Myanmar trucks, only about 230 fruits are high quality and required by Chinese traders. Therefore, about five tucks of Myanmar fruits can get only one truck in Chinese trucks after choosing the good quality one. The price of the fruit also fetched only 20 per cent of the market prevailing price. The fruit growers are urged to convey the fruits by hearing the last dates, not by the price of the fruit," said U Sai Khin Maung of the Khwanyo Fruit Depot.

As a result, some of the first 26 trucks entered the Chinese market on 9 December and four watermelon trucks were sold for 90,000 yuan.

If the watermelons are of better quality, they will get a better price than the prevailing price, U Sai Khin Maung clarified.

Nevertheless, the watermelons are conveyed to China step by step during the COVID-19 period and the trucks will take more time for waiting of new Customs regulation, the Khwanyo Trading Depot stated. Traders cannot expect trade facilitation according to the changes in China's policy during the COVID-19 pandemic. If the restrictions are eased and negotiation goes smooth, the trade will go back to normality.

The Kyinsankyawt border post between Myanmar and China, which was earlier suspended for the COVID-19 pandemic, has been reopened starting from 26 November on a trial run. — NN/GNLM

The Kyinsankyawt border post between Myanmar and China, which was earlier suspended for the COVID-19 pandemic, has been reopened starting from 26 November on a trial run.

Muse border trade plunges by $896.4 mln as of 10 Dec

THE value of trade between Myanmar and China via the Muse land border as of 10 December 2021 of the current mini-budget period (October 2021-March 2022) reflected a drastic drop of US$896.4 million as against the year-ago period owing to the border trade suspension, as per the Ministry of Commerce.

The value of Muse border trade touched a low of US$197.37 million over the past month amid the COVID-19 impacts. The figures plummeted from $1.09 billion recorded in the year-ago period, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

As of 10 December, Myanmar's exports to China through the Muse land border were valued at $193 million, while imports are worth $4 million. The trade showed a slump in both exports and imports compared to the corresponding period of last year.

The border posts next to Muse are Nantaw, Sinphyu, Mang Wein, Kyinsankyawt-Wamting and Panseng-Wamting posts. Earlier, China shut down all the border posts amidst the COVID-19 negative consequences. At present, some border checkpoints are operating trade activities on a trial run.

Myanmar can now convey the watermelon to China by Chinese trucks when they unloaded their goods in Myanmar. However, quality is of vital importance as Chinese authorities will not allow the fruits of inferior quality for import, the Muse fruit commodity depot stated.

Additionally, China's new Customs Regulation and mandatory quarantine process posed some hurdles in the border market. Traders cannot expect trade facilitation according to the changes in China's policy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Myanmar exports agricultural products, including rice, beans and corn, and fishery products such as crab, prawn, etc. Furthermore, Myanmar's natural gas export to China is also conducted through the Muse-Ruili border. The raw CMP materials, electrical appliances and consumer goods are imported into the country. — KK/GNLM

18 DECEMBER 2021
THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Beware of COVID-19 in further possible waves

THE State Administration Council adopted a policy that nothing is more important than human life, highlighting that emphasis must be placed on securing human life at the most important time if one has a chance to choose the best thing.

Such an event happened in Myanmar in recent months. Everybody knows the severe infection of COVID-19, leaving a large number of casualties. At that time, the State Administration Council adopted the above-mentioned policy to save the lives of Myanmar citizens to be free from the disease.

In the climax days in July and August 2021, the government tried hard to defy the infection of COVID-19 by taking preventive, control and treatment measures of the disease but the number of dead and injured persons piled on each other.

> According to the latest news, the government has made proper preparations at hospitals and clinics to admit the patients suffering from COVID-19 for providing healthcare services to them in time while assigning medical doctors and health staff at separate units of COVID centres. All the citizens need to beware of COVID-19.

Finally, Myanmar successfully survived the dark days with the implementation of vaccination programmes using COVID-19 vaccines, some of which were purchased and some were donated by neighbouring countries and friendly countries and organizations. Their contributions are unforgettable.

Actually, Myanmar should not rely on these countries and donors in a long run. As such, the government decided to manufacture the vaccines against the COVID-19 pandemic at home with the help of friendly countries. Such a good decision will help the citizens escape from the abyss of the pandemic.

Currently, the government holds meetings with Chinese authorities for manufacturing the COVID-19 vaccines at home. Reportedly, a plan is underway to initiate manufacturing of the vaccines in the coming January. Such good news wins the applause of the people. A vision was set to manufacture 5 million units of COVID-19 vaccine per month. If so, such an amount of vaccines is sure to save the life of people in time.

Significantly, all the people of Myanmar need to take care of their moves as the new variant Omicron make a trip to some regional countries and neighbouring countries of Myanmar. Despite no chance to enter Myanmar, the new Saturn Omicron would make attempts to enter the country if the people are weak in health disciplines.

According to the latest news, the government has made proper preparations at hospitals and clinics to admit the patients suffering from COVID-19 for providing healthcare services to them in time while assigning medical doctors and health staff at separate units of COVID centres. All the citizens need to beware of COVID-19.

■ ■ ■

Why antibodies aren't the only defence against Omicron

IN THE fight against the coronavirus, one key component of the human immune system has hogged the limelight: antibodies.

These Y-shaped proteins have made top news recently because Covid-19 shots don't produce as many of them that work against the heavily mutated Omicron variant compared to past strains — at least, not without a booster.

Trained by both vaccines and infection, antibodies grab on to the spike protein that studs the surface of the coronavirus, stopping it from penetrating cells and sickening the host.

But while antibodies are rightly celebrated, they're not the only game in town.

In fact, "there's a complex and coordinated response that is really beautiful from an evolutionary standpoint," Harvard immunologist Roger Shapiro explains.

Here are some key points:

Carpet bombers' of the innate immune system

In the minutes and hours after the virus first comes calling, signalling proteins send out alarms to recruit the tough-but-dim brutes of the "innate" immune system.

Further research is needed to better understand Omicron's potential to escape protection against immunity induced by vaccines, WHO said. **PHOTO: AFP**

First to the scene are "neutrophils", which make up 50 to 70 per cent of all white cells and are quick to fight, but also to perish.

Others include hungry "macrophages" that snarf down pathogens and spit out key bits to help train their smarter colleagues, menacingly named "Natural Killer" cells and "dendritic" cells that pass on their intel to more elite fighters.

"It's sort of like carpet bombing the whole area and hopefully you damage the invader as much as possible… at the same time calling into the headquarters to get your SEAL units ready to go," said John Wherry, an immunologist at the University of Pennsylvania.

B and T cells: intelligence officers and trained assassins

If the invaders aren't driven off, the "adaptive" immune system comes into play.

A few days into a first infection, "B cells" wise up to the threat and start pumping out antibodies.

Vaccination also trains B cells — mainly inside lymph nodes in our armpits, near the site of injection — to be primed and ready.

Shapiro likened them to intelligence operatives, holding vital information about threats.

The most potent kinds of antibodies, known as "neutralizing," are like chewing gum sticking to the business end of a key, stopping it from unlocking a door.

There are other, less heralded antibodies that aren't as sticky as the neutralizing kind — but still help grab a hold of the virus, dragging it towards immune cells, or calling for help and escalating the overall response.

B cells' key partners are "T cells," which can be broadly split into "helpers" and "killers."

"Killers are like assassins, and they go and attack the cells that have been infected," said Shapiro — but these assassins also inflict collateral damage for the sake of the greater good.

The helper T cells "are like generals," added Shapiro, marshalling troops, spurring B cells to up their production and directing their lethal counterparts toward the enemy.

Stopping severe disease

Because of its heavily mutated spike protein, the Omicron variant may more easily slip by neutralizing antibodies conferred by prior infection or vaccination.

The bad news is this makes people more prone to symptomatic infection. But the good news is that T cells aren't nearly as easily fooled.

T cells have a "periscope" into infected cells, where they can look for the constituent parts of the virus during its replication cycle, said Wherry.

They're much better at recognizing tell-tale signs of foes they've encountered before, even if their clever disguises get them past antibodies.

The killer T cells carry out search-and-destroy missions, poking holes in infected cells, bursting them open, and triggering reactions to bring inflammatory proteins known as "cytokines" to the fight.

SOURCE: AFP

Experts see unprecedented Omicron spread, 'probably' in most countries

THE World Health Organization warned Tuesday Omicron was spreading at an unprecedented rate and urged countries to act, as drug maker Pfizer said its coronavirus pill was effective against the variant.

Dutch primary schools will close early as Europe battles a fresh wave of infections and hospital admissions, while British Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced a major parliamentary test seeking to impose fresh Covid curbs.

Omicron, first detected by South Africa and reported to the WHO on 24 November, has a large number of mutations, setting alarm bells ringing since its discovery.

Early data suggests it can be resistant to vaccines and is more transmissible than the Delta variant, which was first identified in India and accounts for the bulk of the world's coronavirus cases.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters the strain had been reported in 77 countries and "probably" spread to most nations undetected "at a rate we have not seen with any previous variant". Omicron now accounts for around three percent of cases in the United States, a figure that is expected to rise rapidly as has been seen in other countries.

The United States is the nation hit hardest by the pandemic, and it crossed 800,000 known Covid-19 deaths on Tuesday, according to a Johns Hopkins University tracker.

'Dangerous situation'

Although Britain on Monday confirmed what is thought to be the world's first Omicron death, there is no proof yet that the variant causes more severe illness.

The WHO on Tuesday provided room for cautious optimism saying Africa had recorded a massive rise in cases over the past week but a lower number of deaths compared with previous waves.

But it urged countries to act swiftly to rein in transmission, protect their health systems and guard against complacency.

WHO expert Bruce Aylward strenuously warned against "jumping to a conclusion that this is a mild disease". "We could be setting ourselves up for a very dangerous situation."

The warning came as Pfizer on Tuesday said clinical trials of its Covid pill reduced hospital admissions and deaths among at-risk people by almost 90 per cent.

The American drug maker said its new treatment, Paxlovid, held up against Omicron in lab testing.

Chief executive Albert Bourla called the news a "game changer" and said he expected approval from the US medicines regulator as early as this month.

"This news provides another potentially powerful tool in our fight against the virus, including the Omicron variant," added US President Joe Biden.

A real-world study from South Africa has showed two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was 70 per cent effective in stopping severe illness from Omicron.

Researchers called the results encouraging, though it represented a drop compared with earlier strains, underlining the threat of the coronavirus.

And the WHO added that low vaccination rates in regions including Africa — where Omicron was first detected — would provide breeding grounds for new variants of the virus, which has known to have claimed more than 5.3 million lives around the world.

Dutch schools to close

Europe is the global coronavirus hotspot, recording 62 per cent of the world's total cases in the past seven days, while the five countries with the world's highest infection rates are all European.

Scientists have predicted the true figure of those already infected with Omicron in Britain could be as high as 200,000 a day. **PHOTO: AFP**

The Netherlands followed other European nations in reintroducing restrictions on Tuesday as Prime Minister Mark Rutte announced primary schools will shut next week and a night-time lockdown will be extended over Omicron fears. Schools will close from 20 December instead of on 25 December due to concerns that children, among whom infection rates are the highest, could pass it on to older relatives. France on Tuesday registered 63,405 new coronavirus cases — its highest daily total since April — even with more than 77 per cent of its population having had at least one shot.

SOURCE: AFP

Myanmar Gazette

Appointment of Heads of Service Organizations

The State Administration Council has appointed the following persons as the Heads of Service Organizations shown against each of their names on probation from the date they assume charge of their duties.

Name	Appointment
(1) Dr Soe Myint Aye Deputy Director-General Department of Higher Education Ministry of Education	Rector Sagaing University Department of Higher Education Ministry of Education
(2) Dr Yi Yi Oo Pro-Rector Toungoo University Department of Higher Education Ministry of Education	Rector Kyaukse University Department of Higher Education Ministry of Education
(3) Daw Nwe Ni Deputy Director-General Department of Advanced Science and Technology Ministry of Science and Technology	Director-General Department of Advanced Science and Technology Ministry of Science and Technology
(4) Dr Theingi Maung Maung Deputy Director-General Department of Atomic Energy Ministry of Science and Technology	Director-General Department of Atomic Energy Ministry of Science and Technology
(5) Dr Nilar Thein Pro-Rector University of Information Technology Department of Advanced Science and Technology Ministry of Science and Technology	Rector University of Computer Studies (Thaton) Department of Advanced Science and Technology Ministry of Science and Technology

Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Friday 17 December, 2021)

BAY INFERENCE: According to the observations at (18:30) hrs M.S.T today, a lowpressure area has formed over South Bay of Bengal and adjoining Equatorial Indian Ocean. Weather is a few cloud over the North Bay and East central Bay and partly cloudy to cloudy over the Andaman Sea and elsewhere over the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL NOON OF THE 18 December, 2021: Light rain are likely to be isolated in Tanintharyi Region. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin, Northern Shan, Chin, Rakhine, Mon States and generally fair in the remaining Regions and States.

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

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Slight decrease of night temperatures in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin, (Northern and Eastern) Shan, Chin States.

Kachin State Highways Department upgrades roads to develop local transportation

KACHIN State Highways Department under the Ministry of Construction upgraded the earthern road into AC road for 56 routes with 2,080 miles and five furlongs in length to improve the transport system of the state.

The upgrade work included 47 miles and four furlongs long Momauk-Kyaunk Sakhan-Seinlon-Lwejel route conducted by Hongshin Kyanba BOT Company under the assignment of the department.

After the project is complete, the trade flows between Jiangpong town of Longchun District of China and Bhamo Township of Kachin State will be faster than before.

The government also invited E.O.I to upgrade 53 miles and three furlongs long Moegaung (Parhote)-Kamine-Phakant route section and now is selecting the applicants to conduct under a B.O.T system.

Kachin State Highways Department under the Ministry of Construction upgraded the earthern road into AC road for 56 routes with 2,080 miles and five furlongs in length to improve the transport system of the state. **PHOTO : KAYAN SOE MYINT**

Moreover, the department conducted upgrade works on 218 miles long Myitkyina-Sumprabum-Putao earthern road into concrete road starting from the financial year 2016-2017 and now it completes up to 106 miles and four furlongs long in the 2020-2021FY. Therefore, it becomes more assessable to Putao from Myitkyina. The 116 miles long Myitkyina-Bhamo section of Mandalay-Lashio-Bhamo-Myitkyina road section was also upgraded into AC road up to 62 miles and seven furlongs between the 2017-2018FY and the 2020-2021FY. After completion, the road section from Bhamo to Lajayang will become AC road. — Kayan Soe Myint/GNLM

100,000-gallon RC ground tank construction in Yangon completes 40%

ABOUT 40 per cent of the construction of the reinforced concrete ground tank, which can store 100,000-gallon water, in the compound of Yangon City Hall on Maha Bandoola Road, Kyauktada Township, Yangon Region has been completed so far, reported the Yangon Region City Development Committee (YCDC).

"This ground tank is aimed to store rainwater and counter flooding. The rainfall led to sewer overflow in downtown areas (Sule Pagoda, Maha Bandoola Road and City Hall). That is why the tank will become a place to collect and store rainwater and a water pump will be installed either. This is the first-ever rainwater storage tank in Yangon. Upon completion of the tank, the urban community will not face flooding problems in the downtown areas," said Daw Moe Moe Aye, an staff officer of YCDC's Engineering Department (Water and Sanitation).

This tank is 70 feet long, 33 feet wide and seven feet deep.

Yangon downtown areas are inevitably flooded after heavy rainfall occurs.

It will be a temporary space to collect rainwater and water will be discharged through a five-foot drainage system inside Maha Bandoola Park to the outer bar (Yangon River).

The sanitation and drainage system will improve after the project. This project commenced on 21 November 2021 and it is slated to finish in the second week of January 2022, YCDC stated. — Pwint Thitsar/GNLM

The reinforced concrete ground tank in the compound of Yangon City Hall can store up to 100,000 gallons of water. **PHOTO: SOE MYINT AUNG**

No (2) Kunlong Bridge constructed on Myanmar-China border trade route

An aerial view of No 2 Kunlong Bridge.

THE No 2 Kunlong Bridge is under construction marking China-Myanmar friendship over Thanlwin River along Lashio-Hsenwi-Kunlong-Chinshwehaw-China border trade road near Kunlong Township in Shan State (North) by China Yunnan Sunny Road Bridge Co., Ltd.

The No 2 Kunlong Bridge is located about four miles upstream the No (1) Kunlong Bridge. The two-lane 286 miles long Baland Cantilever Type Prestressed Concrete Box Girder bridge is 12 metres in width and it has a load capacity of 75 tonnes.

Officials of the Bridge Department under the Ministry of Construction and China Embassy to Myanmar signed an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) to make a feasibility study (FS). The Chinese ambassador and the Union Minister for Construction signed the statement to support the new Kunlong Bridge project and exchanged it in Nay Pyi Taw on 20 March 2018.

According to the agreement, 25 Chinese engineers conducted the feasibility study in the project area between 22 March 2019 and 15 May 2019.

The government has provided compensation to the owners of land, buildings and farms located in the project area using the allocated budget. —Kayan Soe Myint/GNLM

S. Korea to reimpose curbs amid ongoing surge in coronavirus cases

SOUTH Korea said it will bring back measures to curb the coronavirus from Saturday as daily COVID-19 cases continue to increase sharply, only a month and a half after relaxing them.

Prime Minister Kim Boo Kyum said Thursday the restrictions, some of which are newly designed in response to the current situation, will reduce the maximum size of private gatherings to four people, as long as all are fully vaccinated. Those who are not completely inoculated are only allowed to dine out alone.

The curbs will also require restaurants and cafes to close by 9 p.m., Kim said.

The adjusted social distancing rules will last until Jan. 2 while the government will re-examine the situation at the end of this year, Kim said.

The government on Nov. 1 lifted social distancing rules and implemented its "living with COVID-19" policy. With the reintroduction of the rules, however, the policy will have only been in place for 47 days.

The country reported 7,622 new cases on Wednesday, with most centering on Seoul and the neighboring Gyeonggi Province, while the number of critically ill patients marked a record-high 989, according to health authorities. As of Thursday, the rate of South Koreans who are fully vaccinated reached 81.5 percent and the percentage of those who received booster shots stands at 17.3.— Kyodo ■

People take selfies at Yeouido Hangang Park in Seoul, South Korea, 6 May 2020. **PHOTO: XINHUA/WANG JINGQIANG/FILE**

Asia tech conference calls off 2022 event citing virus fears

RISE has been called off next year as Hong Kong's tight Covid containment rules make it difficult to arrange conferences in the city. **PHOTO: AFP**

A major tech conference scheduled to take place in Hong Kong in March has been cancelled and will return in 2023, organizers said Thursday, in a fresh blow to an international business hub that has embraced China's "zero-Covid" strategy.

The annual RISE Conference brings together CEOs, start-ups and investors and has been held in Hong Kong since 2015.

In a brief statement, organizers said they chose to postpone because "uncertainties brought about by the pandemic have continued". The move came after organizers flip-flopped on their choice of venue, announcing last December that it would ditch Hong Kong for Malaysia before walking back their decision nine months later.

RISE initially said moving to Kuala Lumpur would expand the event's presence into Southeast Asia.

But as Malaysia faced a fresh surge of Covid-19 cases this summer, the company behind the event said it was "no longer feasible" to keep it in the country.

At the time, RISE CEO Paddy Cosgrave said the conference "always intended to come back to Hong Kong at some stage", citing past success in the city.

But while Hong Kong has managed to keep coronavirus infections at bay, its largely closed borders and lengthy quarantine rules have made it a difficult place to arrange international conferences for a whole different set of reasons. Most arrivals must undergo at least three weeks of hotel quarantine and a growing number of nations with high counts of the Omicron variant even have to spend one of those weeks in a government camp.

RISE's evolving relationship with Hong Kong has drawn attention at a time when major tech firms fret over Beijing's crackdown on dissent in the financial hub.—AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Miss World 2021 temporarily postponed following COVID-19 concerns

THE finale of this year's 'Miss World'-- one of the prestigious international beauty pageants, has been temporarily postponed due to COVID-19 concerns.

Miss World 2021 grand finale was slated for a global broadcast in Puerto Rico this week, but according to the official statement shared by the Miss World Organization, the programme has been temporarily postponed due to the health and safety concerns of contestants, staff, crew, and the general public.

"Miss World 2021 temporarily postpones global broadcast finale in Puerto Rico due to health and safety interest of contestants, staff, crew and general public," the statement read.

The broadcast will be rescheduled at Puerto Rico Coliseum Jose Miguel Agrelot within the next 90 days.– ANI ■

Russia reports 28,486 new COVID-19 cases

RUSSIA registered 28,486 new coronavirus cases over the past 24 hours, taking the nationwide tally to 10,131,646, the official monitoring and response centre said Thursday.

The nationwide death toll from COVID-19 increased by 1,133 to 294,024, while the number of recoveries increased by 37,155 to 8,876,788. Meanwhile, Moscow, Russia's worst-hit region, reported 3,322 new cases, taking its total to 1,995,029.

Russian Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said Wednesday that around 3.9 per cent of those vaccinated in the country had contracted the virus.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova said Tuesday that the country's level of immunity had reached 56.1 per cent. –ANI ■

Restrictions on travel from UK over Omicron surge

FRANCE is to tighten restrictions on travel from Britain to slow the spread of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 that is causing record numbers of cases on the other side of the Channel, the government said Thursday.

"We will put in place a system of controls drastically tighter than the one we have already," government spokesman Gabriel Attal told BFM television, saying the office of Prime Minister Jean Castex would issue a statement on the new measures in the coming hours with many believing a ban on non-essential travel is on the cards. He said returning travellers would need a negative test less than 24 hours old, a blanket quarantine would be enforced on return to France, and trips for tourism limited. "We will reduce the validity of the test to come to France from 48 hours to 24 hours," said Attal.

"We will limit the reasons for coming to France from the UK, it will be limited to French nationals and residents and their families. Tourism or business trips for people who do not have French or European nationality or are residents will be limited."

"People (coming back) will have to register on an app and will have to self-isolate in a place of their choosing for seven days — controlled by the security forces — but this can be shortened to 48 hours if a negative test is carried out in France," he said.—AFP ■

Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport also known as Roissy Airport, is the largest international airport in France and one of the busiest airports in Europe. **PHOTO: AFP**

IMF pulls out of Brazil after economy minister's ire

THE International Monetary Fund said Thursday it will close its Brazilian office, a day after receiving harsh criticism from Economy Minister Paulo Guedes over its forecasts for Latin America's biggest economy.

The IMF said it would close its office in Brasilia when the current country representative's mandate expires on 30 June 2022. The move came after Guedes, far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's ultra-liberal economy guru, said the IMF was overly pessimistic in its forecasts on Brazil and was no longer welcome. "They can go take a walk," he said Wednesday.

"They were here forecasting (Brazil's economy) would contract by 9.7 per cent (in 2020) and Britain's would contract by four per cent. In the end, we contracted by four per cent, and Britain by 9.7 percent," he said.

He also accused IMF officials in the country of being more interested in "football and feijoada" — a meat-and-bean stew that is one of Brazil's most famous attractions — than in helping the economy.

The IMF opened its office in Brazil in 1999, when the country turned to the Washington institution for financing to help get out of an economic crisis. That programme ended in 2005.

The IMF said it had maintained the office to "facilitate dialogue," but Guedes said that was no longer needed. "They've been here long enough. There was a lot of imbalance in the relationship," he said. Guedes and Bolsonaro have been at pains to shore up confidence in Brazil's recession-hit economy as the president heads toward elections next October with his popularity at an all-time low.—AFP ■

Brazil's Economy Minister Paulo Guedes.
PHOTO: BRAZILIAN.REPORT/ALAN SANTOS/AFP

China revises down 2020 economic growth rate 0.1 point to 2.2%

CHINA on Friday revised down its inflation-adjusted economic growth rate for 2020 by 0.1 percentage point to 2.2 per cent following data revisions.

The pace of expansion in sectors like restaurant, tourism and real estate was slower than initially estimated, according to China's National Bureau of Statistics.

In 2020, China became the only major economy to achieve growth as other nations contracted in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic.

Workers manufacture speaker components at a factory in Yaozhou District of Tongchuan City, northwest China's Shaanxi Province, 12 March 2020. **PHOTO: XINHUA/LIU XIAO**

But the pace of expansion was the slowest since the economy contracted in 1976, the final year of the 10-year-long Cultural Revolution initiated by Mao Zedong that historians say killed tens of millions of people.

The Chinese government usually releases the nation's annual gross domestic product data in January every year.—Kyodo ■

BOJ trims COVID-19 funding support, maintains easing policy

The BOJ is seen as one of the last among central banks in major economies in dialling back emergency stimulus and shifting to tightening policy as price increases are subdued and its 2 per cent inflation target is still far off. A department store employee puts up a sign on 30 April in the city of Osaka saying that only the food section of the store will be open. **PHOTO: KYODO**

THE Bank of Japan decided Friday to scale back its COVID-19 funding support as financing conditions have been improving among large firms, while leaving its ultraloose monetary policy unchanged amid uncertainty over the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

After a two-day policy-setting meeting, the BOJ said it will reduce its buying of commercial paper and corporate bonds issued by large firms but retain until September a programme that was due to end in March to support small and midsize firms facing more difficult funding conditions.

The Japanese central bank said, as widely expected, that it will continue to set short-term interest rates at minus 0.1 per cent while guiding 10-year Japanese government bond yields around zero per cent.

The BOJ is seen as one of the last among central banks in major economies in dialling back emergency stimulus and shifting to tightening policy as price increases are subdued and its 2 per cent inflation target is still far off.—Kyodo ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Taliban prepare new Afghan budget without foreign aid

AFGHANISTAN'S finance ministry under the new Taliban government has prepared a draft national budget that, for the first time in two decades, is funded without foreign aid, a spokesman said.

It comes as the country is mired in economic crisis and faces a looming humanitarian catastrophe the United Nations has called an "avalanche of hunger".

Finance ministry spokesman Ahmad Wali Haqmal did not disclose the size of the draft budget – which runs until December 2022 – but told AFP it would go to the cabinet for approval before being published.

"We are trying to finance it from our domestic revenues – and we believe we can," he earlier told state television in an interview shared on Twitter. Global donors suspended financial aid when the Taliban seized power in August and Western powers also froze access to billions of dollars in assets held abroad.

The 2021 budget, put together by the previous administration under IMF guidance, projected a deficit despite 219 billion Afghanis in aid and grants and 217 billion from domestic revenue.

At that time the exchange rate was around 80 Afghanis to the dollar, but the local currency has been hammered since the Taliban's return, particularly in the past week, slumping to 130 on Monday before recovering Friday to around 100.

Haqmal accepted that public servants are still owed several months of wages, saying "we are trying our best" to make good on overdue pay by year-end. He warned, however, a new pay scale had also been prepared.—AFP ■

Hong Kong central bank sends care packages to execs in quarantine

HONG Kong's central bank confirmed Tuesday that its officials sent care package goodies to high profile executives in quarantine as the business community's frustrations grow over the city's international isolation.

The finance hub maintains one of the world's longest quarantines, a measure that has kept the city largely coronavirus-free but cut off from much of the world.

For some VIP executives stuck in mandatory hotel quarantine for up to 21 days, the burden has been eased by care packages.

Eddie Yue, head of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), told the Hong Kong Economic Times on Monday that a team was sending "wine and gourmet food" to finance executives in the hope they would be "less angry with Hong Kong" over the strict quarantines.

When asked for comment on Tuesday, an HKMA spokesperson told AFP: "From their own pockets, HKMA senior executives sent confectioneries to a handful of executives under quarantine as a token of personal regards." The HKMA did not elaborate on the contents of the care packages, nor how many people had received them. –AFP ■

Quebec reinstates anti-Covid measures in restaurants, stores

QUEBEC will reinstate measures in bars, restaurants and stores to slow the spread of the Omicron variant of Covid-19, the province's premier Francois Legault said Thursday.

Citing a "critical" situation, he also asked provincial residents to limit private gatherings during the holidays to a maximum of 10 people.

After the winter vacations, high schools and universities will switch to virtual learning for at least a week.

And from Monday, stores, bars, restaurants, theatres, places of worship and sports venues will have to reduce crowds to 50 per cent of capacity. Sports competitions in the province will be put on hold.

Dance clubs and karaoke bars will have to close, only a few weeks after they were allowed to reopen.

At least 3,700 new cases were recorded on Thursday, surpassing the previous daily caseload record set in January, authorities said.

"I think that nobody, a few weeks ago, would have said that we would have 3,700 cases today," said Legault, who as recently as Tuesday had said it would be possible for groups of 20 people to gather for the Christmas holiday.

The Quebec vaccination campaign will be sped up, reducing the interval between the second dose and the booster from six months to three. But boosters are still not yet available to all age groups, as was announced Wednesday in neighbouring Ontario, the most populous province in Canada.—AFP ■

Quebec cuts capacity limits in stores, bars, restaurants to 50% as of Monday. **PHOTO: AFP**

Rivian announces second US plant, big quarterly loss

Supply chain issues mean Rivian wil fall short of its production targets this year. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

ELECTRIC truck maker Rivian said on Thursday it will invest $5 billion to build its second US assembly plant in the state of Georgia.

It also announced a sharp quarterly loss and acknowledged it may be "a few hundred vehicles short" of its target to produce 1,200 cars this year, according to an earnings release.

The second plant after the automaker's Normal, Illinois factory will be located east of Atlanta and employ more than 7,500 people, Rivian said in a release.

Construction will start next summer with a targeted opening of 2024 for the facility that can produce up to 400,000 vehicles per-year.

"We're happy to partner with Georgia on our new manufacturing site, which will build our next generation of products that are important for scaling our business," the company's Chief People Officer Helen Russell said.

The company also announced third quarter results, with a net loss of more than $1.2 billion.

Rivian has been a favourite of Wall Street since its arrival on indices last month, despite producing only a fraction of the cars of traditional Detroit firms like Ford and General Motors. It overtook those companies in valuation on its first day of trading.—AFP ■

Lira plunges as Turkey cuts interest rate again

THE Turkish lira on Thursday hit fresh lows after the central bank fired the latest salvo in President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's "economic war of independence" by cutting interest rates for the fourth successive month.

The reduction of the main rate to 14 from 15 per cent comes in the face of an annual inflation rate that has surged past 20 per cent and is expected to climb even higher over the next few weeks.

The lira was trading down more than five per cent after the announcement. "The accompanying statement suggests that the easing cycle will be on pause early next year but, even so, the lira will remain under pressure and capital controls are likely," the Capital Economics consultancy said in a research note.

The lira has shed more than half its value since January — and nearly 40 per cent since the start of November -- as policymakers bow to Erdogan's wishes to bring down borrowing costs despite soaring inflation. This unorthodox approach has wiped out the value of people's saving and thrown swaths of Turkish society below the official poverty line.—AFP ■

The lira has lost more than half its value since the start of the year as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pushes for lower interest rates. **PHOTO: AFP**

Statement of Correction and Apology to Mann Yadanarpon Airlines

On November 26 at 7pm Popular News Journal published an article with the headline "Cancellation of a Domestic Airline" on its Facebook page, Telegram channel and website.

We mistakenly quoted the source stating the Myanmar Companies Law and the Bankruptcy Law, along with the subject. There were no other ill intentions of purposes.

The Popular News Journal sincerely apologizes to Mann Yadanarpon Airlines for the misrepresentation of facts.

Mann Yadanarpon Airlines is operated by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), with their airline symbols of 7Y and MYP, and are holding direct flights from Yangon-Thandwe, Yangon-Sittwe, Yangon-Heho, Yangon-Kyaing Tong. Buyers who have purchased tickets, booked tickets, and would like to buy tickets can freely do so.

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CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V PACIFIC SOPHIA

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V PACIFIC SOPHIA VOY.NO. (2107)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **18-12-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **IBTT** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

Phone No: **2301928**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S BEN LINES AGENCIES (S'PORE) PTE LTD

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V B TRADER VOY.NO. (148S/149N)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V B TRADER VOY.NO. (148S/149N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **18-12-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **MITT/MIP** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S SEALAND MEARSK ASIA PTE LTD

Children take part in a protest against US immigration policies outside the US embassy in Mexico City on 26 June 2018. **PHOTO: AFP**

US ends talks on compensation with families separated at Mexico border

THE US government has abandoned negotiations to financially compensate migrant families separated at the southern border with Mexico during the "zero tolerance" policy of former president Donald Trump, representatives of both parties said Thursday.

The administration of President Joe Biden said no agreement had been reached with attorneys for the families who filed lawsuits over the separations, but left open the possibility of doing so in the future.

"While the parties have been unable to reach a global settlement agreement at this time, we remain committed to engaging with the plaintiffs and to bringing justice to the victims of this abhorrent policy," the Justice Department said in a statement.

The plaintiffs, who are seeking compensation for the psychological damage the separations caused them, announced that they will continue with their legal battle. "We are going back to court," said Lee Gelernt, deputy director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Immigrants' Rights Project. "The trauma inflicted on these children and parents at the hands of our very own government is unfathomable. We need to do the right thing," he told AFP.—AFP ■

27 feared dead in building fire in Japan's Osaka

TWENTY-SEVEN people were feared dead after a blaze swept through a commercial building housing a mental health clinic in the Japanese city of Osaka on Friday, as reports said police considered arson a possible cause of the fire.

TV footage showed dozens of firefighters working inside and outside the narrow office building after the blaze was extinguished.

The charred interior of the fourth floor, which housed a clinic that provided mental health services and general medical care, was visible through broken and blackened windows.

An Osaka police spokesman told AFP that officers were investigating the cause of the fire.

But he could not confirm Japanese media reports citing police sources saying arson was a possibility, with some media outlets saying a man had allegedly dispersed a liquid to start the blaze.

A young woman who witnessed the fire told public broadcaster NHK she had seen a woman trapped on the fourth floor.

"She leaned out (from a window) and was saying things like 'Please help'... She seemed very weak. Maybe she inhaled lots of smoke," the woman said.—AFP ■

The blaze, in a busy business area near Kitashinchi train station in the city in western Japan, had been put out after half an hour. **PHOTO: JIJI PRESS/AFP**

Rescuers race to save trapped Chinese miners

CHINESE rescuers were racing to reach 21 miners trapped in a coal mine Friday, as authorities vowed to crack down on illegal digging operations which have spiked amid price surges for the fossil fuel.

The group were trapped when the mine flooded on Wednesday in Xiaoyi city, in northern China's coal-producing Shanxi province, prompting a huge recovery effort.

Hundreds of rescuers have been dispatched to the mine where three pumps are trying to drain out the water that has filled the underground pit.

State broadcaster CCTV said a narrow and concealed entrance to the illegal mine had hampered rescue efforts, as well as a lack of a proper map of the site.

Seven suspects have been detained over the accident, and police said they were searching for others — including the mine's owner, reportedly a local villager who fled after the accident.

China generates about 60 per cent of its energy from burning coal, and had ramped up output in recent months to ease an energy shortage that had caused power cuts and forced factories to close.

Authorities said Thursday that high demand for coal has pushed up prices and cases of illegal mining.—AFP ■

In this photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, rescuers work at a coal mine at Duxigou Village of Xixinzhuang Township in Xiaoyi City in northern China's Shanxi Province, Thursday, 16 December 2021. More than 20 people were trapped after a coal mine was flooded in the city of Xiaoyi, north China's Shanxi province, as a result of illegal mining, local authorities said Thursday. **PHOTO: CAO YANG/XINHUA**

NEWS IN BRIEF

Part of Sudan 2020 peace deal suspended after eastern protests

Sudan's ruling Sovereign Council on Thursday suspended a section of a 2020 peace deal with rebel groups dealing with the east of the country following tribal protests against the deal.

In October 2020, the government signed a peace pact with multiple rebel groups in Sudan's far-flung regions with a view to ending the ethnic conflicts that have dogged the country since independence.

Although the deal focused on three battleground regions – Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan – it left minority communities in other parts of Sudan feeling sidelined.–AFP ■

Brits change plans as Covid crisis bites ahead of Xmas

BRITONS including the Queen were shifting plans Thursday ahead of Christmas, as soaring Omicron Covid cases led to cancelled parties, advice to "prioritize" certain social interactions and France banning UK visitors.

Britain saw a record daily tally of nearly 79,000 new infections Wednesday, but the government has so far stopped short of limiting socializing as it awaits further evidence of the variant's severity and impact.

However, Queen Elizabeth II was among those changing plans, cancelling her traditional pre-Christmas family lunch next week as a precautionary measure, even as Prime minister Boris Johnson said such gatherings could still go ahead.–AFP ■

N. Korea marks 10th anniversary of death of ex-leader Kim Jong Il

NORTH Korea on Friday marked the 10th anniversary of the death of the country's second leader Kim Jong Il, with state-run media hailing his "revolutionary exploits" before and during his 17-year rule.

On Thursday, a memorial service was held at North Korea's embassy in the Chinese capital Beijing on the occasion of the anniversary, the official Korean Central News Agency reported, underscoring the healthy state of relations between the two nations.

After Kim Jong Il died of a heart attack on 17 December 2011, at age 69, his son and current leader Kim Jong Un inherited the leadership of North Korea, which was established in 1948 with the backing of the Soviet Union, Russia's predecessor state.

Military personnel visit Mansu Hill in Pyongyang on 17 December 2021, the 10th anniversary of the death of former North Korean leader Kim Jong Il.
PHOTO: KYODO

Wang Chen, a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, was quoted by KCNA as saying at the memorial service that Kim Jong Il "made a great contribution to the development" of Sino-North Korean ties.

He also said the traditional friendship between China and North Korea "serves as precious wealth for both sides," according to the news agency.

On Mansu Hill in the heart of North Korea's capital Pyongyang, meanwhile, citizens on Thursday laid flowers and bowed in front of the giant statues of Kim Jong Il and his father and the county's founder Kim Il Sung, who died in 1994.

In the wake of the death of Kim Il Sung at age 82, Kim Jong Il took control of North Korea, but he did not assume his father's titles until 1997 when he became general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and chairman of the National Defence Commission.

"Dear Leader" Kim Jong Il, well-known for his fondness of Hennessy cognac and his large collection of movies, was seen as a reclusive figure as he rarely travelled abroad beyond trips to China and long train journeys to the then Soviet Union and later Russia.—Kyodo ■

Chile chooses president from polar opposites

Gabriel Boric (L) and Jose Antonio Kast face off in Chile's runoff election.
PHOTO: AFP/FILE

A Chile in the throes of profound change will choose a president Sunday from polar opposite candidates vying for votes among an apathetic and alienated electorate.

In the midst of rewriting its dictatorship-era constitution in answer to a social uprising against economic hardship and one of the world's highest rates of economic inequality, the country faces a stark leadership choice.

The candidates could not have been more different: far-right lawyer Jose Antonio Kast, an apologist for ex-dictator Augusto Pinochet and the neoliberal economic model he left behind; and leftist lawmaker Gabriel Boric with his plans for a welfare state. "Certainly, a lot of people are uncomfortable with the choices they have. And that's because the moderate candidates didn't make it to the runoff. The two extreme candidates made it to the runoff," analyst Patricio Navia of the New York University told AFP.

Kast, 55, and Boric, 35, are polling neck and neck. And with half the electorate undecided, a recent history of low voter turnout, and a high percentage of Chileans uncomfortable with either candidate, the ballot could be marked by high abstention and a strong protest vote.

"Most Chileans that vote... are going to (vote) because of fear," Michael Shifter, president of the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington DC, told AFP.—AFP ■

290,000 Afghans flee to Pakistan after Taliban takeover: minister

PAKISTAN'S government on Thursday said about 290,000 Afghans have fled here since the Taliban takeover and warned that the refugee crisis could aggravate if not urgently addressed by the international community.

"If this number increases, our economy will not be able to bear this burden," Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry told reporters.

The figure comprises those who have legally moved here, but thousands more may have illegally crossed the border.

The United Nations had weeks after the mid-August Taliban takeover warned that up to half a million Afghans could leave their country before the end of the year.

Pakistan, which is already hosting about 3 million Afghan refugees, half of them unregistered, initially refused to allow new arrivals from the war-ravaged country and sealed its border crossings, but the restrictions were gradually relaxed as the humanitarian crisis worsened. The World Food Programme has said that "this winter, millions of Afghans will have to choose between starvation or migration."—Kyodo ■

Thousands of Afghans trying to escape the misery at home have flocked to their country's southern border with Pakistan. **PHOTO: ANI**

NEWS IN BRIEF

UK PM Johnson suffers by-election disaster

BRITISH Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Friday suffered a crushing by-election defeat in a constituency never previously lost by his Conservative Party, a result which raises serious questions about his leadership.

His party won the seat in North Shropshire, central England, by a massive majority in 2019, but that was wiped out by the Liberal Democrats in Thursday's vote in a result that will intensify the mutinous mood among Conservative MPs.

Johnson, 57, was already reeling after roughly 100 of his MPs rebelled in parliament Tuesday against the government's introduction of vaccine passes for large events. The UK leader's authority has also been clobbered repeatedly in recent weeks by claims of corruption and reports that he and his staff broke coronavirus restrictions last Christmas.—AFP ■

EU threatens Russia sanctions as NATO backs Ukraine

WESTERN allies on Thursday rejected Russia's bid to thwart Kiev's NATO ambitions and urged Moscow to halt its military build-up along Ukraine's border and return to talks led by France and Germany.

European Union leaders, meeting in Brussels, insisted on "the urgent need for Russia to de-escalate tensions caused by the military build-up along its border with Ukraine and aggressive rhetoric".

Separately, NATO's members used similar language, rejecting "the false Russian claims of Ukrainian and NATO provocations" and urged Moscow to "immediately de-escalate, pursue diplomatic channels, and abide by its international commitments." Both organizations, which share most of their member states, reiterated a threat to impose "massive consequences" on Moscow through sanctions, coordinated between European powers and Washington. On Thursday, the EU leaders agreed to renew for six months existing economic sanctions imposed on Russia in 2014 in response to its annexation of Crimea, a Ukrainian region.—AFP ■

Myanmar to play against Philippines today in Suzuki Cup last group match

MYANMAR national men's football team will take on the Philippines team in the last Group A match of the AFF Suzuki Cup today at the National Stadium in Singapore.

Myanmar head coach Antoine Hey expressed his feeling about the match during a pre-match press conference yesterday.

"We have a week to prepare for this game against the Philippines. The rest days were important to us as we had several players injured after the first few matches of our campaign and this allowed them to recover well," said Hey.

"We are in the process of rebuilding and every match that we play gets us closer to the level that we want to be. It has taken time for us to get the rhythm as a team and individuals," Hey added.

Next, Myanmar team Captain Maung Maung Lwin said, "The Philippines are a strong team. They have many quality players. We have observed and analyzed their matches, so we know their strength. It will be difficult but we will be competitive."

On the other hand, Philippines head coach Stewart Hall said that team Myanmar is very competitive.

"We have eight players from the U23 with us, so at least four will start the match against Myanmar. There will be changes for sure," added Hall.

"It will be a challenge to play Myanmar as they pass the ball around quite well. We are disappointed with the result in our last game (against Thailand) but we have to go on and finish our campaign well".

Both teams have been knocked out of the group stage and will play for their dignity. — GNLM ■

Bodybuilders train ahead of XXXI Southeast Asian Games

Bodybuilders are taking training ahead of the XXXI SEA Games to be held in Viet Nam in May 2022. **PHOTO: SOE MYINT AUNG**

AS XXXI Southeast Asian Games to be held in Viet Nam from 12 to 23 May 2022 is drawing to a close, Myanmar athletes and bodybuilders are training hard intensively.

"Nine male and two female athletes have been shortlisted for the Qualifiers, which are scheduled to take place in January. They train twice daily from 8:00 am to 12:00 noon and 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Lightweights may win medals at the SEA Games, but heavyweights are expected to compete this year as well.

Bodybuilders are also training to compete in the Asian Championships next September," said Joint Secretary U Kyaw Sein Than of the Myanmar Gymnastics Federation.

In the SEA Games, the Myanmar team will compete in men's 55 kg, 60 kg, 65 kg, 70 kg, 75 kg and 80 kg and men and women mixed event, women's physique event, respectively.

The main competitors for Myanmar athletes will be Viet Nam and Thailand, said officials.

After the 27th Southeast Asian Games hosted by Myanmar, the host countries did not include bodybuilding and physique competitions.

The XXXI Southeast Asian Games will be hosted by Viet Nam and will feature the bodybuilding and physique event.

It is learned that all the athletes are training intensively for the upcoming tourneys. — Pwint Thitsar/GNLM ■

Six games called off as Covid wreaks havoc on Premier League

THE Premier League on Thursday postponed six more matches due to the wave of coronavirus infections hitting Britain, but said it intended to "continue its current fixture schedule where safely possible" as calls for a circuit break intensified.Leicester's scheduled match against Tottenham was postponed just hours before kick-off on Thursday. Five more games scheduled for this weekend have also been postponed due to outbreaks at Manchester United, Brentford, Norwich and Watford.

United's home clash with Brighton, Brentford's trip to Southampton, Watford's meeting with Crystal Palace and West Ham's fixture against Norwich have all been called off along with Leicester's visit to Everton. For the second consecutive day, record numbers of Covid-19 cases were recorded in Britain as the Omicron variant runs riot, with fears growing that the crisis could derail the football season. Brentford boss Thomas Frank led calls for a firebreak of at least a week to allow the infection rate to stabilise. "Covid cases are going through the roof at all Premier League clubs. Everyone is dealing with it and having problems," said the Dane.

"To postpone this round and also the Carabao (League) Cup round (next week) would give everyone a week at least, or four or five days to clean and do everything at the training ground so everything is clean and you break the chain." —AFP ■

Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Nine Objectives

1. Political affairs

(a) To build a Union based on democracy and federalism, through a disciplined and genuine multiparty democratic system that is fair and just.

(b) To emphasize the achievement of enduring peace for the entire nation in line with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).

(c) To continue implementing the principle of peaceful co-existence among countries through an independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy.

2. Economic affairs

(a) To enhance production based on agriculture and livestock through modern techniques and strengthen all-round development in other sectors of the economy.

(b) To develop a stable market economy and promote international investment in order to enhance the economic development of the entire National people.

(c) To promote and support local businesses to create employment opportunities and increase domestic production.

3. Social affairs

(a) To ensure a strong and dynamic Union spirit, the genuine spirit of patriotism.

(b) To respect and promote the customs and traditions of all National peoples and preserve and safeguard their cultural heritage and national characteristics.

(c) To enhance the health, fitness and education quality of the entire nation.

Woods looking 'impressive' in build up to PNC Championship

WORLD number six Justin Thomas is excited to see his friend Tiger Woods tee it up alongside son Charlie at the PNC Championship family tournament this weekend, and Thomas's dad Mike thinks Woods fans are in for a treat.

"It's crazy how good he's hitting it and far he's hitting it for what he's been through," Mike Thomas said of 15-time major champion Woods, who suffered career-threatening leg injuries in a California car crash in February.

Woods has downplayed expectations for the event at the Ritz-Carlton Golf Club in Orlando, Florida, saying he's playing "as a dad" as he continues to consider how he might fashion a return to tournament golf proper.

But Mike Thomas — a former collegiate golfer and longtime club professional who teamed with Justin to win the event last year -- said he'd played a recent round with Woods and found it "impressive where he's at."—AFP ■

Tiger Woods hits balls on the range during the final round of the Hero World Challenge at Albany Golf Course on 5 December 2021. **PHOTO: MIKE EHRMANN/ AFP**