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.

Magway region produces about 200 tonnes of honey annually

ABOUT 200 tonnes of honey is produced annually by private beekeeping businesses in Magway Region, according to the Beekeeping Development Division of the Magway Region Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department.

There are reportedly more than 70 private beekeepers in Magway Region and more than 12,000 beehives. Most of the beekeeping is conducted in Salin, Pwintbyu, Magway, Yenangyaung, Chauk, Natmauk, and Minbu townships.

"Our department provides beekeepers with beekeeping and maintenance services, bee diseases prevention and treatment, and honey production with technical assistance training," said staff officer of the Magway Region Beekeeping Development Division U Kyaw Htay.

The Beekeeping Development Division of the Magway Region Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department aims to spread beekeeping skills to the people, increase more employment opportunities for the rural people who grow crops, and develop socio-economic life. **PHOTO: NAY THIT**

The Division aims to spread beekeeping skills to the people, increase more employment opportunities for the rural people who grow crops, and develop socio-economic life.

"Our beekeeping business produces over 10 tonnes of honey annually. This business is economically viable," said beekeeper U Aung Min.

"We now sell farmed honey as a raw material. We hope to be able to sell it as a value-added product for more business convenience. We are working for this and we need the government help," he added.— Aung Min Han (MNA)/GNLM

Public Notice

1. The government seizes/uncovers illegal arms and ammunition, mines, communication equipment and other related materials in addition to terrorist attacks of NUG and CRPH, which were declared as terrorist groups in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, and their subordinates PDF groups with homemade guns, gunpowder, mines and accessories, as well as arms and ammunition, mines, communication equipment and other materials imported via border areas by some ethnic armed organizations aiming to make political and military profits on a daily basis, and it also exposes the cases of the terrorists who possess firearms in various ways.
2. Moreover, some terrorists take advantage of the honesty of the people and they make them keep their illegal arms and ammunition, mines, communication devices and other related materials, including restricted materials using different ways and forms.
3. Therefore, in order to prevent unnecessary legal action against those who are not related to the terrorists, all the citizens should hand over the illegal arms and ammunition, mines, communication equipment and other related materials, including drugs banned by the government according to the law no later than 31 December 2021 to the respective wards/village administration offices/security forces if they keep these things in their houses, apartments and other places for various reasons and ways, and if they are found after the deadline, action will be taken against them under the existing laws.

Information Team
State Administration Council

Four national objectives of 74th Anniversary of Independence Day 2022

1. All ethnic nationals to safeguard non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national unity, and perpetuation of sovereignty;
2. To ensure the emergence of a good and clean government and administrative system by implementing a genuine disciplined democracy;
3. All ethnic nationals to amicably and unitedly cooperate in the country development based on the genuine Union spirit;
4. To strive for restoring perpetual peace the entire people aspire.

176 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 25 December, total figure rises to 529,503

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 529,503 after 176 new cases were reported on 25 December 2021 according to the Ministry of Health. Among these confirmed cases, 507,035 have been discharged from hospitals. Death toll reached 19,251 after 3 died.—MNA

Bagan-NyaungU ancient cultural zone flooded with visitors during Christmas holidays

DURING the Christmas holidays in December, the famous pagodas in Bagan-NyaungU ancient cultural zone in Mandalay Region are crowded with people, said U Htin Lin Oo, secretary of Lawkananda pagoda board of trustees.

The people visit Swetaw Thonsu, Tantkyitaung in Pakokku Township, Maha Nghatpyittaung pagoda, Hteelominlo pagoda, Ananda, Maha Bawdi, Buu, Kantawpalin, Khayminga, Thagya Pone, Shwe Late Tuu pagoda, Thabinyu pagoda, Nga Kywal Nar Gaung, Phahtoethar Myar, Shin Myar Shin, Manuha, Dhamma Yaza, Shin Izzagawna, Dhammayangyi and Sulamuni pagodas.

PHOTOS: KO HTEIN (KPD)

The Bagan-NyaungU ancient cultural zone can lure the interest of local and foreign visitors not even during the religious significant days. During the holidays of Thadingyut, Tazaungdaing, Christmas, December school holidays, the people pay visits to ancient pagodas, religious buildings, palace walls of Bagan and the visitors also want to visit there every time. As the pagodas are not far from one another and such locations can attract visitors, said Ma San San Lwin, who visits Bagan from Yangon. There can be seen visitors in holidays as they appreciate the Bagan-NyaungU ancient cultural zone, said Daw Sein Tint, a visitor from Natmauk township.

There are more than 3,000 visitors to Bagan-NyaungU during the Christmas holidays, said U Than Myint Oo, the secretary of the board of trustees from Shwezigon Pagoda.—Ko Htein (KPD)/GNLM

Need to Distinguish between Politics and Being Disciplined

You are required to distinguish politics from being disciplined. Nothing will work without having discipline. If someone wants to violate a discipline, they must be well convinced of the kind of punishment they will deservedly receive as a consequence. Try your best by being disciplined to have an order changed. Abide by disciplines before having it changed. This is the difference between politics and being disciplined.

(Excerpt from Bogyoke Aung San's speech given at the All Workers' Union meeting and dinner in Natmauk, on 25 March 1947)

MoC Union minister inspects Middle Paunglaung Bridge construction site in hydropower project area

The construction site of the Middle Paunglaung Bridge.

UNION Minister for Construction U Shwe Lay inspected the Middle Paunglaung Bridge construction project of the Middle Paunglaung Hydropower Project which was offered by the Department of Hydropower Implementation under the Ministry of Electricity and Energy yesterday.

The Union minister and party first arrived at the Middle Paunglaung hydropower project and inspected the water supply system and construction of the building to link with the main dam and hydropower system from the viewpoint.

Then, the officials of the department concerned reported on the location of Middle Paunglaung Bridge, data, allocated budget, completion and future work plans.

The Union Minister went to the bridge construction site and inspected the construction of A2, P3, P1 and P2 of the bridge and provided masks, fruits and other foodstuffs to the employees, staff of the hydropower project and security guards.

The Middle Paunglaung Bridge was constructed by Bridge Task Force (1) of the Bridge Department under the Ministry of Construction. The 400 feet long bridge has 27 feet and 6 inches in width and it is 1.8 metres and 2.2 metres Caisson Foundation and built of Plate Girder and R.C Girder on R.C Concrete. It has a load capacity of HS-25. Currently, the operation completes 65 per cent.

The Union minister then inspected Hlatsit Lankhwal-Hlay Khwin Taung-Khawma junction (four miles and four furlongs) which will be handed over to the Highways Department of the ministry from the Department of Hydropower Implementation of the Ministry of Electricity and Energy. — MNA

Indawgyi Lake boasts of 4 fish species, not recorded yet in marine science, 2 world's rarest species

INDAWGYI Lake in Mohnyin Township of Kachin State, the largest freshwater lake in Myanmar, designated as the ASEAN Heritage Park and Ramsar Site, is home to four species of fish that have not yet been recorded in marine science and two of the world's rarest fish species.

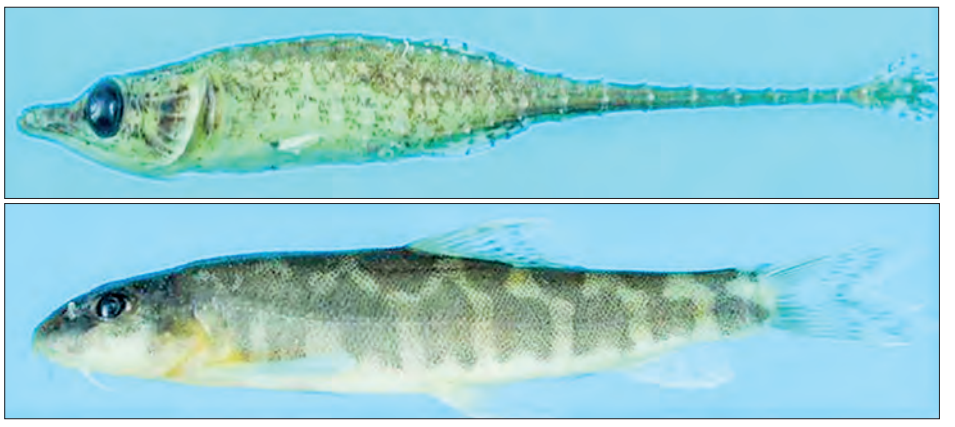
The lake covers 314.67 square feet and is conserved as a wildlife sanctuary by the Forest Department, and the department works together with FFI to collect the data of fish species and water quality of the lake.

As it is a biological area where the migratory birds annually move there and due to the high population of various fish species, the quality of the lake plays a key role and so the officials conduct laboratory tests on the water at a university of Germany together with FFI.

"We test the water quality every year whether the quality becomes worse or better or normal together with FFI. We send the water to the university of Germany for lab tests. They come and explain the results here. Now, they cannot do such doing due to the outbreak of COVID-19. We have been working with them for three years. Since 2016, the quality of the lake is not significantly low but there is a few changes. Moreover, four Botia species which have not yet been recorded in marine science and other two fish species can be seen in Indawgyi Lake and so it is such a pride in Indawgyi Ramsar Site," said U Maung Win, head of Indawgyi Wildlife Sanctuary.

Unlike the Innlay Lake, the people do not live in the Indawgyi area and so it does not significantly affect the environment and quality of the lake and it becomes one of the eight Ramsar sites of Myanmar where the migratory birds inhabit most. The plenty of fish species in the lake lure resident birds and migratory birds and the good water quality creates a place where migratory birds and rare fish species to reproduce.

There are 95 fish species in the Indawgyi Lake and its basin area including four species of fish that have not yet been recorded in marine science. Two rare fish species – Microphis Dunckeris and Syngnathidae (pipefish) that are only endemic to Indawgyi Lake are inhabiting there.



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These six species are the most valuable ones as they can be seen only at the Indawgyi Lake in the world. The students from Norway and Germany study the fish species scientifically and collect data and such measures support the lake.

Conserving animals that live both in water and land and environment as a national duty can improve the rural socio-economic status and the nature-based tourism industry. — Nyein Thu (MNA)/GNLM

MoHT Union minister attends Christmas dinner, rural cycling festival in PyinOoLwin

A 2021 PyinOoLwin Christmas dinner party was held at the Forestry Training School on the evening of 24 December and was attended by Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism Dr Htay Aung, Mandalay Region Chief Minister U Maung Ko and ministers of the Mandalay regional government, Tatmadaw senior officers from the PyinOoLwin Station, priests, nuns and Christian guests.

At the dinner, Mandalay Region Chief Minister U Maung Ko said all ethnic nationalities in Myanmar are living together in unity and love for one another grows despite the different religious festivals and cultural events, and he wished that the blessings of Christ may abound and peace is upon you.

Afterwards, His Holiness Father L. Mar and His Holiness Lap Khusap explained about the Christmas festival and wished Myanmar peace and prosperity and good health to all its people, and expressed words of thanks. After singing hymns, the Union Minister and the Chief Minister presented Christmas presents to the attendees and shared a Christmas cake and dinner.

Yesterday morning, Union Minister Dr Htay Aung and party attended the "PyinOoLwin Rural Cycling Festival" held at the PyinOoLwin District Public Stadium as a movement to revitalize tourism in Mandalay Region. More than 150 local and foreign cyclists reportedly took part in the 9-mile stretch up to December Farm from Pwekauk Waterfall.

Afterwards, the Union minister and party arrived at the PyinOoLwin station and cut the ribbon to open the railway from PyinOoLwin to Gote Hteik Viaduct, giving souvenirs to the passengers. In order to follow COVID-19 rules and regulations, the number of regular passengers was halved, with about 140 passengers on board. The Union minister and party also met the cyclists at Pwekauk Waterfall and presented commemorative medals and awarded certificates to those who participated in the cycling tour at December Farm.

In the afternoon, the Union minister and party observed the registration process under the "Flower Garden" project conducted by the Ministry of Immigration and Population and handed over the registration cards to the local people who came to register. — MNA

COVID-19 vaccination continues in different regions, states

DOCTORS and nurses from public hospitals, Tatmadaw medical teams, healthcare workers and volunteers are working hard to give COVID-19 vaccines in different states and regions as the vaccination programme is one of the most important activities in the prevention, control and treatment of COVID-19 disease.

COVID-19 vaccine is administered daily to target groups regardless of race or religion including Buddhist monks and nuns, local people over the age of 55, religious leaders, prisoners, people with disabilities, ethnic armed groups, people with chronic diseases, and people in IDP camps respectively.

Doctors and nurses from public hospitals, medical teams from the Tatmadaw, relevant healthcare workers in collaboration with volunteers have already given COVID-19 vaccines to 4,844 people from 13 townships in northern Shan State, 980 from Mongpyin and Monghsat townships in eastern Shan State, 4,005 from Myeik and Palaw townships in Taninthayi Township, 53.012 from 26 townships in Ayeyawady Region, 4,055 from four townships in Rakhine State, 9,942 from seven districts in Mandalay Region and 250 from Htantabin Township in Bago Region.

Similarly, healthcare officials gave the vaccines to 681 students from four townships in northern Shan State, 85 students from Monghsat Township, eastern Shan State and 953 students from 26 townships in Ayeyawady Region.

It is reported that officials visited the site and coordinated the necessary work. —MNA

MoC oversees daily imports of anti-COVID-19 equipment

THE Ministry of Commerce is facilitating imports 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 one company using one vehicle. A total of four tonnes of masks were imported via the Chinshwehaw trade zone yesterday.

From 1 to 25 December, a total of 304 tonnes of liquid oxygen carried by 190 vehicles, two empty oxygen tanks, two oxygen distributors, two oxygen distributors, three oxygen plants, 581 oxygen concentrators, 1,957 COVID-19 test kits, 15,280 PPE suits, 32 tonnes of gloves and 1,039 tonnes of masks have been imported.

In the meantime, 13 bowsers transported liquid oxygen to Yangon, two to Mandalay, and one to Monywa, and two oxygen plants were also transported to Mandalay and one to Muse, respectively.

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

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Further meetings with political parties

ACTION is being taken against the officials who committed malpractice and related persons in the election. The Union Election Commission will hold further meetings with political parties to exercise the PR system.

(Excerpt from the speech delivered by Chairman of the State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at the meeting 18/2021 of the State Administration Council on 13-12-2021)

Raw salt price likely to rise in next opening season

THE salt traders expected that the raw salt prices are likely to rise in Mon State, Myanmar's second-largest salt producer, in the next opening season, it is learnt.

Next coming January 2022 is the opening season of the salt and there will be less access of the raw salt in the market.

Besides, the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology in southern Myanmar has announced that there is a possibility of La Niña in January and February, which is the next coming salt season of 2022. The salt farmers need to be vigilant because La Niña can cause occasional rain, lower night temperatures and possible colder temperatures than usual.

In Mon State, the salt production period is December, January and February. During this period, most salt farmers will sell their raw salt to cover labour costs and other expenditures.

Last January 2021, the raw salt price (normal) was K65 per viss (a viss equals 1.6 kilogrammes) while the raw salt (pure) is K85 per viss. At the last opening season of the salt, the salt prices were not good, and the yield loss of the salt was due to the early rain.

Although the price of salt is mounting in the late season, there is less salt stockpile in the hand of local farmers and traders. On the other hand, rising fuel oil prices have also pushed up transport costs.

Therefore, the last 2021 salt season can be said to be a year of low yields and losses for farmers.

At the end of December, the raw salt price (normal) fetch K130 per viss while the raw salt (pure) is K150 per viss.

Although the price of salt is mounting in the late season, there is less salt stockpile in the hand of local farmers and traders. On the other hand, rising fuel oil prices have also pushed up transport costs.

Yearly, Mon State produces nearly 40,000 tonnes of sun-dried salt beyond magnesium chloride ($MgCl_2$), iodized salt (I_2) and table salt (NaCl).

The 2019-2020 statistics showed 14 iodine salt processing plants and one factory each for magnesium chloride ($MgCl_2$) and table salt (NaCl) production, with the production capacity of 60 tonnes of magnesium chloride, 204 tonnes of table salt and 12,132 tonnes of iodized salt.— NN/GNLM

Sagaing grows high-yielding varieties of sugarcane

High-yielding varieties of sugarcane such as K-95/84, Nawaday-4, Phawmozar, Hsin Shweli are grown in the Sagaing region using irrigated water. **PHOTO: LU LAY**

SAGAING region is growing high-yielding varieties of sugarcane, it is learnt.

"The sugarcanes are grown typically in Katha and Htigyaing. There are also some sugarcane plantations in Kanbalu. Katha and Htigyaing townships are growing the sugarcane on a commercial scale. There is also a sugar mill there. Now, the Sagaing region is cultivating high-yielding varieties of sugarcane by further negotiating with the mill to determine the amount that can be purchased and produced," said U Win Hlaing Oo, head of the Regional Agriculture Department.

More than 50,000 acres of sugarcane have been cultivated during the winter crop season in the Sagaing region. It has been sowed since October 2021 according to the Agriculture Department.

"The cultivation of sugarcane cost over K600,000-K700,000 per acre. That yielded sugarcane is transported to Kanbalu Zigon sugar mill and Htigyaing Maunggon sugar mill. Then, the local farmers grind the sugarcane themselves and sell them as molasses. But the local farmers from Ayadaw township, Monywa district prefer to grow only for sugarcane juice," said Daw Moe Mhee Tin, the deputy officer of Regional Agriculture Department.

According to the official statistics of the Agriculture Department, the Sagaing region grows 8,655 acres of sugarcane in Shwebo district, 456 acres of sugarcane in Kanbalu district, 44,295 acres of sugarcane in Katha district and 48 acres of sugarcane in Kawlin district,

High-yielding varieties of sugarcane such as K-95/84, Nawaday-4, Phawmozar, Hsin Shweli are grown in the Sagaing region using irrigated water. — Lu Lay/GNLM

Shopkeepers, vendors get vaccinated against COVID-19 in Tamway

THE second batch of the COVID-19 vaccination to shopkeepers and vendors in Tamway Township started yesterday.

The vaccination has been conducted under the cooperation of the Tamway Township Development Committee and the Township Public Health Department as per the set COVID-19 rules and regulations to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus in township markets.

A total of 569 shopkeepers and vendors in the township received the first dose of COVID-19 in the first batch according to the Township COVID-19 Disease Control and Emergency Response Committee. — Naing Lin Aung (IPRD)/GNLM

Inoculation drive for shopkeepers and vendors in Tamway township. **PHOTO: NAING LIN AUNG**

NEWS IN BRIEF

China adopts anti-organized crime law

CHINESE lawmakers on Friday voted to adopt an anti-organized crime law in order to strengthen the work of combatting and rooting out organized crime in line with the rule of law.

The law, to take effect on 1 May 2022, was approved at a session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

The law includes provisions on the criteria for identifying various types of "soft violence", such as organized disturbing, pestering and assembling a crowd to cause an uproar for illegal profits or illegal impacts, as well as the responsibilities of regulators in various industries.— Xinhua ■

Beijing 2022 non-accredited media centre to open for registration

THE Beijing 2022 media centre for non-accredited journalists will be open for online registration from 10 am 25 December 2021 to 10 am 10 January 2022.

Apart from the Main Media Centre, the non-accredited media centre, to be set at Beijing International Hotel convention centre from 1-20 February will provide information related to the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games for journalists without official Olympic accreditation.

Non-accredited journalists need to submit the sign-up information including their identities, certifications from the affiliated media outlets, and their records of full vaccination, through the official website - 2022bmc.cn in Chinese and 2022bmc.cn/en in English.

During the Winter Games, the media centre will provide services in line with the Olympic Host Contract and international practices, which include press releases and interviews.— Xinhua ■

Iran accepts tea in payment for Sri Lankan oil debt

Five years ago, Sri Lankan tea made up nearly half of all the tea consumed in Iran. **PHOTO: ATTA KENARE AFP/FILE**

IRAN has agreed to accept Ceylon tea in payment for a Sri Lankan oil debt valued at $251 million, Iranian media reported Thursday.

"In recent negotiations, we reached a written deal to reimburse Iran's debt and interest on it in the form of a monthly shipment of tea produced in Sri Lanka," the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organizxation said.

Alireza Peyman-Pak was quoted as saying that "a deal was reached on Tuesday, according to which Sri Lanka will export tea to Iran every month to settle a $251 million debt for Iranian oil supplied to Sri Lanka nine years ago".

In 2016, Ceylon tea made up nearly half of Iranian consumption, but the proportion has declined in recent years.

The barter deal will allow sanctions-hit Iran to avoid having to use up scarce hard currency to pay for imports of the widely consumed staple, Peyman-Pak said.

"Iran and Sri Lanka have great potential to develop mutual trade," he said, adding that Iran's non-oil exports to the country are valued at less than $100 million a year.

Sri Lankan Plantation Industries Minister Ramesh Pathirana said the deal "will not violate any UN or US sanctions since tea has been categorized as a food item under humanitarian grounds", according to the Economynext website.

He added that Iranian banks that have been blacklisted under US sanctions will not be involved in the transaction.—AFP ■

Electricity projects suspended in Afghanistan since Taliban takeover

SINCE the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in mid-August, many electricity supply projects have been halted for the past four months. Officials at Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS) said that the main reason for halting these projects is the suspension of funds from the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the United States development aid to Afghanistan, reported Tolo News. Turkmenistan's 500 KV electricity transmission to Afghanistan is one of these projects, which was transferring electricity from the border of Turkmenistan to Sheberghan's Aqina port and then to the Alvazun plain of Kunduz and finally to the Arghandi district of Kabul. Only 10 per cent of the work needs to be finished. "90 per cent of the 500 KV line project is completed and only 10 per cent of its work remains. If the ADB allows it, we can complete the remaining 10 per cent of its work in the next six months," said Safiullah Ahmadzai, Executive Chief of DABS.

DABS officials added that a complete solution to the shortage of electricity in Kabul will require the construction of two more electricity substations at a cost of USD40 million, reported Tolo News. Meanwhile, a number of Kabul residents complained about the lack of electricity and said that the shortage of electricity has increased this winter.— ANI ■

Inside the power station at the Kajaki Dam in the southern Helmand Province of Afghanistan. **PHOTO : WIKIWAND/ANI**

US to lift travel ban on southern Africa

Travellers queue at a check-in counter at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg on 27 November 2021, after several countries banned flights from South Africa. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

THE United States will next week lift the travel ban imposed on several southern African nations when the Omicron variant of Covid was first detected, officials said Friday.

Countries around the world restricted travel from southern Africa after the variant was detected in South Africa, which reported Omicron to the World Health Organization (WHO) on 24 November.

WHO and the United Nations spoke out against the travel bans and officials in South Africa said they were being punished for identifying the strain and being transparent.

White House assistant press secretary Kevin Munoz defended the ban on Twitter, saying, "The restrictions gave us time to understand Omicron and we know our existing vaccines work against Omicron, (especially) boosted." He said the travel ban would be lifted on 31 December.

A senior White House official added that with Omicron present across the United States and globally, international travellers from the eight affected countries would not have a significant impact on US cases. —AFP ■

Thailand records 1st cluster of Omicron variant of COVID-19

THAILAND reported its first cluster of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in the northeastern Kalasin province, health officials said on Friday.

According to the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA), there are 22 confirmed cases of the Omicron variant linked to the Kalasin cluster.

The index case of the latest cluster was believed to be a couple who travelled from Belgium through Thailand's quarantine free scheme and tested positive with the Omicron variant earlier this month, CCSA spokeswoman Apisamai Srirangsan said.

Since their arrival, the couple visited several places including bars, shopping malls and state offices in the province, Apisamai said, adding that around 100 people were still deemed at high risk due to their close contact with the patients.

According to officials, the total cases of the Omicron variant in Thailand had risen to 205 as of Thursday night.

Fears of rapid spreading of the new variant had triggered Bangkok city hall to announce the cancellation of its New Year countdown events on Thursday.

A staff member cleans up for reopening at a shopping mall in Bangkok, Thailand, 31 August 2021. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

Since the start of the pandemic early last year, Thailand has registered 2,204,672 COVID-19 cases, with 21,528 cumulative deaths. – Xinhua ■

Canada's COVID-19 cases surpass 1.95 million

The Government of Canada is prioritizing the health and safety of everyone in Canada by taking a risk-based and measured approach to reopening our borders. The town of Banff in Canada. **PHOTO: AFP**

CANADA reported 11,304 new COVID-19 cases Friday afternoon, raising the cumulative total to 1,957,058 cases with 30,139 deaths, according to CTV.

COVID-19 cases continued to increase in Canada, with the provinces of Ontario, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island all reporting record-high numbers on Friday. Ontario, the most populous province, reported 9,571 new COVID-19 cases, the highest number ever recorded in a single day since the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in February 2020.

Manitoba saw an all-time daily record increase of 742 new cases, New Brunswick reported 265 new cases, and Prince Edward Island reported its highest-ever 40 new daily cases.

Canada's COVID-19 cases soared in the past days due to the fast spread of the Omicron variant. Like the Delta variant that has been dominant since last summer, the Omicron variant is highly transmissible. What's more, the Omicron variant reportedly has proved tenacious at evading vaccines. The combination of the two traits has led to projections that the new variant will sweep through Canadian populations rapidly if public health measures are not tightened, according to Canadian medical experts. — ANI ■

Germany's health system struggling to trace COVID-19 infection chains

A large proportion of public health departments in Germany already stopped contact tracing for people infected with COVID-19 due to overload, said Ute Teichert, the federal chairwoman of public health physicians, on Friday.

"Comprehensive tracking is almost not happening at all right now," Teichert told Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland (RND), adding that several federal states such as Baden-Wuerttemberg, Berlin and Hamburg "even completely suspended contact searches."

Germany is bracing for a new wave of COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the more infectious Omicron variant, to hit the country. The coming Omicron wave could even worsen staff shortages in the country's healthcare system.

"Because of the Omicron variant, we are running into a situation in Germany where health departments will eventually not be able to compensate for sick staff," she said.

After introducing stricter health measures, Germany's COVID-19 incidence rate has been declining for around two weeks and fell to 265.8 infections per 100,000 inhabitants per week, down from around 332 last week, according to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) on Friday.

A pedestrian walks past a safety notice board in Munich, Germany, on 27 November 2020. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

Daily infections also declined and dropped to 35,431 recorded cases within one day, around 15,500 less than one week ago, according to the RKI, the federal government agency for disease control and prevention.

But the RKI warned that it is possible that only an incomplete picture of the epidemiological situation is given. – AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

26 punished for COVID-19 resurgence in China's Xi'an

DISCIPLINE inspection and supervisory authorities of Xi'an City, capital of northwest China's Shaanxi Province, said Friday that 26 persons have been held responsible for the latest COVID-19 resurgence.

Xi'an also held four grassroots Party organizations and working units responsible for inadequate epidemic prevention efforts since imported COVID-19 cases were reported earlier this month.

There were problems such as insufficient attention to safety standards, failure to rigorously implement anti-epidemic measures and poor management during the period, according to the city's discipline inspection and supervisory authorities. – Xinhua ■

Cases of COVID-19 Omicron variant rise to 527 in Israel

ISRAEL on Friday reported 186 new cases of the Omicron COVID-19 variant, according to the country's Health Ministry.

This raised the total Omicron cases in Israel to 527, the ministry said.

It added that 351 of all the infected are returning passengers from abroad. – Xinhua ■

Russia registers 24,946 new cases of COVID-19 in past 24 hours

RUSSIA registered 24,946 new cases of COVID-19 in the last 24 hours, which brings the cumulative total to 10,368,299, the federal response centre said Saturday.

On Friday, the response centre reported a daily tally of 24,703 COVID-19 cases countrywide.

In the last 24 hours, Moscow registered the highest number of new cases at 2,714, followed by 2,072 cases in St. Petersburg and 1,431 in the Moscow region. – ANI ■

26 DECEMBER 2021
THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Turn out qualified maritime professionals for our motherland

MYANMAR is decorated with more than 140,000 square miles of water territory and more than 1,260 miles of coastal areas. Deep seaports, ports and jetties at different levels are functioning along the coast as well as in rivers and creeks across the nation.

In order to manage the maritime measures, Myanmar established the Myanmar Maritime University in 2002. The university turned out 4,137 BE graduates, 1,052 diploma holders and 17 ME graduates from 2007 to 2020. As the graduates from the university are professionals in the maritime sector, the government plans to recruit those graduates to be deployed in the respective sectors for the development of the nation.

> Arrangements must be made for students to comprehensively understand the teaching of faculty members. Moreover, it is necessary to encourage the students to use and read the books on maritime subjects and maritime engineering subjects as well as port management supporting to improve their proficiency.

Thanks to the strength of those professionals, the country needs to manage the ports and give maritime services through ocean liners, coastal liners and river cruises. Myanmar needs to build overseas merchant vessels and other vessels to extract the natural resources from the seas while conserving the maritime resources. Among various subjects from the university, shipbuilding professionals from the university need to lead the shipbuilding process at the shipyards of the nation. The university needs to produce more qualified professionals to be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with those from the international community.

The university needs to maintain the existing success and secure more success. Although democratic countries control just private businesses, the Myanmar government manages some sectors due to various reasons. The university has to create good environs for the students and development of social lives. And, efforts must be made for providing assistance to students to stand on their own upon completion of the training.

Arrangements must be made for students to comprehensively understand the teaching of faculty members. Moreover, it is necessary to encourage the students to use and read the books on maritime subjects and maritime engineering subjects as well as port management supporting to improve their proficiency.

Those graduates need to uplift their skills of English proficiency with the purpose of working to associate with those from the international universities and skills of computer science as well. Moreover, the students should be fulfilled in the needs of accommodation, security and food for their convenient learning as it is no ordinary university education to become the symbol among the universities of the international community.

■ ■ ■

Covid clouds Christmas celebrations for second year

POPE Francis called for more solidarity with those living in poverty as he celebrated mass in Rome in front of a masked congregation of around 2,000 people, while billions around the world again marked Christmas under the shadow of the coronavirus.

An explosion in cases driven by the rise of the Omicron variant has meant a Christmas season tainted by the pandemic for a second year running, with Santa's arrival and longed-for family reunions overshadowed by the prospect of yet more Covid-19 restrictions.

In St Peter's Basilica, the 85-year-old Argentine pontiff urged the faithful to "value the little things in life".

"On this night of love, may we have only one fear: that of offending God's love, hurting him by despising the poor with our indifference," said Francis, who later Saturday will give his traditional Urbi et Orbi address and blessing.

Christmas Eve mass

About 2,000 members of the public and 200 religious figures attended the Christmas Eve mass, wearing face masks and respecting social distancing as part of measures against the coronavirus.

In Bethlehem's Manger Square, visitors in Santa hats and scouts beating drums marked Christmas Eve, but numbers were lower than usual as coronavirus fears overshadowed celebrations for a second straight year.

The city where Christians believe Jesus was born is usually a focal point of the holiday, with thousands packing the streets and filling hotels.

But Israel, which controls all entrances to Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank, barred its borders to foreigners in an effort to rein in infections from the Omicron strain of the coronavirus.

"It is a bit surreal," American student Hudson Harder told AFP.

"There is a selfish part where it's like 'Oh I get to see this place so empty' but on the other hand you feel for the shops, all the money they are losing, it's really quite tragic."

Flights cancelled

In his homily for midnight mass celebrated in St Catherine's Church in Bethlehem, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Pierbattista Pizzaballa said it was however encouraging that celebrations were "certainly more joyful this year".

"Compared to last year's Christmas, the participation is much greater and this is an encouraging sign," he told the masked congregation, but regretted the absence of foreign worshippers due to the pandemic.

Typhoon-hit church

In the southern Philippines, standing in a pool of water in his typhoon-hit church, Father Ricardo Virtudazo celebrated Christmas Day mass with dozens of devotees who prayed for a better year after the storm killed nearly 400 people and left hundreds of thousands homeless.

"What's important is all of us are safe," said Joy Parera, 31, attending the service with her husband in the town of Alegria on the island of Mindanao.

Another survivor, Marites Sotis, said she would usually serve up meat, spring rolls and salad for Christmas but that her family was struggling after the storm felled most of their coconut trees.

"We won't have those this year because they cost a lot of money," Sotis, 53, told AFP. "We'll make do with spaghetti."

Locals visiting the Christmas tree in front of the Church of the Nativity, in the West Bank city of Bethlehem, 22 December 2020. **PHOTO: AFP**

For the second year, surging infections have complicated yuletide plans from Sydney to Seville.

The new coronavirus strain severely disrupted holiday travel, with tracking website Flightaware.com reporting more than 2,300 flights had been cancelled around the world, hundreds of them in the United States.

Loved ones for Christmas

Millions of Americans were nevertheless on the move to see loved ones for Christmas, even as Covid infections surpass the peak of the previous wave and hospitals run out of beds.

In Washington, US President Joe Biden and his wife Jill visited a children's hospital for the traditional Christmas book-reading by the first lady.

The couple chatted with patients and doctors, showing one boy a photo of "Commander" — their new puppy — before settling into chairs beside a Christmas tree and reading a book inspired by the Disney movie "Frozen".

In Europe, governments are reimposing misery-inducing safety measures that are draining the fun from Christmas for many.

SOURCE: AFP

The technology behind Covid jabs

THE World Health Organization on Tuesday authorized its 10th Covid-19 vaccine — Nuvaxovid from US firm Novavax.

As the highly mutated Omicron variant throws yet more uncertainty into the mix, here is a look at the technology behind the jabs.

'Subunit' and 'viral vector'

Novavax's jab is a subunit vaccine, containing a piece of the virus — in this case, the spike protein.

This method is already used in jabs against whooping cough, meningitis and hepatitis B.

The EU also approved Novavax this week, with the bloc's chief Ursula von der Leyen saying she hoped it would "offer a strong encouragement to everyone who has not yet been vaccinated or boosted".

Two other jabs with EU authorisation — those from AstraZeneca and Jansen — use "viral vector" technology, whereby a modified version of the virus spurs the body into producing defences.

Richer countries have moved away from these jabs, relying on Pfizer and Moderna instead. AstraZeneca is now mainly being supplied to poor nations through the Covax scheme.

mRNA on top

By far the most widely used Covid-19 vaccines, Pfizer/BioNTech's Comirnaty and Moderna's Spikevax, use cutting-edge mRNA technology.

Novavax's jab is a subunit vaccine, containing a piece of the virus — in this case, the spike protein. This method is already used in jabs against whooping cough, meningitis and hepatitis B. Novavax labs in Gaithersburg, Maryland. US. **PHOTO: AFP**

Rather than using a component or modified virus, mRNA vaccines tell the body to produce proteins that resemble those of the virus.

The body then reacts to these proteins, building a defence that fights Covid-19 if it enters the body.

According to a tally by McGill University, Comirnaty has been authorized in over 100 countries and Spikevax in 80, and the two jabs have the best records for efficacy.

Omicron shakes things up

The extremely contagious Omicron variant has changed the game.

Recent lab tests show that antibody levels in blood samples from people vaccinated with Pfizer and Moderna drop when faced with Omicron.

The drop is even greater in those vaccinated with AstraZeneca or Sinovac, a Chinese jab authorized in about 50 countries.

A booster seems to reignite antibody immunity with both Pfizer and Moderna announcing positive results from recent tests.

The catch is that nobody knows how long this boost lasts.

For Novavax, even less is known about its efficacy against variants since it was in clinical trials when the Alpha and Beta variants still dominated.

But this does not mean vaccines are useless against Omicron: the body has a secondary immune defence called T-cell response, which fights the virus by attacking infected cells.

This secondary response is particularly important in preventing severe forms of illness.

A recent study from South Africa showed Pfizer/BioNTech to remain effective at preventing severe Covid from Omicron even after just two shots.

Pfizer and Moderna have both said they are working on Omicron-specific jabs, but it is not clear whether they will be needed.

Unsettled youngster debate

The EU has followed the US and Israel in authorizing jabs for children aged five to 11.

Children in the EU and US are allowed Pfizer/BioNTech at a third of the strength of an adult dose.

But vaccinating children against Covid-19 is still a matter of scientific debate as youngsters rarely get seriously ill and jabs can have side effects — albeit rare — that involve the heart.

Instead, the idea is to stop children from spreading the disease.

But scientists are also questioning the practicalities, as protection from Omicron seems to require three jabs.

"At this point kids will be fully protected at the end of March and we will be past all the most dangerous waves," virologist Benjamin Davido told French radio.

SOURCE: AFP

■ ■ ■

Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Saturday 25 December 2021)

BAY INFERENCE: Weather a few cloud over the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL NOON OF THE 26 December 2021: Light rain will be isolated in Upper Sagaing, and Tanintharyi regions and Kachin and (Northern and Eastern) Shan states. Degree of certainty is (80%). Weather will be generally fair in Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay, Magway, Bago, Yangon, and Ayeyawady regions and Rakhine State and partly cloudy in the remaining regions and states.

STATE OF THE SEA: Sea will be slight to moderate in Myanmar waters. Wave height will be about (4-6) feet off and along Myanmar Coasts.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of slight decrease of night temperature in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin State.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 26 December 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 26 December 2021: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 26 December 2021: Generally fair weather.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Study finds a new epitope for universal influenza vaccines

A team of scientists has identified an important place of vulnerability on influenza viruses.

The research has been published in the 'Nature Journal'. The scientists found that a small subset of antibodies elicited by experimental and existing influenza vaccines targeted a site at the base, or anchor, of the influenza virus hemagglutinin (HA) protein--an "epitope" whose significance was not recognized in prior influenza antibody studies.

Experiments in cell cultures and in mice suggested that antibodies against this "anchor epitope" can neutralize a broad set of influenza strains, including strains with pandemic potential.

"This will now be one of the key influenza epitopes that we target as we develop candidate universal influenza vaccines and antibody therapies," said study co-senior author Dr Patrick Wilson, who was recruited as a professor of paediatrics and a scientist in the Gale and Ira Drukier Institute for Children's Health at Weill Cornell Medicine.

Most of the study was conducted while Dr Wilson was at the University of Chicago. —ANI ■

Tibet's ecological area spread over nearly 90 pct of region

NATIONAL land areas with ecological significance in southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region account for nearly 90 per cent of the region's total, a survey shows.

According to the third regional land survey, Tibet is now home to more than 13 million hectares of forest land and over 80 million hectares of grassland.

Land with ecological functions, such as forest land, grassland, wetlands and water areas, has increased to more than 1.08 million square km from about 1.07 million 10 years ago, it said.

Expansion of the ecological area highlights the achievements of ecological construction in Tibet over the past decade, said Li Yajun, one of the leaders of the survey.

Tibet will scientifically reorganize the red line for ecological protection and rationally lay out ecological construction on the basis of the database provided by the survey this time, Li said. —Xinhua ■

NASA telescope set for launch on million-mile voyage

THE world's most powerful space telescope is set to blast off on Saturday to its outpost 1.5 million kilometres (930,000 miles) from Earth, after several delays caused by technical hitches.

The James Webb Space Telescope, some three decades and billions of dollars in the making, will leave Earth enclosed in its Ariane 5 rocket from Kourou Space Centre in French Guiana.

The launch, scheduled in a brief window after 9:20 am (1220 GMT), will send the telescope on a month-long journey to its remote orbit.

It is expected to beam back new clues that will help scientists understand more about the origins of the Universe and Earth-like planets beyond our solar system.

Named after a former NASA director, Webb follows in the footsteps of the legendary Hubble -- but intends to show humans what the Universe looked like even closer to its birth nearly 14 billion years ago.

Speaking on social media, Webb project co-founder John Mather described the telescope's unprecedented sensitivity.

"#JWST can see the heat signature of a bumblebee at the distance of the Moon," he said.

All that power is needed to detect the weak glow emitted billions of years ago by the very first galaxies to exist and the first stars being formed.—AFP ■

The James Webb Space Telescope, some three decades and billions of dollars in the making, will leave Earth enclosed in its Ariane 5 rocket from Kourou Space Centre in French Guiana. **PHOTO: EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY/AFP**

Philippine typhoon survivors wish for roofs and food at Christmas

FATHER Ricardo Virtudazo stands in a pool of water in his typhoon-hit church in the southern Philippines delivering Christmas Day mass to dozens of devotees whose wishes this year were for new roofs, food and fine weather.

More than a week after Typhoon Rai cut a swathe through the archipelago, killing nearly 400 people and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless, survivors clung to family and faith after their homes -- and planned festivities -- were wiped out.

"What's important is all of us are safe," said Joy Parera, 31, attending Christmas mass with her husband at San Isidro Labrador Parish church in the town of Alegria, on the northern tip of Mindanao island.

A light rain soaked the pews and white tiled floor of the damaged church, which has been left with a gaping hole in the roof after Rai ravaged the area.

Devotees wore masks as they gathered inside the church festooned with Christmas decorations and prayed for a better year. "We still have hope," Virtudazo told AFP.

"In spite of the calamities they experience, they still have faith in God." Christmas is one of the most important events in the Christian calendar and in the Catholic-majority Philippines, families typically gather to share a meal. But the widespread destruction caused by Rai in the southern and central regions of the country has dampened celebrations as many survivors plead for drinking water and food.—AFP ■

Residents queue to receive free drinking water in General Luna town, Siargao island, on 23 December 2021, days after Super Typhoon Rai devastated the island. **PHOTO: AFP**

Winter migration emerges as a lucrative approach for NW China herders

YANG Qiang, 33, a herder from northwest China's Gansu Province, checks on his flock of sheep grazing in a cornfield every two hours to make sure they are adapting well in the new habitat at the foothills of Qilian Mountains.

Since 2015, the herdsman in Sunan Yugu Ethnic Autonomous County has been unperturbed about livestock feed in winter, as he and his herd migrate from highland pasture to downhill farms to spend the winter.

"With the onset of winter, the highland pasture where I live is no longer able to provide enough forage for livestock, resulting in a poor survival rate for lambs," Yang explained.

Over the past few years, 506 households of shepherds like Yang in the mountainous county have driven their flocks downhill to the farms instead of grazing in highland throughout the winter months of October to March, when agricultural lands are barren.

Thanks to a government-aided ecological development initiative, a balance between shepherds' livelihoods and environmental conservation has been struck.—Xinhua ■

A large number of migratory birds make a stop in the wetlands of Shahu Lake in Shizuishan, northwest China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

Third jab 'significantly' boosts Omicron antibodies

BRITISH pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca said Thursday that a third, or "booster", dose of its Covid-19 vaccine Vaxzevria "significantly" lifted antibody levels against the Omicron strain in a laboratory study.

"Vaxzevria significantly boosted levels of antibodies against the Omicron SARS-CoV-2 variant (B.1.1.529) following a third dose booster," the company said in a statement citing the study.

"The third dose booster vaccination neutralized the Omicron variant to levels that were broadly similar to those observed... after the second dose against the Delta variant," it said.

Levels of neutralising antibodies were also higher with the booster jab than with individuals who had previously been infected and recovered naturally from Covid-19.

A healthcare worker prepares a dose of AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine, during a mass vaccination in Nairobi, on 16 December 2021. **PHOTO: SIMON MAINA / AFP**

The study was conducted by investigators from the University of Oxford, which is the academic institution which helped AstraZeneca develop the vaccine last year. The study analysed blood samples taken from individuals infected with Covid-19; those vaccinated with two doses plus a booster; and those who had reported previous Covid infection.

"It is very encouraging to see that current vaccines have the potential to protect against Omicron following a third dose booster," said University of Oxford professor John Bell, one of the study investigators.

"These results support the use of third dose boosters as part of national vaccine strategies, especially to limit the spread of variants of concern, including Omicron."

On Wednesday, the World Health Organization had warned that rich countries cannot use boosters to escape the Covid crisis, as they divert valuable jabs away from poorer nations -- and encourage the virus to spread and mutate.

The threat of the highly transmissible Omicron variant is looming large over the end-of-year holidays, pushing many governments to roll out new restrictions and urge citizens to get vaccinated. The latest data suggest Omicron does not cause more severe illness than previous variants, including Delta, but as soaring infection numbers threaten to overwhelm health systems, scientists warn it could still cause more deaths.—AFP ■

A pop-up clinic in Los Angeles International Airport is offering free Covid-19 vaccinations and booster shots. **PHOTO: AFP**

Millions travel across US as airlines cancel flights over Covid

MILLIONS of Americans are travelling before Christmas even as national Omicron Covid-19 infections surpass Delta's peak and hospitals run out of space for patients.

Several thousand travellers face a grim Christmas Eve as airlines United, Delta and Alaska said Thursday they were cancelling 24 December flights due to Covid.

United Airlines said it had called off about 120 flights over the "nationwide spike in Omicron cases", with Delta Air Lines telling customers they had pulled 90 flights.

Alaska Airlines said they canceled 17 flights after some employees "may have been exposed to the virus," adding more trips may be scrapped.

A Christmas testing crunch compounded the country's problems, with pharmacy appointments in big cities booked, government sites overwhelmed and home kits nowhere to be found.

At a newly opened federal testing site in New York City's Travers Park, people formed long lines, wearing puffy winter gear in the bone-chilling cold.—AFP ■

Covid-vaccinated Santa cleared for travel

SANTA has been cleared for travel in Canada's airspace after showing proof of vaccination and a pre-flight negative Covid test, Canadian transport minister said Thursday.

"This year, I'm delighted to clear Santa and his crew for travel in Canadian skies," the minister, Omar Alghabra said in a statement. "When I spoke to Santa (in a call to the North Pole), he assured me that he met all the pre-entry requirements to re-enter Canada," he said. Santa's flight crew -- including reindeer Rudolph, whose "nose shone red and bright (but) made sure he had no Covid-19 symptoms before taking off" -- have also been given the all clear.

Last week, Ottawa advised Canadians against non-essential foreign travel over the Christmas holidays, saying the Covid-19 Omicron variant "makes us fear the worst," including soaring infections and travel disruptions. Several provinces, meanwhile, have reimposed public health restrictions including gathering size limits.

"By doing your part to keep others safe," urged Alghabra, including getting vaccinated, wearing a mask, and staying six feet or "at least a dozen or so candy canes apart, you'll find yourself atop the Nice List this year."—AFP ■

Santa has been cleared for travel in Canada's airspace after showing proof of vaccination and a pre-flight negative Covid test. **PHOTO: AFP**

NEWS IN BRIEF

France sets new daily Covid infections record

FRANCE set a new daily coronavirus infections record on Friday, registering 94,124 cases over 24 hours, the highest figure since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

It marked the second day in a row that infections climbed to record highs.

The numbers are likely to climb further, fuelled by the super-contagious Omicron variant and the Christmas holiday season, when schools are closed and families gather.

Some 16,173 people are currently hospitalized for Covid-19 in the country, with 3,254 of them in emergency care.

Some 122,462 people have died of Covid-19 in France since the start of the pandemic.

Some 76.5 per cent of the population have received two vaccine doses, and nearly 21 million people in a country of 67.4 million residents have received a booster shot.

On Friday, health authority recommended that adults receive a booster jab three months after their initial vaccination.– AFP ■

Omicron hospitalization rate up to 70% lower: UK govt agency

THE risk of hospitalisation is up to 70 per cent lower among people infected with the Omicron variant compared with previously dominant Delta, a UK government agency said Thursday.

The UK's Health Security Agency (UKHSA)said in a briefing its latest research into Omicron cases in the country had found that "an individual with Omicron is estimated to be between 31 and 45 per cent less likely to attend A&E (hospital emergency departments) compared to Delta, and 50 to 70 per cent less likely to be admitted to hospital".

It cautioned that the results were "preliminary and highly uncertain" since they are based on a small sample of cases of hospitalizations so far where Omicron has been confirmed.

Thee have been 132 such hospitalizations, more than 40 per cent of them in London, it said.–AFP ■

Japan gov't upgrades GDP growth forecast to 3.2 pct in fiscal 2022

Japanese cosmetic maker Shiseido's new factory in Otawara.
PHOTO: KYODO

JAPAN on Thursday upgraded its growth forecast for its economy in fiscal 2022 to a real 3.2 per cent from the previously estimated 2.2 per cent, expecting the pace of economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic to speed up after a weaker-than-anticipated increase in the current year.

As repeated resurgences of COVID-19 infections in the country prolonged economic fallout from the pandemic, the government reduced the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate projection for the current fiscal year (1 April 2021- 31 March 2022) from 3.7 per cent to 2.6 per cent.

The government had initially expected Japan's GDP to return to its pre-pandemic level in the October-December period of 2019 within this year, but the goal would likely be pushed back to March 2022, a government official said.

According to the official, the size of GDP in real terms in fiscal 2022 is expected to hit a record 556.8 trillion yen (4.88 trillion US dollars), exceeding the previous high of 554.3 trillion yen (4.86 trillion dollars) in fiscal 2018.

Moreover, Japan's total value of goods and services produced in nominal terms, unadjusted for inflation, will likely rise 3.6 per cent in fiscal 2022 compared to an earlier projection of 2.5 per cent.

The estimation of private consumption, which accounts for more than half of the Japanese economy, stayed unchanged at an increase of 4.0 per cent in the next fiscal year. Capital expenditure is expected to rise a real 5.1 per cent, higher than the July forecast of a 4.2-per-cent expansion.—Xinhua ■

China lowers tariffs to boost high-quality growth, high-level opening-up

A sweeping number of import items will enjoy lower tariffs next year as China has made new tariff adjustments for trade pacts, soon to take effect, amid efforts to improve the quality of life and boost opening up. The Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council announced earlier this month to implement provisional tariffs that are lower than the most-favoured-nation rates on 954 imported commodities starting 1 January 2022. The figure saw an increase from 883 last year and 859 in 2019. "Many of the imports on the list are heavily featured in people's daily lives so that foreign firms can benefit from China's development," said Mei Xinyu, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation under the Ministry of Commerce. The country will also grant zero-tariff treatment on 98 per cent of taxable items originating in the least-developed countries, according to the commission.

AIMING FOR HIGH QUALITY

According to experts and industry insiders, imports included in the adjustments tell tales of improving livelihood and industrial upgrade aimed at low-carbon outcomes, both traits of high-quality growth.—AFP ■

The 20 millionth TEU container is loaded to a container ship at the Tianjin Port of north China's Tianjin Municipality, 18 December 2021.
PHOTO: XINHUA/ZHAO ZISHUO

Senegal railway opening overshadowed by compensation protest

AFTER five years' work and at a cost of more than a billion dollars, Senegal's capital city next Monday will finally welcome a new commuter railway line.

Politicians are lining up to extol the benefits of slashing journey times and decongesting Dakar once the gleaming TER regional express trains start to roll.

But thousands of residents claim they have not been properly compensated for homes and businesses that were demolished to make way for the much-trumpeted line.

"We plan to block the start of the TER on the day of the inauguration to demand satisfaction for our grievances," said Ibrahima Cisse, who leads a group of some 16,000 people who say they are owed money.

Many are also furious that the rehousing they were promised has not yet been completed. The government says that almost everyone who is owed compensation has received it, but accepts that some resettlements have not yet happened.

The TER has been dogged by claims of insufficient compensation from thousands of people whose homes or business were expropriated to build the line. **PHOTO: AFP**

'Record-breaking' works -

Travelling at up 160 kilometres (100 miles) per hour, the trains will ply the 36-kilometre (22-mile) route between Dakar and the new city of Diamniadio in about 20 minutes.—AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

UN planning USD8 billion aid to restart Afghanistan's economy

THE United Nations (UN) is planning to aid Afghanistan's economy with USD8 billion to rebuild governing systems and social services.

Saeed Shah, writing in Wall Street Journal (WSJ) said that the plan would move beyond a purely humanitarian mission, taking on many government functions at a time when the Taliban regime remains under economic sanctions and lacks diplomatic recognition, according to international officials.

"We do not want to become an alternative government of Afghanistan. But is it important to support systems, not lose the gains made in past years," said Ramiz Alakbarov, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and the humanitarian coordinator for Afghanistan.—ANI ■

Markets waver on Christmas Eve as Covid fears recede

WORLD stock markets wavered Friday in subdued Christmas Eve trade as investors mulled receding Omicron coronavirus fears, with European bourses wrapping up early before the long holiday weekend.

Asian equities mostly rose in thin volumes after Wall Street finished its trading week Thursday with strong gains on solid economic data. The London and Paris stock exchanges ran out of steam in a half-day session with traders somewhat wary over more possible restrictions to curb Omicron. "Markets ... remain reticent today due to lower volumes as traders are away for a holiday period," AvaTrade analyst Naeem Aslam told AFP.—AFP ■

China ranks 2nd as home to over 300 unicorn companies: report

CHINA ranked second globally with a total of 301 unicorn companies, or startups valued at more than 1 billion US dollars in 2021, according to a new report released by a Shanghai-based research institute. Compared with a year ago, 74 new Chinese unicorn companies were added to the list, said the Global Unicorn Index 2021 compiled by the Hurun Research Institute.

Globally, a total of 1,058 unicorn companies were on the list, up 80 per cent year on year, the data showed.

The United States topped the list with 487 unicorn companies in total, while India has surpassed Britain to grab the third spot with 54 startups.

Chinese tech giant Bytedance, the parent company of video platform TikTok and its Chinese sister app Douyin, came in as the most valuable unicorn worldwide, with its valuation surging to 2.3 trillion yuan (about 350 billion US dollars) this year.

Beijing hosted 91 unicorn companies in 2021, second largest in terms of the number of unicorns globally, while Shanghai ranked fourth with 71. Shenzhen maintained its fifth place with 32 unicorn companies.— Xinhua ■

ByteDance has recently begun investing in sectors not directly related to social media. **PHOTO: HANDOUT/ XINHUA**

Taliban ban use of women's photos in advertisements

The spokesman of Kabul municipality, Nematullah Barakzai, said the government has ordered the municipality's officials to remove all photos of women on the signboards of shops and business centres in Kabul. **PHOTO: KYODO/FILE**

IN a move that can further tarnish the image of the Taliban in the international arena, the group banned the use of photos of women on storefronts in Kabul city.

The spokesman of Kabul municipality, Nematullah Barakzai, said the government has ordered the municipality's officials to remove all photos of women on the signboards of shops and business centres in Kabul, reported Tolo News. "Based on the decision of the government, the photos that are against Islamic regulations will be collected or removed from billboards," said Barakzai.

The owners of beauty salons in Kabul criticized the decision of the Islamic Emirate, and asked the government not to impose restrictions on their business, reported Tolo News.

Shayesta Saifi, a make-up artist, has worked in a beauty salon for seven years. Shayesta said she is financially assisting her 10-member family. —ANI ■

UK department store Selfridges in £4.0bn Christmas Eve sale

BRITAIN'S luxury department store chain Selfridges, famed for its flagship store on London's Oxford Street, was snapped up Friday by a Thai-Austrian alliance for £4.0 billion in a Christmas Eve deal that will create a global giant.

Selfridges, whose stores normally throng with gift-hunting shoppers over the festive holiday, has been sold by Canada's Weston family to Thai retail giant Central Group and Austrian property firm Signa, the groups announced in a statement.

The price, equivalent to $5.4 billion or 4.7 billion euros, was not officially disclosed but was confirmed by a source close to the matter.

The blockbuster deal however comes amid growing unease over the impact of the Omicron coronavirus variant on the bricks-and-mortar retail sector, which has already been hit hard by the long-running pandemic.—AFP ■

Ministry of Electricity and Energy

Invitation for Expression of Interest –EOI

1. The Ministry of Electricity and Energy hereby announced an Invitation to Expression of Interest – EOI to the eligible Consultant/ Consulting firm who has international experiences to provide the consultancy services by technically, commercially and legally to assist in preparation of the Tender for the renovation and leasing of the existing Fertilizer Plants and Refineries and constructing of new Fertilizer Plants and Refinery under the Ministry of Electricity and Energy.
2. EOI proposals shall be submitted to the following address in person or by parcel express not later than (12:00) noon at the date of 27 January 2022;
Director (Planning and Economic Branch)
Oil and Gas Planning Department
Office No. 6, Nay Pyi Taw
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3. The required information for EOI can be available in the Ministry's Website https://www.moee.gov.mm. Please contact to the above mentioned address to enquire further information in office hours.

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
M.V SINAR POMALAA VOY.NO. (074N)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V SINAR POMALAA VOY.NO. (074N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **25-12-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **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
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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.

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Agent For:

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M.V KOTA HALUS VOY.NO. (KHLU0192N)

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V KOTA HALUS VOY.NO. (KHLU0192N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **25-12-2021** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **AWPT** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.
Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S ADVANCE CONTAINER LINES

NEWS IN BRIEF

Bethlehem subdued for second pandemic Christmas

In Bethlehem's Manger Square, visitors in Santa hats and scouts beating drums marked Christmas Eve on Friday, but numbers were lower than usual as coronavirus fears overshadowed celebrations for a second straight year.

The city where Christians believe Jesus was born is usually a focal point of the holiday, with thousands packing the streets and filling hotels.

But Israel, which controls all entrances to Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank, barred its borders to foreigners in an effort to rein in infections from the Omicron strain of the coronavirus.

"It's very strange," said Kristel Elayyan, a Dutchwoman married to a Palestinian, who came to Bethlehem from Jerusalem.

"Before (the pandemic), you had a bunch of people coming in from different countries to celebrate Christmas, and now you know that everybody who is here is probably not a tourist."—AFP ■

Russia fines Google €86 million over banned content

A Moscow court slapped Google with an unprecedented hefty fine on Friday for repeatedly failing to remove illegal content as Russian authorities pile pressure on foreign tech giants.

The US firm was fined 7.2 billion rubles, ($98 million, €86 million), the court's press service said on Telegram.

Russia has recently heaped fines on the world's biggest tech companies, accusing them of not moderating their content properly and interfering in the country's affairs.

However, the fines that Meta (Facebook), Twitter, Google and other foreign tech giants received stretched into the tens of millions of rubles, not billions.

Interfax news agency reported that the fine was calculated as a percentage of Google's annual earnings.—AFP ■

Ethiopia govt says no further advance into Tigray

ETHIOPIA'S government said on Friday that its troops would not advance further into the war-torn region of Tigray but warned that the decision could be overturned if "territorial sovereignty" was threatened.

The announcement comes days after the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) rebel group declared a retreat to their Tigray stronghold, and signals a pause in fighting following a series of battlefield victories claimed by the government.

Although unconfirmed, the TPLF pullout from the Amhara and Afar regions had raised hopes there would be talks to end a 13-month conflict that has killed thousands and left parts of the country on the brink of famine. On Friday, the government communication service released a statement saying federal forces had secured eastern Amhara and Afar and been ordered to "vigilantly remain in areas under our control".—AFP ■

Cambodian PM Hun Sen's eldest son endorsed as successor

The Cambodian People's Party announced the endorsement of Hun Manet after the Central Committee of the party unanimously voted for him as the future prime minister. **PHOTO: AFP**

CAMBODIA'S ruling party endorsed the eldest son of Prime Minister Hun Sen as his successor in a move to establish a political dynasty, state media reported Friday.

The Cambodian People's Party announced the endorsement of Hun Manet after the Central Committee of the party unanimously voted for him as the future prime minister, according to the report.

But the party did not specify when he will succeed Hun Sen who has ruled the country for more than three decades.

Hun Manet, 44, is a top general in the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces who graduated from the US Military Academy at West Point.

Hun Sen said on 2 December that he wants his eldest son to be the next leader. The 70-year-old prime minister has held the position since 1985 and is known as the world's longest-serving prime minister.— Kyodo ■

High-speed train reaches Changbai Mountains in northeast China

A high-speed train is about to depart from the station of Changbaishan, or Changbai Mountains, in northeast China's Jilin Province, 24 December 2021. **PHOTO: XINHUA/LIN HONG**

A new high-speed railway line reaching the foot of the Changbai Mountains in northeast China's Jilin Province was put into operation on Friday.

At 7:35 am, a bullet train numbered G9127 departed from the Changchun railway station in the provincial capital Changchun for the station of Changbaishan, or Changbai Mountains, marking the start of official operations of the railway line.

The fastest train takes passengers only two hours and 18 minutes to travel from Changchun to the newly-built Changbaishan station more than 300 km away.

The railway, with a designed speed of 250 km per hour, will shorten the travel time between Beijing and Changbai Mountains to eight hours.

"It's a high-speed railway station with a great scenic view. Standing in the waiting hall, I can see the vast primeval forest," said Wang Peng, a tourist from Changchun after getting off at the Changbaishan station.

Changbai Mountain resort, located in southeastern Jilin, is famous for the stunning crater lake of Tianchi, primeval forests, and several renowned ski fields. Last year, the resort received over 700,000 tourists.—Xinhua ■

Tesla will no longer allow drivers to play video games in moving cars as US government probes safety risks. **PHOTO: TESLA/AFP**

Tesla, after probe, deactivates video games in moving cars

ELECTRIC automaker Tesla will update its vehicle software to prevent drivers from playing video games on the console while the car is in motion, US traffic safety regulators said Thursday.

"Following the opening of a preliminary evaluation of Tesla's 'Passenger Play', Tesla informed the agency that it is changing the functionality of this feature," a spokesperson for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in a statement emailed to AFP.

"In a new software update, 'Passenger Play' will now be locked and unusable when the vehicle is in motion."

The agency had announced it had launched an investigation into some 580,000 Tesla cars after the automaker's decision to allow drivers to play on the entertainment system's touch screen while the vehicle was moving.—AFP ■

Pope calls for humility in Christmas Eve mass

POPE Francis Friday called on the faithful to value the "little things in life" and show solidarity with the poor in his Christmas Eve mass in St. Peter's Basilica.

Some 2,000 members of the public and 200 religious figures attended, wearing face masks and respecting social distancing as part of measures against the coronavirus, the Vatican's press office said.

Those who had not managed to grab a ticket watched on huge screens outside St Peter's Basilica.

The 85-year-old Argentinian pontiff recalled the shepherds in the tale of the nativity, who lived modestly and were witness to the birth of Jesus.

"That is where Jesus is born: close to them, close to the forgotten ones of the peripheries. He comes where human dignity is put to the test."

He called for people to seek out "littleness" — in "our daily lives, the things we do each day at home, in our families, at school and in the workplace".

"Jesus asks us to rediscover and value the little things in life," he said. Francis, formerly the Archbishop of Buenos Aires Jorge Mario Bergoglio, called for more solidarity with those living in poverty. "On this night of love, may we have only one fear: that of offending God's love, hurting him by despising the poor with our indifference," he said.

It was the second such Christmas Eve mass during the coronavirus pandemic.

Last year, barely some 200 people — mostly Vatican employees — attended.—AFP ■

The 85-year-old Argentinian pontiff recalled the shepherds in the tale of the nativity, who lived modestly and were witness to the birth of Jesus. **PHOTO: VATICAN MEDIA/AFP**

NEWS IN BRIEF

Guadeloupe protesters seize legislature in standoff with Paris

PROTESTERS in Guadeloupe on Friday occupied the local legislature in the French Caribbean overseas territory, in a new flare-up of a standoff with Paris sparked by Covid rules.

There have been tensions in Guadeloupe and the neighbouring island French territory of Martinique during the last weeks over rules including obligatory Covid vaccinations for healthworkers that have fed into long-standing local grievances. Protesters first entered the debating chamber of the regional council while it was meeting on Thursday with several staying the night and deciding to continue their action into Friday. Councillors were able to leave peacefully.—AFP ■

Death toll rises to 16 in latest Greece migrant boat accident

At least sixteen people died when a migrant boat sank in the Aegean, Greece's coastguard said early Saturday, just hours after a similar incident claimed another 11 lives. The latest tragedy — the third since Wednesday — came amid high smuggler activity not seen in Greek waters in months. According to Athens News Agency, the coastguard found 16 bodies late Friday, including those of three women and a baby, and rescued 63 people from a boat that overturned and sank near the island of Paros.—AFP ■

US became 'arrogant' after fall of Soviet Union: Gorbachev

THE United States grew "arrogant and self-confident" after the collapse of the Soviet Union, leading to the expansion of the NATO military alliance, former leader Mikhail Gorbachev said on Friday.

In recent years President Vladimir Putin has grown increasingly insistent that NATO is encroaching close to Russia's borders, and Moscow last week demanded "legal guarantees" that the US-led alliance halt its eastward expansion.

Gorbachev resigned as president of the Soviet Union on 25 December 1991, days after the leaders of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine said the USSR no longer existed.

"How can one count on equal relations with the United States and the West in such a position," Gorbachev told state news agency RIA Novosti on the eve of the anniversary of his resignation as the leader of the USSR.

He said there was a "triumphant mood in the West, especially in the United States" after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.—AFP ■

In this file photo taken on 8 December 2021, A woman walks past a huge state emblem of the USSR which was removed from an avenue after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, in a modern history sculpture park in Moscow on 8 December 2021. **PHOTO: ALEXANDER NEMENOV / AFP/FILE**

Libya has had no political stability since the 2011 uprising that ousted Muammar Qaddafi. Libya split between warring eastern and western factions in 2014. **PHOTO: AFP**

Libya urged to reschedule presidential vote 'swiftly'

THE US and four European powers on Friday urged war-torn Libya to quickly set a new date for delayed presidential elections.

In a joint statement, they urged the North African country's leaders to "swiftly" name a new date and issue the final list of presidential candidates, which had been a key point of contention in the run-up to the polls that were set for Friday.

"We call on the relevant Libyan authorities to respect the aspirations of the Libyan people for prompt elections," said Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the United States.

The authorities overseeing the country's first-ever presidential election said earlier this week that holding it on Friday as scheduled would be "impossible".

The vote was intended to mark a fresh start for the oil-rich country, a year after a landmark ceasefire and more than a decade after its 2011 revolt that toppled and killed dictator Moamer Kadhafi.—AFP ■

Myanmar striker Win Theingi Tun shows good performance in Indian club

MYANMAR women's national team striker Win Theingi Tun has extended his contract with Indian club Gokulam, according to the team's statement.

Win Theingi Tun has signed a two-month contract extension with the Indian football club due to her brilliant performance, football authorities said.

Under the new contract, Win Theingi Tun will stay until the end of April 2022 and is playing in the Indian Women's League.

Win Theingi Tun struggled to fit in when she first arrived at Gokulam, but is now in good form and is scoring goals.

Win Theingi Tun is the first Myanmar female footballer to go abroad, and the opportunity to play abroad is likely to improve a lot, including her experience, football officials said.

Win Theingi Tun has not been able to join the Myanmar squad due to playing for an Indian club and will only be in India to compete in the Asian Cup, football authorities stated. —Ko Nyi Lay/GNLM ■

Winter Games longshots set sights on Olympic glory on Montenegro's slopes

AFTER dabbling in modelling in Asia and later working in high finance in London, Benjamin Alexander's life took an unlikely turn in his early 30s when the Jamaican national took up alpine skiing and set his sights on Olympic glory.

As the sole member of the Jamaican national ski team, Alexander faces an uphill climb to the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing in 2022, where he hopes to compete in the giant slalom event.

Alexander was among a dozen athletes—including others from far-flung warmer climates like Morocco, Ghana, and East Timor—competing in Montenegro's Kolasin this week, where skiers were hoping to rack up points in a final dash to qualify for the games in Beijing next year.

For Alexander, a trip to China for the games would cap an improbable journey for a novice skier who only first picked up the sport six years ago on a whim during a holiday in Canada.

Jamaica's Benjamin Alexander was among a dozen athletes including others from far-flung warmer climates like East Timor competing in Montenegro's Kolasin this week hoping to rack up points to qualify for the Winter Olympics in Beijing. **PHOTO: AFP**

"I went out without an instructor, I went down this run and I fell over 27 times," Alexander tells AFP. "I just kept doing the same run over and over and over and over again."

Since then, it's been constant improvement for the 38-year-old. "I became obsessed," he adds, saying in the past two years alone he skied more than 450 days.

Cool runnings

Alexander readily admits that he stands little chance against the sports elites—many of whom have been skiing since they were toddlers and have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars into their careers over the years.—AFP ■

Rodgers confident Leicester will avoid Liverpool hangover against Man City

LEICESTER City manager Brendan Rodgers believes his side will recover quickly from their agonizing penalty shoot-out exit from the League Cup when they face Premier League leaders Manchester City on Sunday.

The Foxes twice conceded a two-goal lead in their midweek League Cup quarter-final against Liverpool—including an equalizer deep into added time—before losing on spot-kicks.

Adding to the pain of defeat, Leicester defenders Caglar Soyuncu and Ricardo Pereira were forced off while star striker Jamie Vardy played the last 20 minutes with a tight hamstring.

None of which augurs well for Leicester's fixture against Premier League leaders City, even though the Foxes have won two of their last four meetings against Pep Guardiola's side.

"There is always disappointment but I said before the game 'You are coming to Anfield, a great place to play, and whatever happens let's impose our way'," said former Liverpool manager Rodgers on Friday. "That's what I've always had from these players. They have been competitive against the best teams in the country and we saw that, we just couldn't do enough to get over the line." —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.

Gerrard says players deserve credit for Villa's rise

STEVEN Gerrard said Friday his players deserved the credit for Aston Villa's climb up the Premier League table since he took charge of the Birmingham club. Villa had lost five straight league matches and were just two points above the relegation zone when Gerrard left Scottish champions Rangers to replace Dean Smith, sacked as manager in November.

Since Gerrard's arrival at Villa Park, the club have climbed from 16th to 10th and will be bidding for a fifth win in seven league games when they are at home to Chelsea on Sunday.

"I had confidence and belief that we could come in and have the impact that we've had," said Gerrard, who brought several of his coaching staff with him from Glasgow giants Rangers. "The players deserve the credit for going and carrying those performances out."—AFP ■

Premier League: Manager Steven Gerrard believes Aston Villa players deserve credit. **PHOTO: AFP**