CONSERVE MANGROVE, COCONUT PLANTS FOR THE PREVENTION OF NATURAL DISASTERS 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.

Historic Santawshin Kyaikdevi Pagoda renovated in multiple sectors, with hoisting diamond orb and pennant-shaped vane and consecration

HISTORIC Santawshin Kyaikdevi Pagoda was renovated in multiple sectors with hoisting a diamond orb and a pennant-shaped vane in addition to the consecration on Thiri Mingala Hillock in Indaing in Hlegu Township of Yangon Region yesterday morning, the fullmoon day of Nadaw, 1383 Myanmar Era and 2565 Sasana Era, graced by members of the Sangha led by Ovadacariya of Tri Pitaka Selection Committee member of the State Central Working Committee of the Sangha Agga Maha Pandita Bhaddanta Naradabhivamsa (Sakkasiha, Cetiyangana and Government Dhammacariya Vatamsaka) Pali Paragu Presiding Nayaka of Bahan Nyaungdon Monastery, and Pro-Rector of the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotikadhaja Maha Dhamma Kathikabahujana Hitadhara Maha Ganthavacaka Pandita Dr Bhaddanta Chekinda (Dhamma Duta Sayadaw).

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State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attends the consecration ceremony for a diamond orb and a pennant-shaped vane to the Santawshin Kyaikdevi Pagoda in Indaing of Hlegu Township in Yangon Region on 18 December 2021.

State Pariyatti Sasana University (Yangon/Mandalay) holds 27th graduation ceremony

THE 27th graduation ceremony of the State Pariyatti Sasana University (Yangon/Mandalay) was held at the convocation hall of the State Pariyatti Sasana University (Yangon) yesterday.

Chairman of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee Dr Bhaddanta Kumara Bhivamsa, Chancellor of the University, Ovadacariya Sayadaws, Teaching/Administrative Head Sayadaws of the State Pariyatti Sasana University (Yangon/Mandalay), recipient Sayadaws, Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture U Ko Ko, Yangon Region Chief Minister U Hla Soe and departmental officials joined the event.

The ceremony was opened by reciting "Namo Tassa" three times and the Union minister and party took Five Precepts and Saraniya Ovadakatha from Chairman of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee Chancellor Sayadaw of State Pariyatti Sasana Universities Dr Bhaddanta Kumara Bhivamsa.

Then, officials listened to sermons delivered by Vice-Chair of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee Chairman of State Pariyatti Sasana Universities Administration Central Committee Sayadaw Bhaddanta Sumangala Bhivamsa (Maing Thauk Sayadaw).

Then, Union Minister U Ko Ko supplicated religious matters. He said 2,903 monks received degrees up to the 26th graduation ceremony.

In this 27th ceremony, there are 111 recipients of BA (Buddhism) and MA (Buddhism) and one recipient of PhD (Buddhism) from respective Sasana Universities.

He then underlined the important role of universities operating in line with the education policies of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee in producing educated monks.

Then, Region Chief Minister U Hla Soe presented the government efforts for the sake of the country, including the propagation of Buddha Sasana.

Then, State Pariyatti Sasana University Registrar Sayadaw Bhaddanta Sumana sought approval of Vice-Chair of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee Chairman of State Pariyatti Sasana Universities Administration Central Committee Sayadaw Bhaddanta Sumangala Bhivamsa (Maing Thauk Sayadaw) for the lists of degree holders.

The respective venerable Sayadaws conferred relevant degrees to the recipient monks.

Afterwards, the degree recipient monks took the oaths before the Chancellor Sayadaw of the State Pariyatti Sasana Universities.

Next, the congregation led by the Union minister heard sermons delivered by the Vice-Chancellor Sayadaw and shared the merits gained.

The Union minister, departmental officials and well-wishers donated to 130 monks – 18 invited monks and 112 degree-recipient monks.—MNA

MoC oversees daily imports of anti-COVID-19 equipment

THE Ministry of Commerce is overseeing the importation of essential medical supplies plus anti-COVID devices that are critical to the COVID-19 prevention, control and treatment activities, including liquid oxygen and oxygen cylinders, through trading posts, international airports and seaports.

Anti-COVID-19 equipment was imported by four companies using eight vehicles. A total of 96 tonnes of masks were imported via the Chinshwehaw trade zone yesterday.

From 1 to 18 December, a total of 245 tonnes of liquid oxygen, which was carried by 159 vehicles, 12,826 empty oxygen tanks, one oxygen plant, 514 oxygen concentrators, 1,957 COVID-19 test kits, 15,280 PPE suits, 26 tonnes of gloves and 908 tonnes of masks were imported.

In the meantime, ten oxygen bowsers to Yangon, two to Mandalay, and one to Monywa were undertaken and one oxygen plant was also transported to Mandalay.

Officials from the relevant departments are cooperating to facilitate and expedite the standard operating procedures, including online registration for the import process.

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

Public request by Ministry of Health

ONLY when the people cooperate will the work process achieve success in a short time for effective prevention, control and treatment of COVID-19 among the people. As such, all the people are requested to abide by the following points: -

1. Stay at home as much as possible.
2. Don't accept the guests at the house. You don't visit other houses.
3. The older persons above 65 or those suffering from chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and heart must be worn masks in the house. They must be placed at well-ventilated sites.
4. Wear masks if you go outside without fail. Systematically wash hands. Take a six-foot distance from others. Avoid visits to the rooms where ventilation is not good.
5. Avoid the crowds.
6. If possible, go shopping once a week. Don't buy anything from the vendors who don't systematically wear masks.
7. Take care of carrying the virus to the houses whenever return home from outside. Systematically discard the used masks and single disposable equipment outside the houses. Avoid close contact with family members before changing clothes or washing the body.
8. As the vaccines for your quota is the best, accept vaccinations for full time. Despite receiving the vaccination, you should abide by the protective ways.
9. Systematically cooperate in prevention, control and treatment of the disease with manpower, money, materials and expertise.

Ministry of Health (2-8-2021)

Not to harm the education of schoolchildren

OMICRON spreads in Asian countries. Its infection rate is very high and severe. So, we should not be careless. We open the schools where children are attending. We cannot accept the infection to harm their learning. We have to arrange for them to attend the schools healthily until they completed the examinations in March. They have to attend the schools healthily and safely and education staff should be healthy as well. So, we have to take special care of their conditions.

(Excerpt from the speech delivered by Chairman of the State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at the meeting 3/2021 of the Union Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar on 3-12-2021)

Historic Santawshin Kyaikdevi Pagoda renovated in multiple sectors, with hoisting diamond orb and pennant-shaped vane and consecration

State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, wife Daw Kyu Kyu Hla and the congregation take the Nine Precepts from the Presiding Patron of Bahan Nyaungdon Monastery at the event yesterday.

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Also present at the ceremony were Chairman of the State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and wife Daw Kyu Kyu Hla, members of the State Administration Council Admiral Tin Aung San and wife, General Maung Maung Kyaw and wife, Lt-Gen Moe Myint Tun, Council Joint Secretary Lt-Gen Ye Win Oo and wife, Union ministers, the chief minister of Yangon Region, the Commander-in-Chief (Navy) and wife, senior military officers of the Office of the Commander-in-Chief and their wives, the commander of Yangon Command, the Yangon mayor, guests, well-wishers, officers, other ranks and families, in addition to religious associations and local people.

The Senior General and wife, and the congregation took the Nine Precepts from the Presiding Patron of Bahan Nyaungdon Monastery. Laypersons offered Paritta flowers, water, thread and sand to members of the Sangha. Next, the congregation listened to Parittas recited by members of the Sangha.

The diamond orb and pennant-shaped vane are conveyed before hoisting them atop the Santawshin Kyaikdevi Pagoda yesterday,

The Senior General, wife and families donated diamond orb, pennant-shaped vane and alms to the Presiding Patron of Bahan Nyaungdon Monastery, and members of the State Administration Council, union ministers, and those presented donated alms to members of the Sangha.

The Senior General, wife and families and party conveyed the diamond orb and pennant-shaped vane and rounded the pagoda clockwise. At the auspicious time, the diamond orb and pennant-shaped vane were lifted by the decorated float atop the pagoda. Then, these objects were sprinkled with scented water. Later, the rituals of golden and silver showers were performed to mark the successful completion of the ceremony.

The historic Kyaikdevi Pagoda was the fourth of the seven pagodas built by King Karaviaka of Hanthawady Dynasty and the pagoda was built in 1489 Sasana Year or in ME 307. In Sasana Year 1970 or 788 ME, during the reign of King Dhamma Raza, the pagoda was first renovated to the height of 75 cubits. In 2160 Sasana Year or in 978 ME, the King Anaukphetlun renovated the damaged pagoda to the height of 80 cubits. Then, the pagoda was damaged by earthquakes and the second world war and the government, the pagoda board of trustees, the public and the well-wishers carried out all-round renovation of the pagoda under the request of the local people sent to Ovadacariya Sayadaw with the donations of well-wishers.—MNA

Basic foodstuffs provided to artistes

THE donation ceremony of basic foodstuffs for the artiste's associations was held at MRTV on Pyay Road of Yangon Region yesterday.

In his remark, Union Minister for Information U Maung Maung Ohn said the donation ceremony was arranged for the contributions of Union Minister for Cooperatives and Rural Development U Hla Moe, Yangon Region Economy Minister U Aung Than Oo and their families. Amid the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the entertainment industry of Myanmar is also affected and the artistes face hardships.

MoI Union Minister U Maung Maung Ohn remarks at the event to provide basic foodstuff for artistes in Yangon yesterday.

Therefore, Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing conducted a donation ceremony for the artistes who face difficulties in their keeps in November. The successive basic foodstuffs donations aim for the artistes to run their careers in unity in the long run and entertain the people.

Then, Region Economy Minister U Aung Than Oo and Advocate-General U Htay Aung respectively made remarks.

Then, Union Minister U Maung Maung Ohn and other officials handed over the donations to Myanmar Motion Picture Association, Myanmar Music Association (Central) and Myanmar Comedians Association.

Myanmar Motion Picture Association Chairman Director Kyi Soe Tun expressed words of thanks on behalf of the respective associations.

The Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development donated 3,010 1-litre cooking oil bottles and 3,010 visses of beans, while 3,010 12-pyi of rice bag and 3,010 visses of salt by Yangon Region Economy Minister U Aung Than Oo.

The contributions were provided to a total of 3,010 artistes – 1,690 members of the Myanmar Motion Picture Association, 1,110 members of the Myanmar Music Association (Central) and 210 members of the Myanmar Comedians Association.

At noon, the Union minister attended the funeral of Sithu Bogale Tint Aung, Patron of the Myanmar Motion Picture Association and provided cash assistance to family members.

The Union minister inspected the MRTV re-transmission station in Thandwe Township of Rakhine State and provided cash assistance to the staff on 17 December evening.

The MRTV broadcasts from 258 re-transmission stations across the nation with an Analogue system. Of them, 153 stations were extended to the DVB-T2 system and 16 re-transmission stations broadcast in the whole Rakhine State, including Thandwe Township. — MNA

SMEs development coordination meeting held

THE Centre for Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Development held a coordination meeting on the development of SMEs on 17 December. The meeting was attended by Union Minister for Industry Dr Charlie Than, Deputy Minister U Ko Ko Lwin, Central Committee Member U Khin Maung Kyaw, officials from the UMFCCI, those involved in the development of small and medium enterprises and officials from the Ministry of Industry.

Vice-Chairman of the SME Development Committee Union Minister Dr Charlie Than said that the world is facing many economic, social and health problems due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and many countries are trying to find a solution on how to overcome them individually or collectively.

He said the State Government is implementing the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan (CERP) in a timely manner, adding the Working Committee for Remedial Works on Economic Impacts of COVID-19 has disbursed low-interest COVID-19 loans to 6,333 businesses that may have been affected by the economic impact of COVID-19.

Union Industry Minister Dr Charlie Than meets the Ayeyawady Region Chief Minister U Tin Maung Win.

He called on the participants of the meeting to openly discuss the process to be followed based on their previous experience in order to achieve effective results in a short period of time with practical steps for the development of SME businesses.

The Deputy Minister for Industry and the Director-General for Industrial Supervision and Inspection explained the SMEs development activities, the reorganization of support groups for the development of SMEs: Fund Management Group, Business Review and Coordination Implementation Group and agencies, future plans for the development of SMEs. Those involved in the SME development processes discussed the measures to be taken for the development of SMEs and the Union Minister made concluding remarks.

In the evening, the Union minister met Chief Minister U Tin Maung Win of the Ayeyawady Region government and ministers of the regional government and discussed the status of the operation, raw material requirements and current situation of human resource development of the industries and the Departments of the Ministry of Industry in Ayeyawady Region. The chief minister said he will exert utmost efforts to provide assistance in the resumption of the industrial operations.

The Union minister and Ayeyawady Region Economic Minister U Tin Aye arrived at the Glass Production Division (Pathein), inspected the production process inside the factory and instructed points of requirement. — MNA

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Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish **"Letter to the Editor"** that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.

Mini Gems Emporium continues 2nd day in Nay Pyi Taw

THE second day of the Mini Gems Emporium was held yesterday morning at Mani Yadana Jade Hall in Nay Pyi Taw as per the COVID-19 health guidelines and a total of 220 pearl lots were sold.

Local and foreign jewellers observed pearl and jade lots on display in the hall and designated areas outside of the hall from the morning. At the emporium yesterday, from the pearl lot number (1) to (220) were auctioned by an open tender system and the gem jewellers placed their proposed prices in the tender boxes after inspection the pearl lots to be sold. Afterwards, officials announced the sales of the pearl lots.

It is reported that a total of 330 pearl lots and 780 jade lots will be auctioned by an open tender system from 17 to 22 December at the emporium. — MNA

Gem merchants are looking into the jade lots at the emporium.

Growers from Mongyawng make good profit from coriander leaf farming

Mongyawng is cultivating many flowers and seasonal crops. The local farmers are cultivating coriander leaves with the hope to earn handsome profits. **PHOTO: SAI AUNG ZAW LIN**

THE local farmers from Mongyawng township, Tachilek district, Shan State (East) are engaging with agriculture. And, the growers of early-cultivated coriander leaves are delighted as they are getting good profit from its farming.

"Currently, the coriander leaves are being sold K 200-K500. There are two types of coriander species—cilantro and Thai coriander. The prices of both of them are the same. Some locals are growing them on a manageable scale in their yards. People are using the coriander in their cooking, where it is used as one of the spices in many curry dishes," said a coriander vendor.

Mongyawng is cultivating many flowers and seasonal crops. The local farmers are cultivating coriander leaves with the hope to earn handsome profits.

The coriander seeds can be easily grown and the cultivation cost is not high.

The coriander plants should be watered daily with fresh and cold water once in the morning and the evening. Now, the farmers are growing coriander plants for the whole year.

After two and a half, the plant can be started to pick up.

The coriander is a wonderful tastemaker to all the foods and dishes. They are a rich source of dietary fibres, vitamin C, K, and other proteins. — Sai Aung Zaw Lin/GNLM

170 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 18 December, total figure rises to 528,101

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 528,101 after 170 new cases were reported on 18 December 2021 according to the Ministry of Health. Among these confirmed cases, 505,103 have been discharged from hospitals. Death toll reached 19,213 after 5 died. —MNA

Black bean price drops below K1.3 mln per tonne

THE price of black bean has dropped to below K1.3 million per tonne, according to the Yangon Region Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Bayintnaung Brokerage).

Currently, the black bean price has plummeted under K1.3 million starting from 17 December. But, the price fetched K1,275,000 on 18 December, according to the bean market data.

The price of black beans has dropped because of the entry of new harvested black beans grown in central Myanmar and the other verity pulses from the delta regions in the market.

Besides, the black bean prices are inching downwards because the new black bean will be harvested again next January, February and March.

Nevertheless, the domestic bean price is positively linked to the international markets and it may change depending upon the foreign exchange rate, according to bean traders.

Last September, the rising of foreign exchange rates caused the exported variety pulses price to remain on an upward trend.

The price of black beans stood at K200,000 per three-basket bag in the domestic market.

From 1 October to 19 November in the 2021-22 financial year, the country shipped US$135.546 million worth of 160792.537 tonnes of pulses and beans to foreign markets through the sea route, and $8.458 million valued at 9,034.826 tonnes were sent to the neighbouring countries through border route.

In the 2020-21FY, Myanmar shipped a total of 2,029,695.882 tonnes of beans and pulses to foreign markets through border routes and sea routes, fetching over US$ 1,570.707 million, according to the figure released by the ministry. — NN/GNLM

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Four men, one woman arrested with explosives in Thanlyin

Handmade bomb blast at the CCTV Control Box at Parami traffic point in South Okkalapa Township on 13 October.

Seized weapons, ammunition and explosives in Thanlyin.

THE State Government has been cracking down on CRPH, NUG and PDF terrorists, who are committing bombings and killings of innocent civilians. According to the report of local people in Thanlyin on 17 December, security forces cleared the area in a field outside of Lahayat village in Thanlyin and arrested Thant Zaw Aung (a) Soe Lay, 29, Ye Min Phyo (a) Ko Phyo, 27, Phyo Maung Maung (a) Phyo Gyi, 32 (deceased), and his girlfriend Sandar, 17, together with one M-16, one M-22, one pistol, two M-16 magazines, one M-22 magazine, two magazines of SIG Sauer pistol, 25 rounds of 7.62 ammunition, 50 rounds of 5.56 ammunition, 20 rounds of 9mm ammunition.

According to the statement of the arrested suspects, related suspect Tin Tun Khaing, 41, a keeper of explosives used in terrorist bombings, who lived in Lahayat village in Thanlyin Township, together with 13 bags of potassium carbonate, 10 silicon cups, sulphuric acid, three boxes of the iron ball, 10 visses of silicon powder, one bucket of liquid acid.

According to their statements, Thant Zaw Aung (a) Soe Lay and Phyo Maung Maung (a) Phyo Gyi attended explosive training courses conducted in KNLA Brigade (6) area by Commander Yan Naing in July. Ye Min Phyo (a) Ko Phyo attended the explosive training near Shansu village in Kayah State in August. It was also learned that confiscated weapons and ammunition were ordered from KNLA Brigade (6) area by Phyo Maung Maung (a) Phyo Gyi to be used in their terrorist acts.

They revealed that they committed four killings of innocent civilians, two bombings. On 29 September, Phyo Maung Maung (a) Phyo Gyi killed an innocent civilian with a small firearm in Bogyoke village in Thanlyin Township. On 1 November, along with Pho Kalar, Arnoe, Hnote Khan Mhwe, who have been on the run, he fired at people living in Htanbingon ward in Thanlyin Township, slaying one man and seriously injuring one woman.

Phyo Maung Maung (a) Phyo Gyi, together with Myo Min Oo, Ye Zaw Naing, Kaung Lay, killed two innocent civilians who lived in Myohaung ward, Thanlyin Township on 18 and 30 November, and he killed one innocent civilian who lived in Bogyoke village in Thanlyin, together with Pho Kalar (on the run) on 9 December.

On 13 October, Thant Zaw Aung (a) Soe Lay threw bombs at a CCTV control box at the Parami junction in South Okkalapa Township, together with Ko Jade (a) Zeya and Hein Ko Oo. On 18 October, together with Ye Min Phyo (a) Ko Phyo, Ko Jade (a) Zeya and Hein Ko Oo (both on the run) he threw bombs at a CCTV control box at the corner of Kyuntaw Road and Hanthawady Road in Kamayut Township.

It is reported that the arrested suspects will be taken effective action under the law and the people are requested to work together for the peace and stability of the villages and townships by reporting the terrorists' movements to the nearest authorities to arrest the related suspects as soon as possible, according to the Myanmar Police Force.—MNA

Two terrorists die in landmine explosion

TWO male terrorists were killed when an improvised explosive device (IED) was planted in Taze Township in Sagaing Region.

The incident took place at 8:30 am on 17 December in Taze Township, Sagaing Region.

According to the report, an explosion took place near the sign at the entrance of Taze Township on the exit of Kabo Village, Taze-Kabo Road.

A 23-year-old man (under investigation) was found to have blisters on his face at the scene. A 21-year-old man (under investigation) suffered a fractured right elbow. He was found dead with a puncture wound under his left ear.

Both were severely injured and died when an improvised explosive device (IED) was planted in the area.

Two deaths have been registered in connexion with the incident, and security forces are clearing mines in the area. — MNA

4 males, 5 females, 1 novice die in PDF terrorist attacks in Taze Township

THE terrorists under the name of PDF committed shooting and arson attacks on four houses in Taze Township of the Sagaing Region. It reported that innocent five males and five females died.

On 17 December, the armed terrorist groups (still investigating) entered Thakayta Village of Taze Township of Sagaing Region and shot the villagers and also committed arson attacks. The attacks destroyed one two-storey house built of brick, one Forland truck 7N/8644, one gold chain, K500,000 and about 300 baskets of paddy owned by U Kyaw Shwin, another one two-storey house built of corrugated iron sheet/bamboo matting of Ko Moe Min and one two-story house built of corrugated iron/sheet/bamboo matting of Daw Khin Htay.

Terrorists' arson and shooting attacks leave 10 dead, including one novice, in Taze Township.

Daw Khin Htay and her five family members-daughter, son-in-law and three grandchildren (one of them is a novice), Ko Moe Win and his family members- mother, wife and son died with gunshot wounds and bruises, but Ko Moe Min and U Kyaw Shwin escaped from the attack.

The terrorists brutally killed the innocent villagers including school-age children and novice and committed arson attacks to frighten the people. Therefore, the security forces cooperate with the regional military commands to arrest these insurgents. —MNA

Buthidaung celebrates Khami new year (Sunni) festival

The Khami New Year Festival in action in Buthidaung. **PHOTO: HLA KYAW**

THE traditional Khami New Year (Sunni) festival was celebrated in Ganari village, Buthidaung, Maungtaw Township, Rakhine State yesterday morning.

The festival was opened by playing the traditional Khami drums nine times and recitation of traditional poetry. Sayadaw Ashin Ardissa from the Ganari Youth Development Charity School explained the reason for the festival.

Chairman of the Khami Ethnic Literature and Culture Committee U Tun Sein Aung addressed the ceremony, and the Rakhine traditional dance troupe, Myo traditional dance troupe and Dainet (a) Sakkama traditional dance troupe performed. Afterwards, Khami traditional military dance, Khami traditional bamboo dance were performed and the performers received certificates of honour. At the festival, ethnic dance groups performed the "Let's United" song.

The Khami new year (Sunni) festival has been celebrated since from long time ago and is a festival dedicated to the sun and the moon, with people dancing at the sunrise and when the moon comes out. The festival was held at the Ganari Youth Development Charity School from 2001 to 2006 and was held in Laungshay Chaung village in MraukU township in one year. It wasn't celebrated due to various reasons afterwards until 2018 in Buthidaung Township. Khami ethnic group is one of the Rakhine ethnic nationalities and about 100,000 Khami live in Sittway, Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun, MraukU, Pauktaw, Buthidaung, An and Maungtaw townships. — Hla Kyaw (IPRD)/GNLM

148 people receive COVID vaccines at Paingkyong Station Hospital

HEALTH officials gave the first dose of Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccines to local people at Paingkyong Station Hospital, Paingkyong Township, Pa-An District, Kayin State yesterday.

To prevent and control the spread of the COVID-19 virus, officials gave the vaccines to local people over 18-year-old including monks, health workers, civil servants and vendors who have yet to be vaccinated for a variety of reasons.

On 17 December, the first batch of 500 people was scheduled to be vaccinated, and 148 people came and received the vaccines. Officials and departmental staff are working together to vaccinate the people in Paikyong and the remaining batches of vaccines will be given on 20 December.

Officials will conduct healthcare services to the local people during the vaccination programme, according to the officials. — Paingkyong (IPRD)/GNLM

Inoculation drive in Kayin State.

19 DECEMBER 2021
THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Conserve mangrove, coconut plants for the prevention of natural disasters

MANGROVE forests are dubbed as the strong walls against the erosion of water from rivers and creeks. Despite weakness in each plant, various kinds of salt-tolerant mangrove plants can thrive in the tidal areas to prevent landslides with their complicated roots.

Strong winds and storms can break small and large trees into pieces but shrubs and bushes, including mangrove plants. In 2008, the severe cyclonic storm Nargis swept all small and large trees in the Ayeyawady Region and some parts of the Yangon Region, bringing terrible tidal waves. In fact, the majority of people died in the tidal waves more than those in the storm.

> Hence, the local people are responsible for safeguarding their areas by growing mangrove plants and coconut trees to thrive in their regions to be able to bravely overcome challenges of natural disasters such as flooding, storms, landslides and bank erosions for their survival.

It is necessary to take lessons from past events. In looking back at the past events, local people from the Ayeyawady Region extracted poles of mangrove plants to produce charcoal, firewood and household use. But they neglected to regrow mangrove plants and other shade trees to conserve the environment. Consequently, they could not prevent the attacks of tidal waves when severe cyclonic storms fell there.

As such, local people not only in the Ayeyawady Region but in other regions and states close to the sea need to grow mangrove plants as the best way to prevent natural disasters. It is because these mangrove forests are the best and strongest banks along the rivers, creeks and beaches.

That is why, the government decided to plan the cultivation of mangrove plantations, especially in the Rakhine State, Ayeyawady and Yangon Regions including deltaic areas and conserve the existing mangrove plantations. In this regard, local authorities need to seek public participation in environmental conservation tasks.

At present, arrangements are being made to grow mangrove plants and coconut trees along the coastal lines in the Ayeyawady, Yangon and Taninthayi regions as well as the Rakhine and Mon states as part of building the natural barriers against the disasters.

Such a plan will be a chance for local people not only to enjoy the use of products from the mangrove plantations and coconut trees but to take environmental conservation measures against possible natural disasters.

Hence, the local people are responsible for safeguarding their areas by growing mangrove plants and coconut trees to thrive in their regions to be able to bravely overcome challenges of natural disasters such as flooding, storms, landslides and bank erosions for their survival.

■ ■ ■

Two years into pandemic, WHO emergencies chief eyes 'brighter future'

AFTER two years at the forefront of WHO's pandemic battle, emergencies chief Michael Ryan remains optimistic humanity will change course and take the steps needed to tame the virus.

As concern grows about the fast-spreading coronavirus variant Omicron and surging infection rates, the World Health Organization's second-in-command acknowledged the crisis could plausibly evolve in disastrous directions.

We could face the constant emergence of new and more dangerous variants and waves of infection that repeatedly collapse our health systems.

"That's a plausible future if we don't adequately deal with the virus," Ryan told AFP in an interview.

But, he said, "I don't see that right now. I see a brighter future."

The 56-year-old epidemiologist and former trauma surgeon insisted that "if we knuckle down now in terms of disease control, ... (and) getting vaccine coverage up," we can move past the pandemic phase.

While the SARS CoV-2 virus that causes Covid is unlikely to go away, he said it could become just another endemic respiratory virus, like the flu.

That upbeat outlook may seem to fly in the face of the dire situation on the ground.

Covid has officially killed nearly 5.5 million people worldwide, with the true figure likely several times higher.

And with Omicron spreading at an unprecedented rate, we will see fresh spikes, overburdened health systems and more deaths unless countries act swiftly to rein in transmission, WHO says.

'Pathological optimist'

But Ryan said the new variant did not necessarily alter his outlook for the pandemic trajectory.

"We were in trouble long before Omicron," he said, pointing to already surging cases of the still dominant Delta variant before the new strain surfaced.

Any government blaming the new variant for surging cases "is really using Omicron as a crutch".

Ryan acknowledged the situation could appear bleak due amid glaring inequity in vaccine access, politicization of the pandemic and widespread misinformation.

But he said he believed the world could change course, pointing to the "incredible resilience" displayed in communities, the selfless service of health workers and unprecedented scientific cooperation since the start of the pandemic.

Scientists are worried about the ability of antibody treatments to tackle the Omicron coronavirus variant.
PHOTO: KENZO TRIBOUILLARD/AFP

"I am filled with optimism for what we can collectively achieve."

The fast-talking Irishman is often described as a "pathological optimist" -- a useful quality since he took the helm of WHO's Emergencies Programme in 2019, shortly before the pandemic hit.

'Abuse'

It has not been easy, especially as the WHO was caught in the middle as countries exchanged blame over the crisis.

"It's been tough at times," acknowledged Ryan, who besides WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has been perhaps the most recognizable face of the UN health agency's pandemic response.

"We've taken some hits, taken a lot of abuse," he said. "But that goes with the territory."

Ryan, who Tedros often affectionately refers to as "my general", said the hardest thing for WHO experts working round the clock to review the latest pandemic data had been the impact on their families.

He pointed out that he had only seen his three children, who live in Ireland, four times in two year.

"That is tough," he said, stressing though that his worries were nothing compared to those facing health workers on the ground.

"There is nothing more exhausting, more stressful, than being in the frontline dealing with an epidemic," said Ryan, who himself has spent much of the past quarter-century responding to outbreaks of diseases like Ebola, cholera and polio in the field.

'Bonus'

He knows a thing or two about stress. In 1990, he travelled to Iraq with his future wife to help train doctors.

But days into the trip, Iraq invaded Kuwait, and they were taken forced to work under captivity. Ryan has described performing one surgery with a gun pointed at his head.

"I have been a hostage in Iraq, and ... many times in my life I thought my life was over," he said.

"Now for me a lot of the time it's like a bonus."

Ryan said his years in the field had been valuable in preparing him for his current job, by helping cultivate an "ability to cope with the stress of an emergency."

"It's very easy to be pleasant and functional when everything is going well," he said. "It is very difficult to remain engaged and respectful when everything is going wrong." One thing his field experience did not prepare him for was the politics at the echelons of global health.

"I am not a natural politician," he said, acknowledging that his candid style had at time ruffled some feathers.

But "I'm learning," he said. "I may actually be a better diplomat after these last few years."— AFP

US experts recommend mRNA Covid vaccines over J&J shot

A US government-appointed panel of medical experts on Thursday unanimously recommended mRNA Covid vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna over Johnson & Johnson's shot, in light of its weaker protection and greater risks.

The panel voted 15-0 in favour of the new guidance, which applies to everyone over 18 years of age.

Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) director Rochelle Walensky signed off on the measure Thursday evening. "Today's updated recommendation emphasizes CDC's commitment to provide real-time scientific information to the American public," she said in a statement, urging Americans to get vaccinated and boosted against the coronavirus.

The recommendation officially steers the public away from J&J's drug, which was initially praised because it could be stored at fridge temperature and offered good efficacy against earlier strains of the coronavirus after just one shot.

A rare form of clotting

But evidence later emerged linking it to a rare form of clotting, particularly among women of child-bearing age, causing authorities to briefly halt and then resume its use in April. It has remained a distant third choice of vaccine for Americans ever since.

This week, the Food and Drug Administration found the rate of this effect was higher than previously thought, and not confined to females. Preliminary lab testing data has also suggested the jab offers very little protection against the new Omicron variant — at least against infection. "I would not recommend a Janssen vaccine to my family members," said Beth Bell, a clinical professor at the University of Washington, referring to the vaccine by the name of the J&J subsidiary that developed it. "On the other hand, I think we do have to recognize that different people make different choices and if they are appropriately informed, I don't think we should remove that option," she added, explaining her vote.

Nine deaths

The CDC called the vote in light of concerning new safety data.

At least nine people have died from clotting with low platelets or Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS) as of 9 December, with around 16 million doses of the vaccine administered, according to new data released by the CDC.

There were 54 cases as of 31 August, and 36 required admission to intensive care. Some of those who did not die had long-term effects such as paralysis.

The greatest risks were seen in women aged 30-49, where the rate of TTS was around one in 100,000.

But the risk is not confined to this demographic, with two of the nine deaths occurring among men. The CDC said the fatality count may also be an underestimate. Overall, approximately one out of seven cases of TTS have been fatal. Similar cases have been linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is authorized outside the United States and is based on the same viral vector technology.—AFP

Dr. Anike Baptiste receives a dose of J&J from nurse Mokgadi Malebye at a Pretoria hospital last February. **PHOTO: PHILL MAGAKOE/AFP**

Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Saturday 18 December 2021)

BAY INFERENCE: According to the observations at (18:30) hrs MST today, the low pressure area over the Southeast Bay of Bengal and adjoining Equatorial Indian Ocean still persists. Weather is partly cloudy to cloudy over the South Andaman Sea and South Bay of Bengal and a few cloud over the North Andaman Sea and elsewhere over the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL AFTERNOON OF THE 19 December 2021: Light rain are likely to be isolated in Taninthayi Region. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Sagaing, and Mandalay regions and Kachin, (Southern and Eastern) Shan, Kayah, Kayin and 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: Likelihood of slight decrease of night temperatures in Kachin, Eastern Shan and Kayah states.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 19 December 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 19 December 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 19 December 2021: Generally fair weather.

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Chinese researchers develop light-splitting solar greenhouse roof

CHINESE researchers have developed a new type of light-splitting greenhouse roof that can allow visible light to enter while converting near-infrared light into electricity.

A group of researchers from the Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development in Agriculture, affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, developed this new greenhouse covering structure based on the solar spectral splitting utilization, according to China Science Daily.

Visible light, with a wavelength from 400 nanometres (nm) to 780 nm, is critical for driving the photosynthesis process of greenhouse plants, but near-infrared light, with a wavelength from 780 nm to 2,500 nm, has little contributions to plant growth and may cause greenhouse overheating.

A villager picks vegetables at a photovoltaic power station in Weining Yi, Hui and Miao Autonomous County, Bijie, southwest China's Guizhou Province, 24 Aug 2021. **PHOTO: XINHUA/TAO LIANG**

Test conducted by the research group showed that the new solar roof can transmit visible light with an all-day transmissivity of 40 per cent, and convert near-infrared light into electricity at the same time, ensuring normal growth of greenhouse plants with less consumption of cooling energy. The electricity generated by the roof, with a full-day photovoltaic efficiency of 6.88 per cent, can also power the greenhouse's daily operation.

The research finding was published in the journal Energy Conversion and Management.—Xinhua ■

A resident inspects the damage in the area of Daratu, on the outskirts of Arbil, the capital of the northern Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region, on 17 December 2021, after flash floods caused by torrential rains left eight people dead. **PHOTO: AFP**

Foreigners among 11 killed in Iraqi Kurdistan floods

ELEVEN people including two foreigners died Friday in flash floods which swept through northern Iraq after torrential rains in Arbil, capital of the autonomous Kurdistan region, an official said.

In a country dealing with severe drought, many were caught by surprise as powerful storm waters started surging into their homes before dawn.

"The toll is now 11 after the civil defence discovered the bodies of three people who were missing, carried away by the waters. Among them are a Filipino national and a Turk," Nabaz Abdelhamid, a local administration official, told AFP.

Provincial governor Omid Khoshnaw had earlier given a death toll of eight, including women and children. He also reported "significant" damage, especially in a working-class district south-east of Arbil city.

Four members of the civil defence team who came to help residents were injured when their car was washed away, he added.

"Of the eight people who died, one died struck by lightning, while the others drowned in their homes," civil defence spokesperson Sarkawt Karach had said.

Many people have been forced to leave their houses, he added.—AFP ■

Melting Arctic ice draws killer whales further north

IN the pale winter darkness of northern Norway, a huge flock of seagulls circles above an Arctic fjord, signifying the presence of a group of unusual predators in the water below.

With Arctic sea ice shrinking at record levels due to global warming, killer whales are expanding their hunting grounds further north and spending more time in polar waters, US scientists say.

But the giant mammals, also known as orcas and which are at the top of the food chain, risk creating an "ecological imbalance" in the Arctic by preying on endangered species, warned a University of Washington study this month.

When AFP visited the vast Skjervoy fjord in the Arctic Ocean, 70 to 80 killer whales could be seen gathering in family clans of about 10, including calves under a year old.

Increasingly frequent and northerly sightings suggest that the iconic black and white member of the dolphin family, whose males can grow up to eight metres (26 feet) long and weigh six tonnes, is learning to adapt to the newly melted waters of the Arctic Ocean.—AFP ■

With Arctic sea ice shrinking at record levels due to global warming, killer whales are expanding their hunting grounds further north and spending more time in polar waters, US scientists say.
PHOTO: MARCEL MOCHET/ AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

European stores pull products linked to Brazil deforestation

SEVERAL European supermarket chains are dropping Brazilian beef products linked to destruction of the Amazon rainforest and tropical wetland, the US activist group Mighty Earth said Thursday.

Chains such as Carrefour Belgium have committed to pulling from their shelves corned beef, beef jerky and fresh prime cuts suspected to come from cattle raised in the Amazon and the Pantanal tropical wetlands.

The move came after a Mighty Earth investigation in partnership with Reporter Brasil, a Brazilian non-government organisation founded by journalists, highlighted links between Sao Paulo manufacturing plants of Brazilian meat-processing giants JBS, Marfrig and Minerva and deforestation. Activists have long criticized the environmental footprint of the global meat industry, blaming it for some two-thirds of global biodiversity loss.—AFP ■

Climate change, price hikes hit Dijon mustard

CLIMATE change and soaring prices are the seeds of a crisis for France's famous Dijon mustard makers, leaving their prospects looking far more tepid than their product.

The industry's woes are a prime example of the difficulties faced by the food industry as a whole.

Production of mustard grains in 2021-2022 is estimated to have fallen by 28 per cent in Canada, the world's biggest producer, according to a Canadian agriculture ministry report.

As a result, the average price is expected to rise to almost double that of 2020-2021, to "a record $1,700 (1,510 euros) per tonne", the ministry said.

"There was a disastrous drought in Western Canada" last summer, commodity markets analyst Ramzy Yelda told AFP.

"Those who want the high-end mustard will have to pay more," he warned.—AFP ■

Japan PM Kishida asks Pfizer to expedite vaccine supply

PRIME Minister Fumio Kishida on Friday asked Pfizer Inc. to bring forward Japan's contracted supply of coronavirus vaccine, a government official said, amid fears over the global spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant.

Kishida held phone talks with Albert Bourla, chief executive of the US pharmaceutical company, the official said. Japan is looking to move up the third vaccination shots by revising the planned eight-month interval between second jabs and boosters.

The country is planning to prioritize administering booster shots to the elderly and health care workers, with Kishida slated to announce the plan in its entirety later in the day. According to the government's announcement in November, it plans to supply 24 million doses of Pfizer vaccine and 17 million doses of US biotechnology firm Moderna Inc.'s vaccine to local governments by February.

A woman gets a COVID-19 vaccine on 21 June as company inoculations begin at Arima hot spring in Kobe. **PHOTO: POOL / KYODO**

On Thursday, Japan's health ministry gave fast-track approval for the Moderna vaccine to be used in booster shots.—Kyodo ■

Biden warns of 'winter of death' for unvaccinated as Omicron spreads

A COVID-19 test centre operates inside the Tom Bradley International Terminal at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). **PHOTO: AFP**

US President Joe Biden warned Thursday of a "winter of severe illness and death" for those unvaccinated against Covid-19, as the G7 called the Omicron variant the biggest threat to global public health.

The stark words came as Britain saw more than 88,000 Covid-19 infections, a second consecutive record daily number, prompting France to impose "drastic" new limits on travel to the UK. Scientists remain uncertain how dangerous the highly mutated Omicron variant is, but early data suggests it can be more resistant to vaccines and is more transmissible than the Delta variant.

The World Health Organization said earlier this week that the strain has been reported in 77 countries and has "probably" spread to most nations undetected at a higher rate than any previous variant of the virus.

Countries worldwide have begun advising against foreign travel while ramping up domestic restrictions to battle Omicron and bolstering vaccination efforts. The G7 on Thursday called the variant the "biggest current threat to global public health", saying its emergence meant it was "more important than ever" for countries to closely cooperate and share data. In a meeting hosted by group chair Britain, the countries' health ministers emphasized the "increasing importance of booster campaigns and regular testing", according to a statement.

Biden's warning about the winter came as he urged Americans who have already had two shots to get boosters, and vaccine sceptics to step up and get jabbed. "The only real protection is to get your shot," he said, with the White House saying the administration did not intend to take specific restrictive measures but would instead focus on vaccination.—AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

HK scholars find Omicron infects faster than Delta: reports

Researchers at a Hong Kong university have found that the Omicron variant of the novel coronavirus infects and multiplies much faster than the Delta strain but causes less severe infections in the lungs, local media reported on Thursday.

The researchers at the University of Hong Kong said the Omicron variant multiplies 70 times faster than the Delta strain in the human bronchi, which could account for the quick transmission rate as compared with Delta and other coronavirus strains, according to the reports by Ming Pao Daily and other local media.—Kyodo ■

Egypt approves COVID-19 booster shots

EGYPT HAS approved on Thursday the administration of a third COVID-19 vaccine booster shot for those who received their second shot at least six months ago, according to a statement by the country's government.

"Messages will be sent to the targeted people from the Health Ministry's database to determine the time and location of vaccination," acting Health Minister Khaled Abdel-Ghaffar said, adding all types of vaccines are available. He added 23 million booster doses will be provided until June 2022, and nearly 52 million shots have been secured across the country, with an average of 551,000 shots every day.—ANI ■

S Korea reports 7,435 new Covid-19 cases

SOUTH Korea has reported 7,435 new cases of Covid-19 in the past 24 hours, raising the total number of infections to 551,551. The daily caseload was down from 7,622 in the previous day, but it hovered above 7,000 for three days in a row.

The recent resurgence was attributable to small cluster infections in the Seoul metropolitan area. Of the new cases, 2,837 were Seoul residents. The number of newly infected people living in Gyeonggi province and the western port city of Incheon was 2,147 and 565.

The virus spread also raged in the non-metropolitan region. The number of new infections in the non-capital areas was 1,851, or 25.0 per cent of the total local transmission.

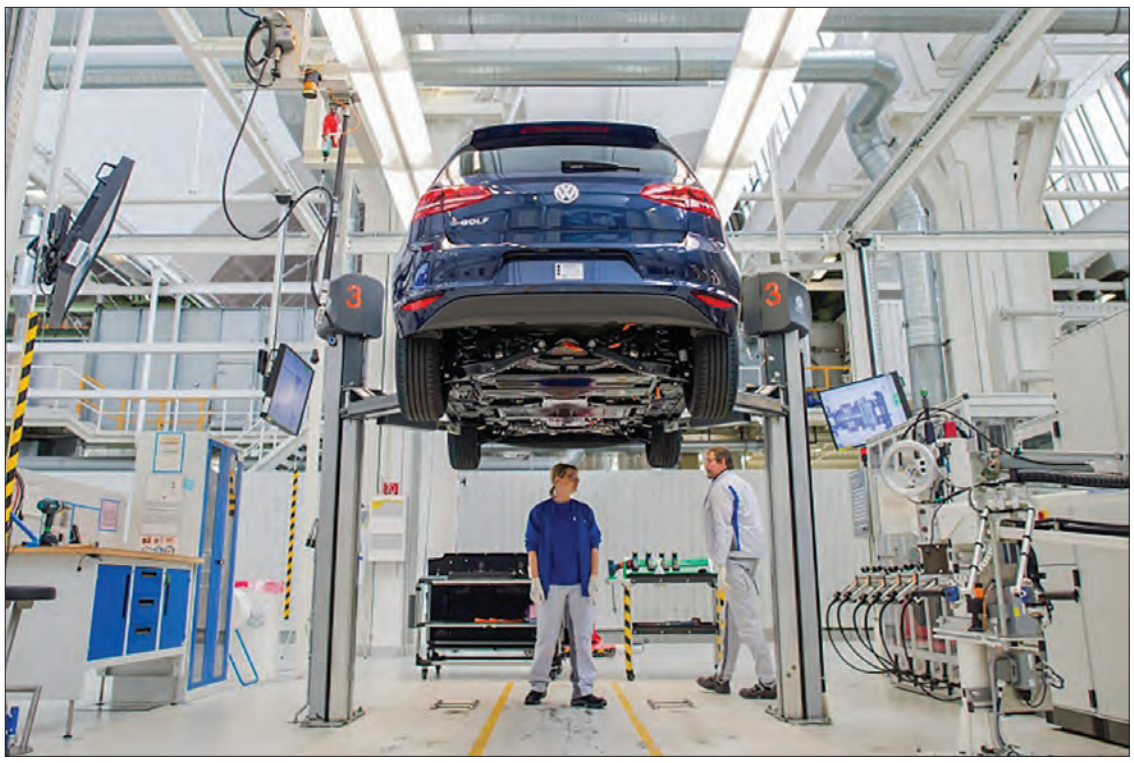
The number of the Omicron variant infections was 151, including 39 imported cases and 112 domestic transmissions, up 3 from the prior day.

Thirty-five cases were imported from overseas, lifting the combined figure to 16,236. The number of infected people who were in a serious condition stood at 971, down 18 from the previous day. Seventy-three more deaths were confirmed, leaving the death toll at 4,591.

The total fatality rate was 0.83 per cent. The country has administered Covid-19 vaccines to 43,300,593 people, or 84.3 per cent of the total population, and the number of fully inoculated people was 41,939,065, or 81.7 per cent of the population. The number of those who received booster shots was 9,781,164, or 19.0 per cent of the population.—Xinhua ■

South Korea's daily coronavirus tallies and the number of serious cases continue to make new records amid a persistent spike in breakthrough infections. A commercial area in Seoul is deserted on 16 Dec 2021, with the central government releasing tougher anti-virus steps amid resurging COVID-19 cases. **PHOTO: AFP**

Europe's car industry faces worse year than 2020



Germany faces renewed curbs aimed at breaking its fourth wave of COVID infections, while supply bottlenecks for microchips especially in the car industry hamstrung manufacturing. **PHOTO: JULIAN STRATENSCHULT/ AFP**

EUROPE'S automobile industry is facing a worse year than the Covid-battered 2020 with sales falling a fifth straight month amid a global shortage of electronic chips used in new models.

European sales fell back 20.5 per cent year-on-year to 713,346 units, the worst slump since 1993, the European automobile manufacturers association (ACEA) said on Friday.

Although economic activity bounced back relatively strongly in the first 11 months of the year compared with last year, car sales on the continent stagnated, falling 0.04 per cent.

"The impact of the microchip shortage on vehicle output dragged the EU's year-to-date sales performance into negative territory despite 2020's record low base for comparison," the ACEA said in a statement.

Several major markets also saw double-digit falls in November sales — German registrations dived 31.7 per cent, Italian and Polish sales were off by a quarter and Spain and Belgium were down 12.3 and 17.1 per cent while France limited the fall to 3.2 per cent.

Bulgaria, Ireland and Slovenia saw small gains, by contrast.

Taken January-November, three of the four largest EU markets posted gains, even so on 2020, Italy rising 8.6 per cent, Spain 3.8 per cent and France 2.5 percent. But Germany saw a fall of 8.1 per cent compared with 2020. European market leader Volkswagen saw January-November sales drop back 1.6 percent to 2.2 million with Skoda suffering in particular although strong showings from Seat and Porsche compensated.— AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

US senators call for mulling digital trade agreement through APEC

THE U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on Friday called for pursuing through a forum of Pacific Rim economies the possibility of a digital trade agreement, amid concerns that the United States may be falling behind China in taking the lead in writing key trade rules in the region.

"We write to urge you to utilize and work with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation...to encourage strong outcomes" in the next leaders' meeting, Democrat Robert Menendez, chairman of the committee, and Republican James Risch, the ranking member of the committee, said in a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Among the priorities the administration of President Joe Biden should work on with other APEC peers, which include countries such as Japan and Australia, are promoting a "common set of technology standards, including the possibility of a digital trade agreement," the two said.

The letter also called for improving efficiency in semiconductor supply chains and cybersecurity as well as advancing cooperation that reduces barriers to cross-border investment in emerging markets.—Kyodo ■

Canada taps maple syrup reserves to meet soaring demand

PANCAKE lovers, fear not. Strong demand for maple syrup after a poor Canadian harvest has created supply-side woes, but Quebec province is tapping its strategic reserves to keep the world awash in the sweet, sticky stuff.

Experts are warning the shortages could be further compounded by climate change, which is already being blamed for last spring's shorter and warmer sugaring season.

To avoid shortages, the Quebec Maple Syrup Producers said it has released more than half of its stockpile of syrup.

"It's normal, that's what we want: The reserves must be the buffer between temperature, demand and production," explained the organization's president Serge Beaulieu.

An employee helps identify and sort empty barrels at the Quebec Maple Syrup Producers storage facility in Laurierville, on 9 December 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

Quebec makes almost three-quarters of the world's supply, and the organization -- sometimes called the OPEC of maple syrup -- represents more than 11,000 producers.—AFP ■

US appeals court reinstates vaccine mandate for large companies

Restaurant workers protest poor working conditions and low wages at McDonald's, Chipotle, and more amid coronavirus pandemic. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

A US federal appeals court Friday reinstated a Biden administration mandate that large companies require Covid-19 vaccines for their employees, after the move was halted in court in November.

President Joe Biden had set a 4 January deadline for companies with more than 100 employees to ensure full vaccination of their workers against Covid-19 -- a rule the administration said would affect more than two-thirds of the country's workforce.

The Friday ruling by the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals removes an earlier stay, allowing the vaccine order to move ahead, although the matter is likely to head to the Supreme Court.

Judge Jane Stranch did not rule on the ultimate merit of the order, but ruled that it had the potential to be found valid to protect American workers from the coronavirus.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc across America, leading to the loss of over 800,000 lives, shutting down workplaces and jobs across the country, and threatening our economy," she said. Therefore the earlier injunction was not lawful, Stranch said. The ruling contradicts a decision last month from the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, which criticized the mandate as "staggeringly overbroad."—AFP ■

Germany's Bundesbank raises GDP growth forecast for 2022

THE German economy will gain growth momentum over the next two years and gross domestic product (GDP) will increase by 4.2 per cent in 2022 and by 3.2 per cent in 2023, the country's central bank (Bundesbank) said in its projections published on Friday.

Due to the COVID-19-related restrictions and supply bottlenecks, the Bundesbank expects stalled growth for the last quarter of 2021 and the first quarter of 2022.

Once the pandemic-related restrictions are lifted, consumer spending and exports will both increase, the bank said.

Commenting on the projections, Bundesbank President Jens Weidmann warned of the risks of rising inflation. "Monetary policy makers should not ignore these risks. We need to be vigilant," he said. The central bank expects the inflation rate in Germany to reach 3.2 per cent in 2021 and rise further to 3.6 per cent in 2022 before dropping to 2.2 per cent in 2023 and 2024.

The European Central Bank (ECB) also said on Thursday that economic growth in the eurozone is expected to remain strong over the next three years. In its latest staff projections, the ECB expected the eurozone's real GDP to grow by 5.1 per cent in 2021, 4.2 per cent in 2022 and 2.9 per cent in 2023.—Xinhua ■

People sit outside in a restaurant at the Gendarmenmarkt in front of the New Church (Deutscher Dom) and the Konzerthaus concert hall in Berlin, Germany, 22 July 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

China to create 1 mln innovative SMEs by 2025

A visitor tries a VR spinning based on 5G technology at the digital achievements exhibition during the fourth Digital China Summit in Fuzhou, southeast China's Fujian Province, 25 April 2021. **PHOTO: XINHUA/WEI PEIQUAN**

CHINA aims to cultivate 1 million innovative small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by 2025, according to a government guideline on the development of SMEs during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025).

By then, the country will also incubate 100,000 SMEs that feature specialization, refinement, uniqueness and innovation, and 10,000 "little giant" firms, which refer to small enterprises in their early stage of development and focusing on high-end technologies, said the guideline jointly released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and 19 other ministries and government departments. Specifying the targets, the guideline said that research and development expenditure of small industrial firms above designated size will maintain an annual growth of above 10 per cent by 2025, and the number of patent applications will also increase by 10 per cent annually.

Related work during the 14th Five-Year Plan period will focus on mitigating difficulties faced by SMEs with financing, it said, underscoring efforts to support new business models, coordinate research and production, and increase the connectivity between large companies and SMEs in terms of innovation.—Xinhua ■

British hospitality businesses reel from Omicron surge

BRITAIN'S pandemic-weary hospitality businesses have taken a fresh hit from soaring coronavirus cases fuelled by the Omicron variant, as anxious customers curtail socializing and cancel bookings over the Christmas period.

Pubs, restaurants and bars -- already struggling after nearly two years of reduced revenues due to the pandemic -- now face lost income at typically the busiest and most valuable time of the year.

"Normally this is the biggest week of the year (and) it's completely crushed," Pascal Aussignac, chef and owner of five French restaurants in Britain, told AFP.

The UK government last week switched to its so-called "plan B" to deal with coronavirus, advising people to work from home if they can since Monday and mandating they wear masks in most indoor settings.

MPs also backed proposals Tuesday to introduce a Covid pass for people to access large-scale events.

It comes as cases double roughly every two days and health officials reported more than 93,000 new infections Friday, the third consecutive record daily tally.—AFP ■

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CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V MAERSK NORDDAL VOY.NO. (147S)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V MAERSK NORDDAL VOY.NO. (147S)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **19-12-2021** 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

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V PACIFIC GRACE VOY.NO. (2176S)

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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 SITC CONTAINER LINES CO., LTD

Russia urges West to release Afghan funds to stem migrants

THE Kremlin has urged Western leaders to unfreeze Afghanistan's assets to fund humanitarian relief and avert an exodus of migrants to Europe fuelled by the Taliban's takeover.

The international community does not recognize the hardline Islamist group, which gained control of Afghanistan in August after foreign troops hastily withdrew from a two-decade deployment.

More than half of Afghanistan's 38 million people are facing food shortages, according to the United Nations, with the winter forcing millions to choose between migration and starvation.

Zamir Kabulov, the Kremlin's envoy to Afghanistan, said that Russia had warned the West its hold on assets and transfers could see thousands of Afghan families "run to Europe this winter".

"The West is afraid of migration flows," he told the Russian news agency RIA Novosti.

"So let's unfreeze Afghan money. We must do everything we can so there isn't any need for hundreds of thousands of Afghan families to leave the country."

Washington seized nearly $9.5 billion in assets belonging to the Afghan central bank after the Taliban gained control of the country and the aid-dependent economy has effectively collapsed.

Russia since has voiced concerns over the proliferation of terror groups in the country, including the Islamic State group, and warned terror groups planned to infiltrate neighbouring ex-Soviet countries posing as refugees.—AFP ■

More than half of Afghanistan's 38 million people are facing food shortages, with the winter forcing millions to choose between migration and starvation. **PHOTO: AFP**

Israel hunts Palestinians for W.Bank settler killing

Israeli soldiers stand guard as settlers mourn Yehuda Dimentman, a fellow settler who was shot on 16 December 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

ISRAELI soldiers carried out a manhunt Friday in the occupied West Bank, a day after the army blamed Palestinians for shooting dead an Israeli settler and wounding two others.

The army, which said Palestinian "terrorists" carried out the attack, has deployed three extra battalions as well as special forces.

"We are in a physical, technological, intelligence hunt," Israeli army spokesman Brigadier General Ran Kochav told 103FM radio.

"We arrested last night a number of suspects... sooner or later we will find the perpetrators."

Thursday's shooting followed high tensions after Palestinian attacks on Israelis, and the killing of Palestinians by Israeli troops during clashes.

Army radio identified the victim as religious student Yehuda Dimentman, 25, a married father.

He studied at Homesh, an outpost that is illegal under Israeli law.—AFP ■

Political row in Brazil over dystopian film 'Executive Order'

IN the Brazil of the near future, the government has found what it calls the answer to righting the wrongs of slavery: send its black citizens to Africa.

That dystopian premise is the point of departure for the new film "Executive Order," which is generating controversy in the Brazil of the present over allegations it is being censored by far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's government.

The film, the directorial debut from acclaimed actor Lazaro Ramos ("Madame Sata"), has won praise at a series of international festivals, from Moscow to Memphis.

But it does not yet have a release date in Brazil, where there are mounting accusations against the National Cinema Agency (Ancine) of dragging its feet on green-lighting films deemed uncomfortable for the Bolsonaro administration.—AFP ■

Actor and director Lazaro Ramos and his wife, actress Tais Araujo, before the screening of their movie 'Executive Order' at the Rio de Janeiro International Film Festival on 15 December 2021. **PHOTO: AFP**

NEWS IN BRIEF

Male patient suspected of setting fire at Osaka mental clinic

POLICE suspect a 61-year-old male patient of starting a fire at a mental clinic in Osaka that killed 24 people, investigative sources said Saturday.

The police found the man's registration card for the clinic during a search of a place related to him, the sources said.

The man, who the sources say is in serious condition, is among 27 people taken to the hospital after the fire Friday raced through the clinic in a multiple tenant building in the western Japan city.

On Saturday, police and firefighters conducted a joint investigation into the site, located on the fourth floor of the building in Osaka's Kita Ward, to determine the cause of the fire.

The police are investigating the incident as a case of suspected murder and arson. They were also still trying to confirm the identities of the 24 victims -- 14 men and 10 women.—Kyodo ■

Belarusian border committee says Polish soldier seeking political asylum

BELARUS' State Border Committee on Friday said that a Polish soldier has requested political asylum in Belarus in protest against Warsaw's ill-treatment of asylum seekers. On Thursday, a serviceman of the Polish Armed Forces, Emil Ciecko, born 1996, was stopped by a Belarusian border guard unit at the Tushemlya frontier post of the Grodno border group. Ciecko told Belarusian soldiers that he was a soldier of the 11th Masurian Artillery Regiment of the 16th Pomeranian Mechanized Division, which was dispatched to protect the border.

"Disagreement with the policy of Poland regarding the migration crisis and the practice of inhumane treatment of refugees, the serviceman asked for political asylum in the Republic of Belarus", the border committee posted in its Telegram channel. —ANI ■

Top Pakistan Taliban commander escapes suspected drone strike

A top leader of the Pakistan Taliban escaped unhurt from a suspected drone strike on a safe house in eastern Afghanistan, the militant group said Friday.

The strike on Thursday evening came a week after a ceasefire between the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the government collapsed, with militants accusing Islamabad of killing its fighters.

The TTP -- a separate movement but sharing common roots with Afghanistan's new leaders -- plunged Pakistan into a period of horrific violence after forming in 2007.

Two TTP sources currently in Afghanistan told AFP that Maulvi Faqir Mohammad was the target of what they described as a drone strike on a compound in Chawgam village, in the eastern province of Kunar bordering Pakistan. —AFP ■

Russia unveils draft agreement with NATO on security

RUSSIA on Friday published a draft agreement it has proposed to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on measures to ensure the security of both sides.

Russia and NATO shall not strengthen their security individually, including in the framework of international organizations, military alliances or coalitions at the expense of the security of others, read the document published by the Russian Foreign Ministry.

They should settle disputes via peaceful means and refrain from the use or threat of force, and exercise restraint in military planning and conducting drills to avoid dangerous situations, it said.

Moscow suggested that Russia and NATO reaffirm that they do not consider each other as adversaries.

Russia and the NATO member states as of 27 May 1997 would be banned from deploying military forces and weaponry on the territory of any of the other countries in Europe in addition to the forces stationed on that territory as of 27 May 1997.

Both sides would be prohibited from deploying land-based intermediate- and short-range missiles in areas allowing them to reach the territory of each other.

Russia asked NATO to stop further enlargement, including the accession of Ukraine, and to cease any military activity in Ukraine and other countries in the Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and the Central Asia.—Xinhua ■

Western countries have sounded the alarm over a build-up of Russian troops around Ukraine. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

Australian parliamentary inquiry upholds AUKUS information agreement

People stage a protest rally in Sydney against an information-sharing agreement between Australia, the United States and Britain under their AUKUS security partnership on 11 Dec 2021. **PHOTO: KYODO**

AN Australian parliamentary inquiry concluded in a report released Friday that an information-sharing agreement between Australia, the United States and Britain under their AUKUS security partnership does not breach Canberra's nuclear nonproliferation commitments.

The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties explained that the agreement, the first embodiment of the security partnership under which Australia looks to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, is limited to information sharing, saying the committee has recommended that the government ratify it.

But transfers of equipment, materials or technology related to the security partnership must be the subject of different agreements than the Exchange of Naval Propulsion Information agreement, signed last month, that would require further scrutiny by the committee, it said.

The security partnership was announced by the three nations in September amid China's growing maritime power. However, China and some Southeast Asian countries have voiced concerns that it could spark a nuclear arms race in the Asia-Pacific region. Committee Chair and lawmaker Dave Sharma said in a statement that the information-sharing agreement is "essential for learning how to safely build, operate and support nuclear-powered submarines." "With our security environment growing more challenging in the decades ahead, a regionally superior submarine capability is critical to safeguard Australia's security," he added.—Kyodo ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Czech president appoints new gov't

Czech President Milos Zeman on Friday appointed a new government headed by Prime Minister-designate Petr Fiala of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS).

Zeman appointed the cabinet during a ceremony at the presidential manor in Lany, west of capital Prague, according to the president's office. Fiala, leader of the Together coalition, was appointed prime minister late last month. The coalition, formed by his ODS, the Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) and TOP 09, came first in the October parliamentary election, narrowly beating the ANO party led by outgoing Prime Minister Andrej Babis. The coalition later agreed to form a majority government with the alliance of Pirates party and Mayors and Independents (STAN), securing 108 seats in the 200-member lower house of the Czech parliament.—Xinhua ■

Merkel rival wins leadership of German conservatives

Friedrich Merz, a die-hard opponent of Angela Merkel within Germany's conservative CDU, was elected party chief on Friday, marking a new direction after its disastrous defeat in September's election.

The veteran right-winger, 66, won 62.1 per cent of the vote in a ballot of around 250,000 CDU members, decisively beating more moderate rivals Norbert Roettgen on 25.8 per cent and Helge Braun on 12.1 per cent. He will replace Merkel ally Armin Laschet, who led the CDU-CSU bloc to its worst-ever result in the September general election with just 24.1 per cent of the vote as Merkel prepared to retire after 16 years in power.—AFP ■

Man gets 5 years in prison for Capitol assault

A Donald Trump supporter was sentenced to five years in prison for assaulting police officers during the attack on the US Capitol, the harshest punishment yet handed down in the investigation into the 6 January violence.

Robert Scott Palmer, 54, was seen in videos and photos wearing an American flag jacket decorated with pro-Trump patches and a hat reading "Florida for Trump" as he threw boards, a fire extinguisher and other objects at police outside the Capitol.

He had tried to enter the Capitol but was ultimately pushed back by pepper spray deployed by security officials.

After that he continued to throw things at officers, until he was hit by a rubber bullet.

Federal judge Tanya Chutkan rejected Palmer's arguments for leniency of a troubled childhood and a handwritten apology that said that he and others had been duped into attacking the Congress by the former president, whom he called "tyrannical" and "desperate to hold on to power".

"I realize that we meaning Trump supporters had been lied to," he wrote. Prosecutors pointed out that even after his 4 October guilty plea, Palmer continued to defend his actions, labelling police the aggressors on a fundraising website page he set up.

"Palmer purposefully joined a large group of rioters with the specific intent of interfering with the electoral process," the prosecutors told the court in a sentencing memo.—AFP ■

Trump supporters protest outside the US Capitol Building in Washington 6 January 2021. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

Myanmar suffer 2-3 defeat to Philippines in Suzuki Cup match

PHOTO: SUZUKI CUP

MYANMAR national football team faced a 2-3 loss to the Philippines in the last group match of the Suzuki Cup tourney as two come-back goals of Htet Phyo Wai could not help team Myanmar to equalize the result at Bishan Stadium in Singapore yesterday night.

Myanmar head coach Antoine Hey used his favourite line-up including keeper Myo Min Latt, Hein Phyo Win, Suan Lam Mang, David Htan, Captain Maung Maung Lwin, Hlaing Bo Bo and Than Paing.

Bienvenido Maranon of the Philippines scored a hat-trick even in the first half and team Myanmar launched a superb attack during the second half.

Maranon of the Philippines opened the scoring with a strike inside the box in the 16th minute and padded the lead with a volley on a cross by his teammate Iain Ramsay. The Filipino striker added another two goals before halftime, and that action raised Filipino players to score a hat-trick in the AFF Suzuki Cup history. The Filipinos still survived some anxious moments after conceding two goals from substitute Htet Phyo Wai in the 74th and 86th, but the late equalizers could not help to have a draw or win result for team Myanmar. — GNLM ■

Beijing ready to hold "simple, safe, splendid" Winter Olympics: official

BEIJING has made enormous efforts to ensure a "simple, safe and splendid" Winter Olympics, an official told Beijing Daily in a recent interview. The Beijing Organizing Committee for the 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (BOCOG) carries out multiple measures, including streamlining ceremonies, making full use of the 2008 Olympics venues for the Winter Games, and downsizing the venue operation teams, to reduce the cost of the upcoming Winter Olympics, said Guo Huaigang, head of BOCOG general administration department. "In this way, we hope to hold a 'simple' Winter Olympics," Guo added. COVID-19 prevention is the top priority in making the Winter Olympics "safe," Guo said, noting that the BOCOG has issued an "epidemic prevention booklet" and will take differentiated policies to ensure epidemic prevention in different venues.— Xinhua ■

From the earliest stages of preparations for the Games, Beijing 2022 has set a new benchmark for the Olympic movement. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

Denmark's Eriksen leaves Inter Milan 'by mutual consent'

CHRISTIAN Eriksen has terminated his contract with Inter Milan by mutual consent six months after suffering a heart incident playing for Denmark at the European Championships.

The 29-year-old has been fitted with a pacemaker. That means he is not allowed to play in Italian football, but other championships do not have the same rules.

"Internazionale Milano can confirm that an agreement has been reached to terminate Christian Eriksen's contract by mutual consent," the Italian club said.

"Although Inter and Christian are now parting ways, the bond shall never be broken. The good times, the goals, the victories, those Scudetto celebrations with fans outside San Siro — all this will remain forever in Nerazzurri history."—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.

Rafael Nadal returns with epic five-year first against Andy Murray in Aus Open warning

RAFAEL Nadal deemed his unofficial return to competition in Abu Dhabi as a "positive start" after he fell to Andy Murray in a high-quality exhibition match on Friday.

In a battle of two former world number ones, the Scot won 6-3, 7-5 in the semi-final of the Mubadala World Tennis Championship.

Nadal, who had played just two matches in six months after a foot injury that ruled him out of Wimbledon and the US Open, was back in action for the first time since August.

"I think I did a lot of things well and other things, of course after a long period of time, I need to recover again, some things that when you're under competition come automatically," Nadal said after facing Murray for the first time since 2016.

"Now I have to think more, or you don't have this extra time to make the right decisions."—AFP ■

Nadal said he surprised even himself with the quality of his play. **PHOTO: AFP**