

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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Monday, 28 February 2022

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.

Jewelled stake driven for construction of chamber in Maravijaya Buddha Park



A ceremony to drive a jewelled stake for construction of the chamber took place at the Maravijaya Buddha Park in Dekkhinathiri Township of Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory yesterday morning.

Members of the Sangha led by Paukmyaing Monastery Abbot of Lewe Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru Bhaddanta Janinda and Maha Thihanada Monastery Abbot Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru Bhaddanta Acinna of Tatkon attended the ceremony together with Chairman of the State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Vice-Chairman of the Council Deputy Prime Minister Vice-Senior General Soe Win, Council members, Union ministers and officials.

The ceremony was opened with Ratanattaya Puja verse and two stanzas of dispersing Metta three times.

The venerable abbots sprinkled scented Paritta water on the jewelled stake and a stake driver.

The Senior General drove the stake in the centre of the stake area and sprinkled scented Paritta water on it.

Vice-Senior General Soe Win,

Council members General Mya Tun Oo, Admiral Tin Aung San, Mahn Nyein Maung, Lt-Gen Soe Htut, Lt-Gen Yar Pyae, Union Ministers U Wunna Maung Lwin and U Ko Ko drove the stakes at the designated places.

The ceremony ended with recitation of Jayanto Bodhiyam-ule verses and Buddha Sasanam Ciram Titthatu three times.

At the briefing hall, Lt-Gen Kyaw Swa Lin and Lt-Gen Kan Myint Than from the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Army) reported to the Senior General on work progress in building the Buddha image. The Senior General instructed officials to grow trees before monsoon, make Myanmar handicraft and systematically complete the works.

The Senior General and party inspected carving of part 1 and part 2 of Maravijaya Buddha image with the use of modern machinery and attended to the needs of officials.

The Senior General inspected use of CNC machine in carving the nine feet high Buddha images into the marble rock and viewed round the Buddha park by car.—MNA

State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing drives the jewelled stake in the centre of the stake area in Maravijaya Buddha Park in Dekkhinathiri Township on 27 February.

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To build strength within the country!

- In the first, our economy will be developed by our internal strength. We have abundant natural resources and human resources. We have weakness in the socio-economic development of the people as we have been relying on external products or exports rather than our domestic production.
- Secondly, we will build our political strength internally. Building a Union and multiparty democratic system based on democracy and federalism will certainly enhance our political strength.
- Thirdly, the defence capability of the country should be strengthened with the participation of all ethnic national people. With united strength both in weals and woes, we all will build the defence capability of our country with modern military prowess (Army, Navy and Air Force).

(Excerpt from the speech made by the State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on one-year State responsibilities discharged by the State Administration Council

State Administration Council Press Release

Re-invitation to Myanmar citizens who reside in various regions for many reasons

1. Some student youths, State service personnel and citizens, with worries, have evaded to areas of EAOs and foreign countries due to the incitements and intimidation of NLD members, extremist followers, unlawful associations and terrorist groups such as CRPH and NUG, stimulation of CDM, and persons and organizations at home and abroad not wishing to restore peace and stability of the State since Tatmadaw assumed the State responsibilities on 1 February 2021.
2. They are further worried about the dictatorship statement and speeches of unlawful association and terrorist group CRPH and NUG, and some relevant persons. As they face no security guarantee and difficulties in socio-economic life in those areas, they wish to return to their native lands.
3. **The State Administration Council will specifically ease restrictions for service personnel, intellectuals and intelligentsia, and persons from various arenas and citizens who, with worries, absconded from the country except for persons who committed murders, robberies, setting fires, mine explosions and intentional attacks on security troops, those who crowded to attack public service personnel and some people, those who destroyed government and private-owned buildings and those who are highly involved in the CDM activities by providing monetary assistance and other means.**
4. As those who evade their native areas are also citizens, the State Administration Council will arrange their returns from the evaded areas to various parts of Myanmar.
5. As such, the information was released that if those who evaded to various areas, except for persons who committed any kinds of crime, wish to return to their native lands in Myanmar of their own accord due to multiple worries, the citizens abroad can contact nearby ward, village, township and district administration bodies and relevant embassies, military attaché offices and consulates in accord with the easing restrictions under the law.

*Information Team
State Administration Council*

THE State Administration Council will specifically ease restrictions for service personnel, intellectuals and intelligentsia, and persons from various arenas and citizens who, with worries, absconded from the country except for persons who committed murders, robberies, setting fires, mine explosions and intentional attacks on security troops, those who crowded to attack public service personnel and some people, those who destroyed government and private-owned buildings and those who are highly involved in the CDM activities by providing monetary assistance and other means.

Myanmar War Veterans Organization issues statement

12th Waning of Tabodwe 1383 ME

27 February 2022

1. The Gambia, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), filed a case against Myanmar at the International Court for Justice (ICJ).
2. As the Gambia submitted the second pleading at the ICJ in the Netherlands on 21 February 2022, the Myanmar delegation led by the Agent of Myanmar, Union Minister for International Cooperation U Ko Ko Hlaing and the Alternate Agent of Myanmar, Union Minister for Legal Affairs Attorney-General of the Union Dr Thida Oo attended the hearing.
3. It was delightful that Agent of Myanmar, Union Minister for International Cooperation U Ko Ko Hlaing presented the opening statement. In his opening statement related to the first round of preliminary objection, the international advocates representing Myanmar stated that in arguing that the Court lacks jurisdiction or that the case is inadmissible, in accord with the legal analysis and references under the relevant laws.
4. The Myanmar War Veterans Organization welcomes and supports the concluding speech of Union Minister U Ko Ko Hlaing on 25 February 2022 and presentations of Union Minister for Legal Affairs and Attorney-General of the Union Daw Thida Oo and international advocates representing Myanmar that the Court lacks jurisdiction over the pleading of the Gambia or the case is inadmissible to file Myanmar, at the second-day session of the Court.
5. The statement was hereby issued that the organization honours the Myanmar delegation led by Union Minister U Ko Ko Hlaing and international advocates representing Myanmar, who strive for protecting the interests of the State and the citizens for justice under the law, and the Myanmar War Veterans Organization stands with them.

Myanmar War Veterans Organization

New special postage stamp to feature traditional costume during Konbaung Dynasty



Two kinds of postage stamps bear costumes of people in Konbaung era.

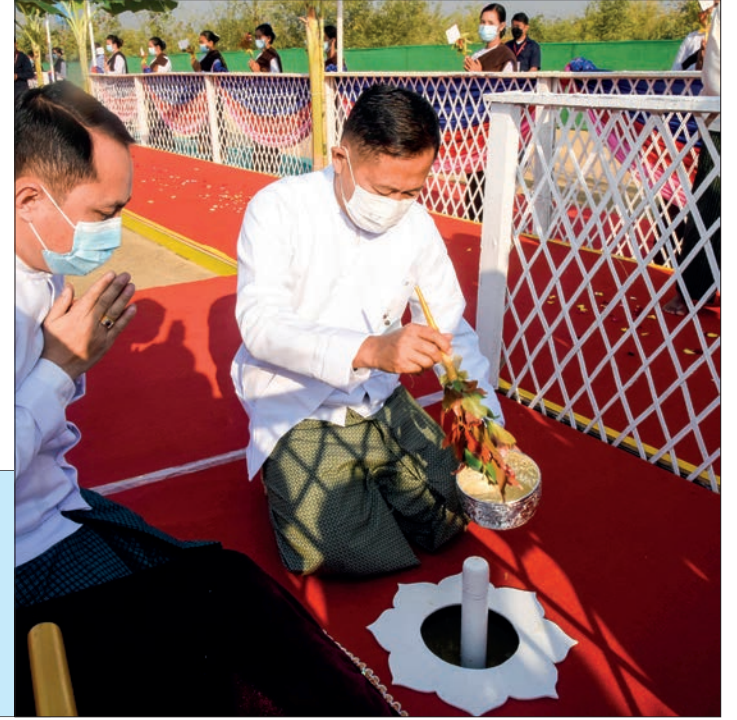
THE Myanmar Post under the Ministry of Transport and Communications will issue two new postage stamps (worth K200) at 9:30 am on 2 March 2022 (1st Waxing of Tabaung 1383 ME), depicting the traditional costumes of men and women in Konbaung Dynasty. The new series will be sold at Central Post Office in Nay Pyi Taw,

General Post offices in Yangon and Mandalay and other post offices in each region and state. To mark a special event, the postage stamps which will be purchased at Central Post Office in Nay Pyi Taw and General Post offices in Yangon and Mandalay on 2 March will have sealed the date marking.—MNA

Jewelled stake driven for construction of chamber in Maravijaya Buddha Park



State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing views progress of carving Buddha image into marble rock in Maravijaya Buddha Park in Dekkhinathiri Township on 27 February.



Vice-Chair of the Council Deputy Prime Minister Vice-Senior General Soe Win sprinkles scented Paritta water on jewelled stake.



The stake-driving ceremony for construction of Chamber in progress in Dekkhinathiri Township on 27 February.



Photo shows scale model of the Chamber to be built in Buddha park.

CASE CONCERNING APPLICATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE PREVENTION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE

(THE GAMBIA v. MYANMAR)

25 FEBRUARY 2022

SPEECH OF MR CHRISTOPHER STAKER

LEAD COUNSEL AND ADVOCATE FOR MYANMAR

FIRST AND FOURTH PRELIMINARY OBJECTIONS

Introduction

Madam President, Mr. Vice-President, Members of the Court,

1. The parties were reminded at the end of the first round that there is no need in the second round to repeat any statements already made.¹

2. In this second round, I will first present arguments in respect of the first and fourth preliminary objections. Professor Talmon will then address the second preliminary objection, followed by Professor Kolb who will deal with the third. The Agent for the Republic of the Union of Myanmar will then close Myanmar's second round.

General matters

3. However, before turning to the individual preliminary objections, I will first address three general matters arising out of The Gambia's first round of oral argument.

4. The first matter is this. The Gambia acknowledged several times during the first round that the Provisional Measures Order² considered issues of jurisdiction and admissibility only on a prima facie basis.³ That is correct. In that Order, the Court expressly observes that at the provisional measures stage, it "need not satisfy itself in a definitive manner that it has jurisdiction as regards the merits of the case" [*n'a pas besoin de s'assurer de manière définitive qu'elle a compétence quant au fond de l'affaire*].⁴ Issues of admissibility are dealt with in the Order on the same prima facie basis.⁵

5. Thus, paragraph 85 of the Provisional Measures Order states unequivocally that that Order "in no way prejudices the question of the jurisdiction of the Court



... and admissibility of the Application" [*ne préjuge en rien la question de sa compétence ... ni aucune question relative à la recevabilité de la requête ...*], and that that Order "leaves unaffected the right of ... Myanmar to submit arguments and evidence in respect of those questions" [*laisse intact le droit ... du Myanmar de faire valoir leurs moyens et éléments de preuve à cet égard*]. The Court itself thereby clearly acknowledges the right of Myanmar to request that the same issues of jurisdiction and admissibility be determined on a definitive basis at a subsequent preliminary objections phase.

6. Despite this clear indication from the Court, statements were made by The Gambia in the first round suggesting that the four preliminary objections have somehow already been decided by the Court at the provisional measures stage, and that the Court's decision should not

change, given that nothing has changed in the meantime.⁶

7. However, if the preliminary objections have not been prejudged in any way, as paragraph 85 of the Provisional Measures Order makes clear, then in the present phase of the proceedings, the preliminary objections must be subject to a full de novo consideration, in the light of the comprehensive arguments and evidence of the parties. Not only is the Provisional Measures Order not decisive, it is not even a starting point. At this stage, it is no longer material at all to the particular issues now under consideration.

8. The second matter is this. The preliminary objections are entirely independent of the merits of the case. Despite this, during the first round, counsel for The Gambia have made various statements which pertain to The Gambia's substantive claim in the case, or pertain to claims of other events in Myanmar unrelated to

the preliminary objections.⁷ These statements of The Gambia obviously call for no reply at all in the context of the present hearing, which is confined to the preliminary objections, and Myanmar's failure to address these statements cannot be considered as any kind of concession.

9. The third matter is this. The preliminary objections fall to be decided in accordance with the law governing the jurisdiction of the Court and the admissibility of cases. This is so self-evident that it should not need to be stated. However, I do state it because The Gambia has made statements that possibly imply otherwise. During the first round, The Gambia made statements to the effect, for instance, that only the Court has any influence over Myanmar,⁸ that if the Court does not exercise jurisdiction Myanmar will be accountable to no one,⁹ that maintaining the existing provisional measures is essential,¹⁰ that the Court bears a responsibility for upholding the Genocide Convention,¹¹ and that the preliminary objections are in conflict with the aims of that Convention.¹²

10. Given that the preliminary objections are independent of the merits, it is difficult to see why these statements were made by The Gambia at this stage, unless The Gambia is suggesting that the Court should modify the law of jurisdiction and admissibility in its application to this case because of these contended matters. It is apparently suggested that in the case of the Genocide Convention, preliminary objections should be regarded as "concocted technicalities".¹³ Any such suggestion, if it is being made, should not be accepted. The Court cannot in any individual case expand its jurisdiction, or expand the

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1. CR 2022/2, p. 64.

2. Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar), Provisional Measures, Order of 23 January 2020, I.C.J. Reports 2020, p. 3 (hereinafter the "Provisional Measures Order").

3. CR 2022/2, p. 16, para. 10 (Reichler), p. 18, para. 20 (Reichler), p. 40, para. 4 (Pasipanodya), p. 61, para. 14 (Sands).

4. Provisional Measures Order, p. 9, para. 16.

5. Provisional Measures Order, p. 17, para. 42.

6. CR 2022/2, p. 11, para. 7 (Jallow), p. 18, para. 20 (Reichler), p. 40, para. 4 (Pasi-

panodya), p. 59, para. 6 (Sands), p. 62, para. 16 (Sands).

7. CR 2022/2, pp. 13-18, paras. 1-3, 7-19 (Reichler).

8. CR 2022/2, pp. 14-16, paras. 5-6 and 10 (Reichler).

9. CR 2022/2, pp. 11, 16, paras. 8 (Jallow), 10 (Reichler).

10. CR 2022/2, pp. 14, 27, para. 6 (Reichler), 33 (Loewenstein).

11. CR 2022/2, pp. 60-61, para. 12 (Sands).

12. CR 2022/2, pp. 61-63, paras. 14-17 (Sands).

13. CR 2022/2, p. 63, para. 19 (Sands).

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scope of admissibility of cases, simply because it is persuaded that it has a useful role to play in a particular situation. These statements of The Gambia are therefore not relevant to this hearing, and counsel for Myanmar do not need to address them.

11. The written preliminary objections acknowledge the importance of the Genocide Convention.¹⁴ However, no matter how important it may be, it remains subject to general rules of international law governing the jurisdiction of the Court and the admissibility of cases,¹⁵ as well as for instance rules relating to reservations to treaties.¹⁶ It is trite law that the Court does not have jurisdiction over every alleged breach of international law by every State in every situation. The Court must determine whether as a matter of law it has jurisdiction and the case is admissible, not whether it would be desirable for that to be the case.

First preliminary objection

Madam President, Members of the Court,

12. With that, I turn to the first preliminary objection. As I noted in the first round, this involves a main question of fact and a main question of law.

13. As to the question of fact, in the first round The Gambia provided no further particulars of its dealings with the OIC and other member States, and certainly no further evidence of these matters. It did, however, make certain further general statements, unsupported by evidence, such as that “The Gambia assumed a leadership role”,¹⁷ and that it was The Gambia that conceived of the idea of bringing this case.¹⁸ These statements cannot be treated as facts or evidence.

14. The Gambia refers dismissively to the evidence before the Court as “an eclectic variety of websites, articles, tweets and press releases”.¹⁹ However, key items of this evidence are material issued by the OIC, the United Nations, the Government of The Gambia or its representatives, and other OIC member States, as well as media reports of statements of Governments.²⁰ It remains the case that The Gambia has not denied the specific contents of any of this material. 15. Indeed, The Gambia has now ex-

pressly confirmed that its decision to bring this case was taken by its Cabinet only in July 2019, at which the Cabinet endorsed a proposal of the OIC.²¹

16. The Gambia has also not denied, and indeed, has impliedly accepted, the evidence relating to the funding arrangements for the case.²²

17. The Gambia says that Myanmar has “glided over the evidence that matters”.²³ This “evidence that matters” is said to include the opening statement of The Gambia’s Agent at the provisional measures hearing.²⁴ However, the Agent was not appearing as a witness, and that opening statement cannot be treated as evidence. In any event, that opening statement gives no additional particulars of the dealings between The Gambia and the OIC and its other member States leading up to these proceedings. It merely describes a visit that the Agent made to camps in Bangladesh in early 2018 as part of an OIC delegation.²⁵

18. The only other “evidence that matters” identified by The Gambia are the 25 September 2018 statement of the President of The Gambia to the General Assembly, and the 11 October 2019 Note Verbale.²⁶ The Gambia appears to argue that this evidence shows that The Gambia took actions itself, acting in its own name, and doing so voluntarily.²⁷

19. However, that is not to the point. In any case where a State acts on behalf of a third party as its proxy, the proxy will typically itself undertake the relevant actions itself in its own name, and will almost invariably do so voluntarily. There may be any number of reasons why it agrees voluntarily to act on behalf of a third party as its proxy, but as The Gambia says, motivation is irrelevant to issues of jurisdiction. The question is therefore not whether the applicant State is voluntarily undertaking actions itself, in its own name. The question is whether the voluntary actions that it is undertaking itself in its own name are in fact being undertaken on behalf of a third party as the third party’s proxy. That is a question of fact to be decided on the evidence.

20. In short, The Gambia’s first round arguments take the facts no further. The state of the evidence before the Court is

the same as it was before the first round. 21. Contrary to what The Gambia suggests, it is not Myanmar’s case that The Gambia is the real applicant by reason alone that it receives support from others.²⁸ Myanmar contends that the OIC is the real applicant by virtue of all of the circumstances that have previously been set out by Myanmar. I do not repeat all the details. Essentially, the evidence shows that the proposal to bring this case was made by the OIC Committee and endorsed by the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, after which the Islamic Summit decided that the OIC Committee should bring the case on behalf of the OIC. It was only afterwards that the OIC then proposed to The Gambia that it be the applicant State and The Gambia agreed. That looks more like The Gambia providing assistance to the OIC than like the OIC providing assistance to The Gambia.

22. I move on then to the question of law. It is common ground that the issue of proxy States has never arisen before.²⁹ There are two points made in reply.

23. First, contrary to what The Gambia suggests, Article 35, paragraph 1, of the Statute, is not fatal to Myanmar’s argument.³⁰ It has no impact on Myanmar’s arguments at all.

24. This provision states that “[t]he Court shall be open to the States parties to the present Statute” [« *La Cour est ouverte aux Etats parties au présent Statut* »].

25. Apart from anything else, this does not in any way qualify, or create an exception to, Article 34, paragraph 1, which provides that only States may be parties in cases before the Court. Additionally, Article 35, paragraph 1, does not suggest that the Court is “open” to international organizations or other entities that are not States. Furthermore, the mere fact that a State is a party to the Statute of the Court, and that the Court is therefore “open” to it pursuant to Article 35, paragraph 1, does not mean that the Court will have jurisdiction over any case brought by that State, or that any case brought by that State will be admissible.

26. The arguments previously presented in relation to Article 34, paragraph 1, apply equally to Article 35, paragraph 1,

and the latter provision takes matters no further. The academic texts relied on by The Gambia in this respect³¹ were not addressing the issue now before the Court, and are not inconsistent with Myanmar’s arguments.

27. Secondly, The Gambia conflates two separate issues, namely the motivation of a State for bringing proceedings, and the question of whether the applicant State is in fact bringing proceedings on behalf of another State or entity. The Gambia argues that if the applicant brings proceedings because another State or entity wants it to, that is simply the applicant State’s motivation for doing so, and that motivation is irrelevant to jurisdiction.³² This is incorrect. I will not repeat arguments I have already made, indicating how the use of proxy States by States and other entities not entitled to bring a case would be contrary to principles of reciprocity, good faith and effectiveness.³³ The bringing of a case as proxy for a third party engages principles and issues going well beyond the principle that motivation is irrelevant to jurisdiction. This distinction is far from “artificial”.³⁴

Fourth preliminary objection

Madam President, Members of the Court,

28. I move on to the fourth preliminary objection.

29. As to the legal principles, Myanmar has not abandoned anything stated in the written preliminary objections.³⁵ I note that some of the definitions of a “dispute” found in the case law³⁶ may in fact be worded somewhat too broadly to reflect the actual principles applicable to determine if there is a dispute.³⁷ Myanmar contends that the correct principles are those set out in its pleadings and oral argument.

30. I have already explained why the requirement for both parties to be aware of the other’s position is reflected in the *Marshall Islands* cases.³⁸ I have also already explained why, contrary to what is claimed by The Gambia,³⁹ this requirement would not give the respondent a “silent veto” over the bringing of cases before this Court.⁴⁰

31. Contrary to what The Gambia sug-

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14. POM, para. 15.

15. POM, para. 505.

16. Reservations to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 1951, p. 23.

17. CR 2022/2, p. 23, para. 16 (Loewenstein).

18. CR 2022/2, p. 25, para. 23 (Loewenstein) (“it was The Gambia that conceived the idea of bringing a case against Myanmar under the Genocide Convention”).

19. CR 2022/2, p. 22, para. 12 (Loewenstein).

20. POM, paras. 69-137.

21. CR 2022/2, pp. 25-26, paras. 26-27 (Loewenstein).

22. CR 2022/2, p. 26, para. 29 (Loewenstein).

23. CR 2022/2, p. 22, para. 12 (Loewenstein).

24. CR 2022/2, pp. 22-23, paras. 13-15 (Loewenstein).

25. CR 2019/18, pp. 17-18, paras. 6-7 (Tambadou); CR 2022/2, pp. 22-23, paras. 13-15 (Loewenstein).

26. CR 2022/2, pp. 23-24, paras. 17-22 (Loewenstein).

27. See also CR 2022/2, p. 25, para. 25 (Loewenstein).

28. CR 2022/2, pp. 25-27, paras. 24-25, 29, 31 (Loewenstein).

29. CR 2022/1, p. 27, para. 60 (Staker); compare CR 2022/2, p. 20, para. 5 (Loewenstein).

30. CR 2022/2, pp. 20-21, paras. 2-3, 6 (Loewenstein).

31. CR 2022/2, p. 21, paras. 6 and 9 (Loewenstein).

32. CR 2022/2, pp. 21-22, paras. 7-10 (Loewenstein).

33. CR 2022/1, pp. 24-25, paras. 48-50 (Staker).

34. CR 2022/2, p. 22, para. 10 (Loewenstein).

35. Cf CR 2022/2, p. 55, para. 39 (Suleman).

36. CR 2022/2, p. 49 and 55, para. 7 and 39 (Suleman).

37. POM, para. 511.

38. Cf CR 2022/2, p. 55, para. 40 (Suleman).

39. CR 2022/2, p. 48, para. 4 (Suleman), p. 56, paras. 41-43 (Suleman), p. 59, para. 7 (Sands).

40. CR 2022/1, p. 51, paras. 16-17 (Staker).

SPEECH OF MR CHRISTOPHER STAKER LEAD COUNSEL AND ...

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gests, I did not say that the parties must enter into negotiations before a case is brought before the Court.⁴¹ Rather, I said that both parties must be aware of each other's position. Two parties can be aware of each other's opposing positions without any negotiations between them taking place or having yet taken place, and indeed, this will be a common situation. I did not say that the parties must attempt friendly settlement before going to Court.⁴² Rather, I said that because the Court is an alternative to the direct and friendly settlement of disputes, there will not be a dispute for purposes of Court proceedings unless there is a dispute that could be the subject of friendly settlement, and for this both parties would need to be aware of the other's views.⁴³

32. Contrary to what The Gambia suggests, I did not say that an applicant must articulate its claims in such detail

that it would effectively have to share a draft of the application with the potential respondent.⁴⁴ Rather, I made clear that only a minimum degree of particularity is required.⁴⁵

33. Contrary to what The Gambia apparently seems to suggest, the Court's case law does not indicate that there is any defined time after which silence by a respondent can be treated as positive opposition.⁴⁶ Clearly, the question whether a response is called for at all will depend on the individual facts of a particular case. If it is, the maximum reasonable length of time for a response will vary, depending on the circumstances of the particular case. I did not say that Myanmar was entitled to an indefinite or unlimited amount of time to respond. I said that the Note Verbale did not call for a response at all, but that even if it did, a reasonable time for a response would have been more than a month.

34. For the reasons given earlier in the

written and oral arguments, matters relied on by The Gambia as establishing the existence of a dispute, apart from the 11 October 2019 Note Verbale, could not possibly establish the existence of a dispute.

35. As to the Note Verbale, it is indeed correct that the Note Verbale did not state any facts. It merely referred to the findings in the FFM report, and to an OIC resolution. It is also indeed correct that there is no suggestion that The Gambia had access to the FFM's primary evidence on which the report was based, such as the witness interviews that it took. For all the reasons given earlier in the written and oral arguments, this Note Verbale was not a legal claim that called for a response.

36. The mere fact that The Gambia announced in the General Assembly on 26 September 2019, prior to sending the Note Verbale on 11 October 2019, that it intend-

ed to bring a case before this Court⁴⁷ does not mean that the Note Verbale should be considered to satisfy the prior dispute requirement if it otherwise would not.⁴⁸ Indeed, once The Gambia announced publicly on 26 September 2019 that it intended to bring a case before this Court, the failure of the Note Verbale to mention this intention gave rise to an even stronger inference that it was not a document that itself was raising a legal claim, since after 26 September 2019 there would have been an even stronger expectation that the Note Verbale would refer to this intention if it was a legal claim.

Madam President, Members of the Court,

37. That concludes my arguments on the first and fourth preliminary objections. I would invite you now to call on Professor Talmon, to address the second preliminary objection.

41. CR 2022/2, p. 56, para. 43 (Suleman).

42. Cf CR 2022/2, p. 56, para. 43 (Suleman).

43. CR 2022/1, p. 52, para. 20 (Staker).

44. CR 2022/2, p. 56, paras. 44-46 (Suleman).

45. CR 2022/1, esp p. 52-53, paras. 21, 25-26 (Staker).

46. CR 2022/2, p. 57, paras. 48 (Suleman).

47. POM, para. 676; WOG, para. 527; CR 2022/2, p. 55, paras. 36 (Suleman).

48. CR 2022/2, p. 57, paras. 48 (Suleman).

Yangon mayor inspects sanitation, drainage activities in Shwelinban Industrial Zone

YANGON Mayor U Bo Htay, in his capacity as chair of Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC), inspected removal of waste and sand around No 1 drainage outlet at the corner of Mekkhayar Minthagyi and Seikkantha roads in Shwelinban Industrial Zone in Hlinethaya Township with the help of labour force and an excavator yesterday.

Afterwards, they observed manufacturing of motor, water

pump, lawnmower and related equipment being manufactured at Shwe Nayar Co., Ltd in the zone.

Later, officials of Shwelinban Industrial Zone explained No.1 and 2 drains at Kanaung Hall of the management office in the zone. They reported on requirements to restore the water pond for fire safety measures located between U Aung Thu and Kyansitha roads. The mayor co-

ordinated the departments concerned to fulfill the needs.

Next, the mayor left for Mingala Lake on Khayaypin Road, Mingaladon Township and inspected repairs of spillway and retaining walls, culturing lawns, shade tree and landscaping works, installation of benches and lamp-posts along the pavements. He directed the officials concerned to keep Mingala Lake green and clean.—MNA



Yangon Mayor U Bo Htay views dredging of waste and sand at No 1 drainage outlet in Shwelinban Industrial Zone in Hlinethaya Township on 27 February.

Myanma insurance provides fast deposit payment for third party liability insurance, motor vehicle insurance premiums

MYANMA Insurance, which provides both life insurance and general insurance services, have launched the online payment system for third party liability insurance and motor vehicle insurance premiums with QR Code and MPU card so that the people can easily and quickly pay from home.

In developed countries internationally, state-owned insurance companies are increasingly involved in life insurance. Myanma Insurance provides over 40 types of insurance with over 20 types of general insurance and more than 20 types of life insurance, including fire insurance, motor vehicle insurance, aviation and marine insurance, oil and gas exploration insurance, personal accident insurance, entrepreneur liability insurance, engineering business insurance, miners' liability insurance.

"Life insurance is one of the fastest growing industries

in the world. There is a type of insurance that can be used to support the family of an accident survivor and a type that can be used to withdraw money at a certain time after saving," said U Lwin Oo, General Manager of Myanma Insurance (Yangon), Ministry of Planning and Finance.

"And there are two types of insurance: life insurance and general insurance, and it is also necessary to develop new insurance products that are compatible with our country," he continued.

"As a developing country, we often have to provide general insurance services based on per capita income. In providing compensation for public accident damage, we have arranged a fast and easy payment service with QR code and MPU card, which allows the people to deposit money from their home during the COVID-19 period," he added.—Nyein Thu (MNA)/GNLM

Domestic oil price surges on global cues in late February

FUEL oil prices are constantly edging up on the depreciation of Kyat against US dollar and a sharp increase in crude oil prices in the past two days, according to the filling stations in Yangon Region.

On 1 January 2022, the prices stood at K1,390 for Octane 92, K1,440 for Octane 95, K1,375 for diesel and K1,385 for premium diesel, whereas the prices inched higher to K1,745 for Octane 92, K1,800 for Octane 95, K1,720 for diesel and K1,730 for premium diesel. There is a price gap of K345-360 per litre within two months, according to the local fuel oil market.

The fuel oil price is highly correlated with the foreign exchange rate. At present, the exchange rate is pegged at around K2,000 in the local forex market.

Additionally, domestic oil price is positively related to global market. Oil prices



A taxi is taking filling of fuel at filling station in Yangon.

jumped in the global market as Russia-Ukraine crisis escalated, with US\$91.59 per barrel for WTI crude and \$97.93 for Brent crude at the present time.

When a dollar was valued only K1,330 in early February 2021, the fuel oil was estimated at K590 per litre for Octane 92, K610 for Octane 95, K590 for

diesel and K605 for premium diesel then in domestic retail market.

Consequently, in a bid to steer dollar rally in local forex

market, the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) sold US\$65 million at its auction market rate in January this year.

Additionally, the Ministry of Commerce in coordination with Myanmar Petroleum Trade Association implemented a scheme to distribute fuel oil at fairer rate through the government sponsored filling station chains starting from 22 September 2021. The total volume of fuel oil that are sold at very cheap rates is equivalent to the amount that the oil importers directly purchased the foreign currency from the CBM. The CBM has directly sold over \$87 million to the fuel oil sector so far.

Normally, Myanmar yearly imports 6 million tonnes of fuel oil from external markets, the Ministry of Commerce stated.—GNLM

Myanmar foreign trade tops \$11.95 bln as of 18 February 2022



Freight handling process is seen at the port of Myanmar for exportation of rice to foreign countries.

MYANMAR'S external trade as of 18 February in the current six-month mini-budget 2021-2022 (Oct-March) financial year period slid to US\$11.95 billion, which shows a drastic drop of \$765.9 million as against the year-ago period, the Ministry of Commerce's data showed.

The international trade stood at over \$12.72 billion in the corresponding period of last FY 2020-2021, according to the data released by the ministry.

Between 1 October 2021

and 18 February 2022, Myanmar's export was worth over \$6.1 billion whereas, the country's import was relatively low at \$5.85 billion.

The border trade drastically fell by \$1.9 billion as against the year-ago period owing to the closure of some border posts by the main trade partner China. However, the maritime trade was registered a significant increase of US\$1.15 billion.

Myanmar exports agricultural products, animal products, minerals, forest products,

and finished industrial goods while it imports capital goods, raw industrial materials, and consumer goods.

The country's export sector relies more on the agricultural and manufacturing sectors.

The Ministry of Commerce is focusing on reducing trade deficit, export promotion, import substitution and market diversification.

The external trade stood at \$29.58 billion in the 2020-2021 FY, as per the Commerce Ministry's statistics.—KK/GNLM

Edible oil prices shooting up tracking surge in global oil prices

THE price of palm oil significantly rose to 6,200 per viss (a viss equals to 1.6 kg) at present, following the increase in imported oil price, according to the Myanmar Edible Oil Dealers' Association.

The prevailing price of imported palm oil surged to over US\$1,560 per tonne, whereas it fetched only \$1,360 per tonne in early January. Tracking price hike of imported oil.

Palm oil price hit record high amid escalating Russia-Ukraine crisis. Moreover, the international traders are manipulating the price with a severe threat of supply disruptions. Another reason of hike is Kyat weakening against US dollar.

The Central Bank of My-

anmar (CBM) has sold US\$77 million to the edible oil sector in order to distribute the oil at subsidized prices so far. The edible oil is distributed with the mobile market trucks at the fairer price of K5,050 in some townships, in coordination with Myanmar Edible Oil Dealers' Association.

The domestic consumption of edible oil is estimated at 1 million tonnes per year. The local cooking oil production is just about 400,000 tonnes. To meet the self-sufficiency in domestic market, about 700,000 tonnes of cooking oil are yearly imported through Malaysia and Indonesia.

Myanmar imported palm oil worth of nearly US\$830 million in the previous financial year 2020-2021.—KK/GNLM



Workers are unloading barrels of edible oil from a truck.

Enhance the individual capacity of citizens to see a better future for the nation

Enhancement of individual capacity of citizens is the basic factor for nation-building tasks and having a strong and dynamic political system. According to the theories in political science, a human cannot stand in the unchangeable lifestyle but the streamline of evolution theory. As such, citizens must have high capacity in individuals and good critical thinking.

At this juncture, the developed countries are fully utilizing their human resources in the nation-building systems. Despite possessing lesser natural resources including lands and waters, some countries in Asia and Europe are wealthy. It is because they always give training to citizens for improvement of capacity higher and higher.

If the country misses a chance to efficiently deploy human resources despite possessing abundant natural resources, the development of the nation will be weak. As such, all the citizens need to always strive for enhancement of their individual capacity and participate in the nation-building endeavours by effectively utilizing the human resources.

Making efforts for the development of highly-qualified human resources of the country require prevailing peace and stability of the State as well as the rule of law in addition to the restoration of the perpetual peace. Youths have a chance to peacefully learn education. Their capacity enhancement depends on the collaboration of the government and the people in the correct attitudes.

If the country misses a chance to efficiently deploy human resources despite possessing abundant natural resources, the development of the nation will be weak. As such, all the citizens need to always strive for enhancement of their individual capacity and participate in the nation-building endeavours by effectively utilizing the human resources.

Hong Kong and Singapore virus response a tale of two very different cities

Rivals Singapore and Hong Kong have become pandemic polar opposites, the former opting to live with the coronavirus and reopen to the world while the latter doubles down on zero-Covid and its international isolation.

For decades the two cities have jostled to be Asia's premier international business hub, offering low taxes, dependable legal systems and seamless global connections.

Both adopted strict suppression tactics when the pandemic emerged, closing borders to keep infections low within their densely populated territories.

Now they present competing visions as they manage the highly transmissible Omicron variant — with Hong Kong floundering under soaring infections while Singapore offers a pandemic exit strategy.

In the heart of Singapore's financial district, analyst Camille Chautard sipped a coffee on a bench at Raffles Place during the busy lunchtime rush hour.

"Now that it seems the new variant is less deadly, or at least the infections are less severe, it's probably a good time for Singapore to lead the way in the region and open up," she told AFP.

Earlier this week, health minister Ong Ye Kung said Singapore was moving closer towards normalcy, noting that "Omicron poses less of a risk".

Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam had a starkly different message.

Announcing compulsory testing for all 7.4 million residents, the tightest social dis-



Hong Kong has announced compulsory testing for all 7.4 million residents and the tightest social distancing rules to date. PHOTO: GOVHK/AFP

tancing rules to date and plans to isolate all those infected, she said the city must "win the war".

"(Singapore) is miles ahead of Hong Kong in terms of dealing with these waves and especially mitigating the impact of the pandemic," Karen Grepin, a public health expert at the University of Hong Kong, told AFP.

Openings vs closures

The differences were clear on the streets this week.

In Singapore, children are back in class, residents are free to gather in hawkers centres or enjoy post-work drinks, and people fly in and out for business or

pleasure.

For Hong Kongers, in-person classes are suspended, businesses like bars and gyms remain closed, restaurants are only allowed to serve takeout in the evening, and international travel is increasingly impossible and involves lengthy quarantines.

"Zoom calls cannot replace the people-to-people connection...so (easing workplace restrictions) definitely helps," Singaporean businessman Vaibhav Dabhade told AFP.

"I believe that we still have an opportunity to open more, but so far the approach has been

fantastic."

Such upbeat commentary is hard to come by in Hong Kong.

"The government's current zero-Covid policy seems to go against the trend," lamented a 39-year-old telecommunications worker surnamed Wong as he finished submitting to a Covid test outside a shopping mall in Sha Tin district. "Every country around the world is living with the virus," he added, describing the mass testing orders as a "waste".

Politics vs health

Hong Kong and Singapore are currently reporting thou-

sands of infections per day and experts say the outbreak in both cities won't peak until sometime in March.

But as Hong Kong's health-care and isolation system collapses, Singapore has so far avoided such a fate.

The city decided last fall to transition away from zero-Covid after realising it was not sustainable to isolate and hospitalise all the infected, Grepin said.

"We can't constantly live in that sphere, and I think Singapore is much better off because they recognised this early on," she said. One key difference is the vaccination rate among the elderly. Around 95 percent of Singaporeans aged 70 or above have received at least one dose of vaccine, while the figure in Hong Kong is 61 percent despite ample supplies.

That severely limits Hong Kong's ability to transition to living with the virus.

But there is another reason the city's hands are tied — China.

Over the last six months Beijing has increasingly called the shots, ordering Hong Kong to stick to zero-Covid and decrying mitigation as a failed "Western" strategy.

Last week Chinese president Xi Jinping ordered Hong Kong to take "all necessary measures" to get the epidemic under control, reinforcing the reality that Hong Kong's post-pandemic future depends on Beijing.

"The decision to maintain a zero-Covid strategy after the advent of safe, effective vaccines is primarily a political decision as opposed to a public health decision," Grepin said.

SOURCE: AFP

Travel vs isolation

Singapore's approach has also come in for criticism, with some complaining about ever-changing, confusing restrictions.

And while the city's borders are slowly opening through quarantine-free travel with a number of countries, curbs are still tighter than in most Western countries, causing frustration for some foreign residents.

But compared to Hong Kong, which dubs itself "Asia's World City", travel ease is night and day.

Singapore's most recent data showed around 400,000 air passenger arrivals in December, while Hong Kong saw just 27,000 passengers in that same period.

"The longer (Hong Kong) endures the relatively restrictive mobility patterns compared to other hubs, the harder it will be to maintain its dominant position," Standard Chartered chief executive Bill Winters warned in a Financial Times report.

Even established mega-chains headquartered in Hong Kong are feeling the sting — James Riley, chief executive of the Mandarin Oriental hotel giant, told the FT most of their executive team were now working outside the city.

"As a base from which to run a business, it's very, very poor today," Riley said.

In a January survey, the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong asked member companies which city represented the "greatest competitive threat".

Eighty percent answered Singapore.

Aussie researchers uncover evolutionary "bursts" in COVID-19 variants

A new research led by Australia's Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity found that the COVID-19 virus is for short periods able to speed up its evolutionary pace and create variants faster than other viruses.

The research, published in the Molecular Biology and Evolution journal on Friday, detailed "mutational bursts" in the COVID-19 virus before returning to its "normal" rate of mutation.

Lead researcher Sebastian Duchene from the University of

Melbourne and his team conducted hundreds of genome sequences of strains of the novel coronavirus in an attempt to understand the mechanism by which "variants of concern" such as Delta or Omicron emerge.

"Initially it was believed that SARS-CoV-2 must have increased its evolutionary rate in general, but actually it's the virus's ability to temporarily increase its speed which is causing the difference in pace," said Duchene.

Successive variants of concern

The paper revealed that successive variants of concern such as Beta and Delta had mutated faster than earlier variants, noting differences of months to weeks.

It noted that the "substitution rate", the number of new mutations in each generation, would need to be four times faster than the background rate in order to generate the four variants of concern analyzed.

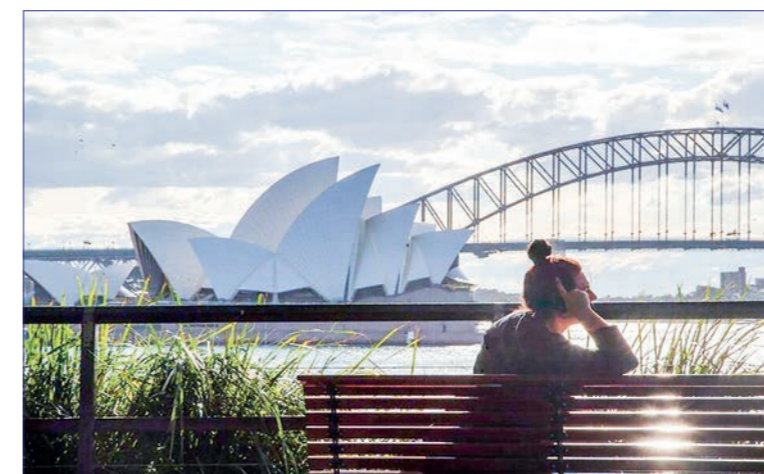
"The Delta variant, for ex-

ample, emerged within just six weeks from its ancestral form."

Duchene added that factors such as the strong natural selection of COVID-19 to avoid immunity and high levels of transmission, especially among unvaccinated populations, could all play a role in these periods of rapid mutation.

He said the findings highlighted the importance of maintaining genome sequencing efforts to ensure the early detection of new variants.

SOURCE: Xinhua



A woman is seen near the Sydney Opera House in Sydney, Australia, 26 August 2021. PHOTO: XINHUA

1,959 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 27 February, total figure rises to 586,198

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 586,198 after 1,959 new cases were reported on 27 February 2022 according to the Ministry of Health. Among these confirmed cases, 533,395 have been discharged from hospitals. Death toll reached 19,365 after 5 died.

COVID-19 vaccine is being injected to those of priority groups in regions and states for prevention and control of the disease. Up to 26-2-2022, a total of 23,586,822 people have been vaccinated. Of them, 20,919,933 people have been fully vaccinated and 2,666,889 people are yet to get the second shots.—MNA



Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Sunday 27 February 2022)

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL AFTERNOON OF THE 28 February 2022: Rain or thundershowers will be scattered in Taninthayi Region and Kachin State and isolated in Upper Sagaing, Yangon, and Ayeyawady regions and Chin, Kayin and Mon states. Degree of certainty is (80%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Bago Region and Kayah State 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 continuation of isolated rain or thundershowers in Taninthayi Region.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 28 February 2022: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 28 February 2022: Partly cloudy.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 28 February 2022: Generally fair weather.

The Global New Light of Myanmar

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Terrorists died while planting homemade mines in Mandalay



Two men under scrutiny die of homemade mine blasts in Chanmyathazi Township in Mandalay.

WHILE planting a homemade mine to commit terrorist attacks in Chanmyathazi Township, Mandalay Region, two terrorists died of the mine explosion yesterday morning.

The incident happened at the corner of the 73rd street and 107th street, Myothit (2) ward, Chanmyathazi Township, at around 5:20 am, and one pistol, one magazine, 14 rounds of 9mm ammunition, and two homemade mines were seized at the scene.

At the same time, a similar mine explosion happened near Yadanabon University traffic lights, killing one terrorist who was carrying a homemade mine in the toolbox of the motorcycle. Due to the mine explosion in the toolbox, the terrorist's lower body was amputated and he died at the scene.

It is reported that the death toll from the blasts is being investigated in accordance with police procedures.—MNA

Illegal teak, foodstuff, vehicles seized this week

UNDER the supervision of the Anti-Illegal Trade Steering Committee, effective action is being taken against offenders to prevent illegal trade in accordance with the law.

On 25 February, a combined inspection team under the management of the Anti-Illegal Trade Task Force seized 5.8346 tonnes of illegal timber (at estimated value K471,920) in An and Maungdaw townships, Rakhine State and action is being taken against crime breakers in accordance with the forest law.

Similarly, on 26 February in Mon State, a combined inspection team led by the Customs Department conducted inspections at the Mayangchaung Permanent Checkpoint.

On a 12-wheeler truck departing from Myawady to Yangon, a variety of undocumented shoes (estimated at K5.25 million) were seized and are being prosecuted in accordance with customs law.

Similarly, a team led by the Kawthoung Township Administrator and customs team conducted an inspection under the management of the Anti-Illegal Trade Task Force in Taninthayi Region.

Undocumented Thai foodstuffs (estimated at K1.46 million) were seized at the motor schooner Port in Kawthoung Township and action is being taken in accordance with customs law.

In addition, an inspection team led by the Myanmar Police Force conducted an investigation



Photo shows seized DT 125 motorcycles in Htigyaying Township.

under the management of the Anti-Illegal Trade Task Force yesterday in Sagaing Region.

Two unlicensed YAMAHA DT 125 motorcycles (at estimated

value K3 million) were seized in Htigyaying Township and action is being taken in accordance with the Import and Export Law.

Therefore, a total of six

arrests (estimated value is K10,181,920) were made on three consecutive days, according to the Anti-Illegal Trade Steering Committee.—MNA



A customs official checks seized undocumented shoes at Mayangchaung checkpoint.



Photo shows seized undocumented shoes.



Undocumented Thai foodstuffs were seized at motor schooner port in Kawthoung Township in Taninthayi Region.



Stimulant tablets seized in Thazi, Hopong townships

A combined team consisting of members of the Anti-Drug Police Force searched a motorbike driven by San Lwin (alias) Kar Kar accompanied by Soe Moe Aung (a) Kalar Gyi (a) Thwar Sin on the Taunggyi-Meiktila road, in South Phayangasu Village, Thazi Township, at 3 pm on 26 February and seized 1,700 stimulant tablets.

At 3:30 pm on the same day, a combined team consisting of members of the Anti-Drug

Police Force searched a Probox passenger van near mile post 134/0 on Hopong-Loilem Road, Honamh Village, Lonkhok Village-tract, Hopong Township and 4,000 stimulant tablets were confiscated from passenger Ma Nang Mo Kham (a) Molin.

They are being filed under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law, according to the Myanmar Police Force.—MNA

Suspect Ma Nang Mo Kham (a) Molin is seen with seized 4,000 stimulant tablets in Hopong Township.

Indian capital ends restrictions as Covid-19 cases fall

INDIA'S capital has announced the end of all the remaining coronavirus restrictions after government data showed cases of the recent Omicron variant had fallen.

The country recorded 11,499 new daily cases and 255 deaths, according to the health ministry's latest statistics on Saturday (26 February), a tiny fraction of those seen during the devastating peak last year.

Local officials in the Delhi region, which record-

ed 460 cases and two deaths on Friday, decided to lift a night curfew and allow restaurants to operate at full capacity.

Places of religious worship were also permitted to reopen.

Schools will function fully offline from 1 April while fines for not wearing masks were also reduced.

The area's disaster management authority "withdraws all restrictions as situation improves" and because people

were "facing hardships due to loss of jobs", Delhi's chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on Twitter.

India was battered by a devastating Covid-19 outbreak last year that saw 200,000 people killed in a matter of weeks, overwhelming hospitals and crematoriums.

Since the outbreak in 2020, India has officially recorded 42,905,844 cases and 513,481 deaths, third behind only the US and Brazil. — AFP ■



The Delhi region recorded 460 cases and two deaths on 25 February. PHOTO: AFP

Australia develops technology to preserve vaccines without refrigeration



Dr Daniel Layton, a CSIRO immunologist, said the breakthrough has the potential to enable more affordable and equitable access to vaccines across the world. PHOTO: CSIRO.AU/XINHUA

RESEARCHERS from Australia's national science agency have developed a technology that could eliminate the need to refrigerate vaccines.

In a study published on Tuesday, the team from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO)

found that encapsulating live virus vaccines in metal organic frameworks (MOFs) protects their integrity for up to 12 weeks at temperatures as high as 37 degrees Celsius.

Without refrigeration or the MOFs, the vaccines would last only a few days.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that each year at least 50 per cent vaccines are wasted globally due to the challenges of transporting them in a temperature-controlled environment, according to CSIRO.

Daniel Layton, a CSIRO immunologist, said the breakthrough has the potential to enable more affordable and equitable access to vaccines across the world. "Vaccination is undoubtedly one of the most effective medical interventions, saving millions of lives each year, however delivering vaccines, particularly to developing countries, is challenging because they often lack the cold storage supply chains required to keep the vaccine viable," he said in a media release. — Xinhua ■

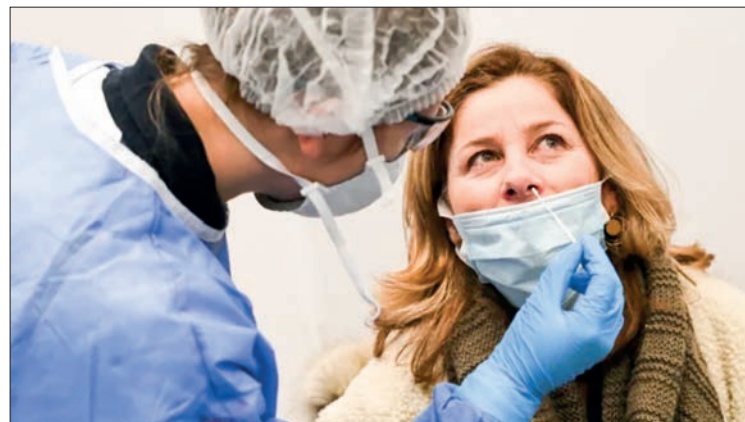
Reinfection with different Omicron subtypes possible: Danish study

REINFECTION with different sub-types of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 is possible, says a new study published by Denmark's Statens Serum Institut (SSI) on Tuesday.

However, "this seems to occur relatively rarely in Denmark, and reinfections have mainly affected younger unvaccinated individuals," the SSI, Denmark's public health and research institution, said.

"None of the infected individuals became seriously ill, and none required admission to hospital."

According to the study, PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests carried out on approximately two million Danes affected primarily by Omicron's sub-



The federal government announced on Tuesday that travellers to Canada will no longer have to take a pre-arrival PCR test when returning home from abroad, as of 28 February. PHOTO: BERTRAND GUAY/

types BA.1 and BA.2 revealed that "67 cases in which the same individual had become infected twice at a 20-60-day interval where both infections were due to Omicron sub-types." Accord-

ing to the study, until December 2021, the majority of those infected with Omicron in Denmark had been affected by BA.1, which was also the most prevalent subtype worldwide. — Xinhua ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Study finds gut health gets compromised in severe COVID-19

A new study of samples of intestines from people who have died of COVID-19 has shown the impact on the gut immune system.

THE findings of the study were published in the journal 'Frontiers in Immunology'.

The study looked at samples of the gastrointestinal tract from patients who died after being diagnosed with COVID-19 during the first wave of the pandemic.

Lymphoid tissue in the gut normally maintains healthy intestinal microbial populations which are essential for good health. Researchers observed that the system that would normally regulate the composition of the microbial communities – otherwise known as Peyer's Patches – were severely disrupted in severe COVID-19. This was irrespective of whether there was evidence of a virus present in the gut or not.

While severe COVID-19 can lead to breathing problems and high fever, some patients can experience diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting, which suggests the involvement of the gastrointestinal tract.

Professor Jo Spencer, from King's College London, said, "This study shows that in severe COVID-19, this key component of the immune system is disrupted, whether the intestine itself is infected with SARS-CoV-2 or not. This would likely contribute to the disturbances in intestinal microbial populations in COVID-19 reported by others." Observations of the samples found the structure and cellularity in Peyer's Patches – a grouping of lymphoid follicles that lines the small intestines – had been altered independently of the local levels of the virus. This included depletion of the germinal centres, which normally propagate antibody-producing cells, in patients who died

US CDC eases COVID-19 restrictions under new guidelines

THE US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has eased mask recommendations for the bulk of the country under a new framework that immediately affects about 70 per cent of Americans. "The new guidelines, which took effect Friday, reflect the administration's view that the United States has entered a different, potentially less dangerous phase of the pandemic," reported The Washington Post. The new guidelines suggest that 70 per cent of Americans can now stop wearing masks, and no longer need to keep social distance or avoid crowded indoor spaces. The change follows a relaxation of restrictions by most governors responding to nosediving case counts and public pressure.

"The shift reflects the reality that after more than two years of living with the virus, most communities have greater protection against severe disease because of widespread immunity gained from both vaccinations and infections, as well as the increased availability of treatments, testing and higher-quality masks," said the report. — Xinhua ■

West seeks to cripple Russian banks, currency in Ukraine sanctions



The headquarters of SWIFT, Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, in La Hulpe, Belgium near Brussels. **PHOTO: BELGA/AFP**

THE United States and Western allies sought to cripple Russia's banking sector and currency Saturday with an extraordinary set of sanctions punishing Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Taking measures unprecedented against a country of Russia's size and international stature, the allies cut selected banks from the SWIFT system, rendering them isolated from the rest of the world.

They hobbled the Russian central bank's ability to use reserves to support the already sinking ruble, which a senior US official said will now "go into freefall."

And they warned that a task force will "hunt down" the "yachts, jets, fancy cars and luxury homes" owned around the world by oligarchs in President Vladimir Putin's ultra-wealthy inner circle, the US official said.

The measures were backed by the United States, Canada, the European Commission, Britain, France, Germany and Italy. In a symbolic gesture likely to resonate in Moscow, which has been counting on European divisions to dilute Western fury over its Ukraine invasion, the stunning news was first delivered from Europe.

Far exceeding others imposed against Russia during Putin's two decades' long grip on power, the sanctions came as the Russian military stepped up its bloody, multi-pronged assault against Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities. Putin says the invasion is meant to restore control over a country that was long dominated by Russia but now wants to join Western institutions.

The group of world powers said in a statement it was "resolved to continue imposing costs on Russia that will further isolate Russia from the international financial system and our economies." — AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ukraine war complicates Fed's inflation fighting effort

THE uncertainty created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its impact on the global economy is piling more complexity onto the US central bank's already tough fight to contain rising prices.

Soaring energy and food costs have pushed inflation in the world's largest economy to the highest pace in four decades, and the Federal Reserve is poised to raise the benchmark borrowing rate in March to put out the fire.

But while the Russia-Ukraine conflict is driving oil prices even higher, it also threatens to undercut the economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

"It just makes a time that was always going to be challenging all the more so," Erica Goshen, a former senior Fed official, told AFP.

Fed policymakers will be "watching the data very carefully. It throws a few more considerations into the pot," said Goshen, senior economics advisor at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. Crude prices briefly topped \$100 a barrel on Thursday after Russia launched its invasion, the first time it passed that benchmark since 2014.

And wheat prices also could spike, as Ukraine is one of the top global exporters of the grain. — AFP ■

Cuban tobacco yield up in smoke amid fertilizer shortages

YURISNIEL Cabrera, 35, is a fourth-generation tobacco farmer, eking out a meager living from the leaves used to make Cuba's famed cigars. Clients can fork out more than \$10 for a single cigar, but for his months of labour, Cabrera earned only a few hundred US dollars from last year's harvest.

This year, the outlook is even bleaker.

Sanctions-stricken and facing its worst economic crisis in nearly three decades, Cuba is running low on fertilizers and pesticides.

The harvest "is not of a good enough quality," Cabrera sighed as he showed AFP around his crop amid the rounded hills dubbed mogotes that dot the fertile Vinales valley in western Cuba.

"It lacked fertilizer and pesticide," he said as he slipped a pile of leaves draped over his arm onto a "cuje," the wooden lathe used to dry the harvest in a rustic, wooden "tobacco house."

Like other farmers in Pinar del Rio province, where 65 per cent of Cuba's tobacco is produced, Cabrera sells 95 per cent of his yield to the Tabacuba state agency. — AFP ■

Brazil tourism sector tries to rise from pandemic ashes



Members of a carnival samba school perform in Rio de Janeiro on February 24, 2022. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

WITH the glittering parades, towering floats and sultry samba postponed by the omicron variant, Brazil will have a carnival week without much carnival this year — bad news for a tourism industry already battered by the pandemic.

In a world without Covid-19, this would have been the week a deluge of tourists — more than 2.1 million in 2020 — descended on Rio de Janeiro for a free-for-all of street parties and spectacular, all-night parades.

Instead, industry experts

predict Rio and other tourist destinations to be relatively low-key, with a smaller number of visitors — mainly Brazilians traveling domestically.

That is adding to the agony of a tourism industry only just starting to recover from near-collapse in 2020.

"It's been very traumatic," said Alexandre Sampaio, head of hotel and restaurant federation FBHA, citing official figures showing the tourism industry's revenues plunged 35 per cent in 2020.

The industry rebounded only partially in 2021, growing around 20 per cent.

Carnival week will still have concerts, parties and balls in Rio — limited to 70 per cent capacity, with vaccine and mask requirements. — AFP ■

Greeks protest at soaring cost of living

THOUSANDS of Greeks on Saturday joined union protests in several cities against a steep rise in the cost of living as the government vowed to boost emergency support for households.

In Athens, police said some 10,000 demonstrators led by Communist-affiliated union PAME gathered outside parliament to protest spiking inflation and a new labour law increasing working hour flexibility.

"We are a river of anger and outrage," said steel unionist Panagiotis Doukas.

"We claim our right to a re-

spectable life... we say a thunderous 'no' to the anti-popular policies that have torn apart our lives," he said.

Greek inflation in January surged to 6.2 per cent in an annual comparison amid fears Russia's invasion of Ukraine will further push up energy and food prices.

According to official data, electricity prices in January jumped by 56 per cent, fuel by 21.6 per cent and natural gas by a whopping 156 per cent.

The cost of living "could on average increase by over two percent in 2022," Panagi-

otis Petrakis, a professor of economics at the University of Athens, told AFP.

The government has already spent 44 billion euros (\$50 billion) in supporting businesses and low-income households during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Late Friday, Finance Minister Christos Staikouras said Greece would conclude an early repayment of bailout loans from the International Monetary Fund and use the interest rate savings "to support households and businesses". — AFP ■

Cryptocurrencies enter Ukraine conflict

HAVING evacuated part of his team from Kyiv, Mike Chobanian, boss of cryptocurrency exchange Kuna, is watching the effects of Russia's invasion on his flourishing industry with a weary eye.

"Business is running, but we're in survival mode over here," the 37-year-old boss said during a video call from his current refuge after leaving the Ukraine capital.

Russia's military build-up led many Ukrainians to turn to cryptocurrencies, before the invasion seized up the sector.

But it is still facilitating global fundraising efforts, albeit through an opaque decentralised system that Russia could also exploit to circumvent sanctions. The Ukrainian government on Friday imposed sanctions against the rouble, forcing Chobanian to halt cryptocurrency swaps with the Russian currency.



A staff worker tests AlipayHK at a store in Hong Kong in May. PHOTO: XINHUA

"But who cares when it's war?" said Chobanian.

His platform saw a steady rise in business from Ukrainian accounts in recent weeks.

Worried about rising tensions, locals were buying up stablecoins, the dollar-backed electronic currencies often criticised by Western regulators for

their opacity.

"Bitcoin, you engage yourself in gambling, you don't know if it's going to go up or down," he explained.

"But here you're trying to preserve what you have and people perceive the US dollar as a safe heaven. Cash is useless, you can't do much with it, it can be easily taken away

with a gun. USDT (stablecoin) is a safe haven."

But trading has become increasingly difficult since the invasion.

Several cryptocurrency users have, however, launched fundraisers that they say are dedicated to aiding the Ukrainian military and relief efforts. — AFP ■

Musk activates Starlink internet service in Ukraine



Elon Musk said Saturday his company SpaceX's Starlink satellite broadband service had been activated in Ukraine, after a Kyiv official urged the tech titan to provide his embattled country with stations. PHOTO: AFP

ELON Musk said Saturday his company SpaceX's Starlink satellite broadband service had been activated in Ukraine, after a Kyiv official urged the tech

titan to provide his embattled country with stations.

"Starlink service is now active in Ukraine," Musk tweeted, adding "more terminals en route."

The tweet came some 10 hours after Ukrainian Minister of Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov urged Musk to provide Starlink services to Ukraine, days after it was invaded by neighboring Russia.

"While you try to colonize Mars — Russia try to occupy Ukraine! While your rockets successfully land from space — Russian rockets attack Ukrainian civil people! We ask you to provide Ukraine with Starlink stations," Fedorov tweeted at Musk.

He also called on the billionaire "to address

sane Russians to stand" against their government's invasion.

Internet monitor NetBlocks said Ukraine has seen a "series of significant disruptions to internet service" since Thursday, when Russia launched military operations in the country.

Starlink operates a constellation of more than 2,000 satellites that aim to provide internet access across the planet. The company on Friday launched a further 50 Starlink satellites and many more are slated to be put into Earth's orbit. — AFP ■

Chinese, US companies to build sustainable aviation fuel base in Guangdong

CHINA'S Oriental Energy Company and the United States' Honeywell UOP will build a sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) production base in Maoming, a city in south China's Guangdong Province, with an annual output of 1 million tonnes.

According to a strategic cooperation agreement signed on Friday in Maoming, the project has two phases, and two sets of production devices using kitchen waste oil and animal fat as main raw materials will be built.

After completion, the

base will be the world's largest SAF production base that uses kitchen waste oil as a main raw material, said Henry Liu, vice president and general manager of Asia Pacific for Honeywell Performance Materials and Technologies.

Compared with traditional fuels, using kitchen waste oil and animal fat as raw materials can greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The project is expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by about 2.4 million tonnes every year. — Xinhua ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Google 'pauses' Russian state media monetization across platforms

GOOGLE on Saturday became the latest US tech giant to prevent Russian state media from earning money on its platforms in response to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. IT follows similar moves by its YouTube subsidiary and Facebook.

"IN response to the war in Ukraine, we are pausing Google monetization of Russian state-funded media across our platforms," a Google spokesperson said in a statement. "WE'RE actively monitoring new developments and will take further steps if necessary."

THE move was revealed hours after YouTube announced it would block certain Russian media channels from monetizing their videos, among other restrictions.

"IN light of extraordinary circumstances in Ukraine, we're taking a number of actions," a YouTube spokesperson said in a statement.

"OUR teams have started to pause the ability for certain channels to monetize on YouTube, including RT's YouTube channels globally," the spokesperson said, referring to the Russian state-funded news outlet.

YOUTUBE channels earn money through ads that appear when users watch their videos.

ON Friday, Facebook also said it was banning Russian state media from running ads and monetizing through its platform. NATIONS around the globe issued broad sanctions against Russian businesses, banks and officials after Moscow invaded Ukraine on Thursday.

"AS always, our teams are continuing to monitor closely for new developments, including evaluating what any new sanctions and export controls may mean for YouTube," the platform's spokesperson said. — AFP ■

China's first commercial license for unmanned driving services issued

THE city of Yangquan in north China's Shanxi Province on Friday issued a license to Baidu for the commercial operation of unmanned autonomous driving services — the first license of its kind issued in China.

"THAT means a safety supervisor is no longer required in the driver's seat in Baidu's autonomous vehicles operating in designated areas of the city," said Nie Yuren, general manager of Baidu Intelligent Driving Business Group Solutions. The license also allows for fare collection, Nie said.

BAIDU launched its autonomous driving research and development in 2013. The company has so far carried out road tests in nearly 30 Chinese cities. — Xinhua ■

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V PACIFIC GRACE VOY.NO. (2206S)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V PACIFIC GRACE VOY.NO. (2206S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 28-2-2022 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.

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Russia claims to have besieged two big cities in Ukraine south and southeast



Russian army military vehicles are seen in Armyansk, Crimea, on 25 February 2022. **PHOTO: AFP**

MOSCOW claimed Sunday its troops had “entirely” besieged the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson and the city of Berdyansk in the southeast, as

the Russian army pressed ahead with the invasion of the pro-Western country.

“Over the past 24 hours, the cities of Kherson and Berdyansk

have been completely blocked by the Russian armed forces,” defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said in a statement carried by Russian news agencies.

Russian troops captured a strategically important former airfield in the south of Ukraine Saturday, and could head toward Mariupol from there during the third day of fighting.

Mariupol is close to the eastern Ukrainian separatist areas and is the last major port under government control on the Sea of Azov.

Ukrainians are fighting hard against Russian forces but tens of thousands of Russian troops have now entered Ukraine, according to an estimate by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. — AFP ■

Sweden, Finland firm on staying out of NATO

SWEDEN and Finland plan to stay out of NATO despite the “shock” of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, leaders of the two countries said Thursday.

With the military offensive ordered last night by Russian President Vladimir Putin, “we have entered a new and dark chapter in European history,” Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson told a press conference.

She condemned “a clear violation of international law and against the European security order”.

Despite a debate about NATO membership that has been revived by Ukraine tensions, the Social Democrat lead-



Swedish soldiers practice the ultimate preparations near the Royal Palace in Stockholm on 18 June 2010 on the eve of the wedding of Sweden's Crown Princess Victoria and Daniel Westling on 19 June. **PHOTO: FRED DUFOUR / AFP/FILE**

er said Sweden's position on not joining the defence alliance remained in place.

“In a situation like this it is important that Sweden's long-standing security policy

stays firm. That we are predictable and clear,” Andersson said.

“Sweden has been alliance-free for an extremely long time. It has served Sweden's interests well,” she added. — AFP ■

Russia says its forces have taken full control of Ukraine's Melitopol



Photo taken on 25 February 2022 shows an empty street in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

THE Russian Armed Forces have established full control over the southern Ukrainian city

of Melitopol, Defence Ministry Spokesman Igor Konashenkov said in a briefing on Saturday.

Earlier in the day, the Russian Defence Ministry said that the Russian military had entered Melitopol without meeting resistance.

“On the evening of 25 February, after an amphibious landing near the locality of Azovske (Ukraine), Russian units marched and, without meeting resistance, entered Melitopol,” the ministry's Zvezda broadcaster reported. The Russian troops were greeted by residents of Melitopol, and some older citizens took to the streets with red flags. — AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Russia attack conjures up fears of new Europe 'iron curtain'

RUSSIA'S attack on Ukraine could herald a Cold War revival in Europe with two blocs armed to the teeth pointing nuclear weapons at each other across an iron curtain, politicians and experts say. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's statement that Moscow's assault on his country was “the sound of a new iron curtain lowering” has resonated in Western halls of power where many had assumed that Europe's post-war division into hostile camps led by the US and Russia was consigned to the history books. From Hitler's defeat in 1945 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Europe was divided into two camps with the dividing line running through Germany. — AFP ■

Germany: Preparing for the refugees

THE refugee aid organisation of the German Red Cross (DRK) is preparing its initial reception camp in Eisenhüttenstadt on the Polish border as Germany prepares to accept an influx of refugees from Ukraine.

Three residential buildings and ten residential containers will be able to house up to 1,300 people in total.

Camp beds and partition walls have been set up in gymnasiums, and the initial reception centre offers refugees a house for families, for men travelling alone, and a shelter for people in need of special protection. — AFP ■

US aviation regulator expands no-fly zone to include Ukraine, Belarus, parts of Russia

THE Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) of the United States said on Thursday that it is extending its no-fly zone in Eastern Europe as conflicts in Ukraine are unfolding.

The FAA said in a statement that it issued Notices to Air Missions (NOTAMs) expanding the area in Eastern Europe and Russia where US airlines and US pilots cannot operate.

“The expanded NOTAMs now cover the entire country of Ukraine, the entire country of Belarus and a western portion of Russia,” the statement read.

NOTAM is a notice containing information essential to personnel concerned with flight operations but not known far enough in advance to be publicized by other means. — Xinhua ■

Zelenskyy says Western 'partners' sending arms

UKRAINIAN President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Saturday that “partners” were sending weapons to help Kyiv fight Russian troops, adding he had spoken by phone with French leader Emmanuel Macron.

“A new day on the diplomatic frontline began with a conversation with Emmanuel Macron,” Zelenskyy tweeted. “Weapons and equipment from our partners are on the way to Ukraine. The anti-war coalition is working!” — AFP ■

Protesters outside Russian embassy call for end to Ukraine invasion

A crowd of people gathered outside the Russian Embassy in Kappara on Friday evening, calling for the immediate halting of the military invasion in Ukraine.

ORGANISED by Repubblika, the Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation, SOS Malta, OASI Foundation, PEN Malta, Prisma Malta and Anti-Poverty Forum Malta, the demonstration was organised in solidarity with Ukrainian people.

PEOPLE held candles and placards denouncing Putin, chanting “hands off Ukraine” among others.

AHEAD of the protest, the organisers said Maltese of goodwill felt no ill will towards Russians, including those who lived in Malta. — AFP ■

Russian forces continue advancing “in all directions” as Kyiv refuses to hold talks

RUSSIAN forces have been instructed to resume their advance into Ukraine “in all directions” after Kyiv refused to hold negotiations, the Russian Defence Ministry said Saturday.

All units were ordered to mount an offensive in accordance with the operation plan, Defence Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said during a briefing Saturday.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday ordered a halt to military operations in light of expected negotiations with the Ukrainian leadership, local media reported citing Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

The Ukrainian side said that Kyiv refused to negotiate with Russia because the conditions proposed were “unacceptable,”

and were “an attempt to force the country to surrender.”

Troops from Lugansk have advanced up to 46 km and captured the settlements of Schastia and Muratovo, while troops from Donetsk have advanced another 10 km from the frontline, according to the ministry.

The ministry also said Saturday that Russian Airborne Forces were protecting the Chernobyl nuclear power plant jointly with Ukraine’s National Guard, according to local media.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev said Saturday that the current sanctions against Russia could be a reason to review relations with all states that have imposed them. — Xinhua ■



Ukrainian service members look for and collect unexploded shells after a fighting with Russian raiding group in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv on 26 February 2022. PHOTO: AFP

Russian troops enter Ukraine’s second city



A fragment of a destroyed Russian tank is seen on the roadside on the outskirts of Kharkiv on 26 February 2022. PHOTO: AFP

THE Ukrainian government said on Sunday that Russian forces have entered its second largest city Kharkiv. According to videos posted by Herashchenko and Ukraine’s State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection, several

light military vehicles were seen moving along a street in the city.

Earlier in the day, Russian forces blew up a gas pipeline in Kharkiv.

Ukraine is continuing to fight against the Russian invasion as the military operation an-

nounced by President Vladimir Putin entered day four. On Sunday morning, massive explosions rocked south of Kyiv. Russian forces have also stormed into Kharkiv after blowing up a gas pipeline in Ukraine’s second-largest city earlier in the day.

According to news agency AFP, two more cities in the south and southeast of Ukraine have been besieged by Russia.

Nearly 200 civilians in Ukraine have died so far and more than 150,000 have fled to neighbouring countries including Poland, Moldova.

A defiant President Volodymyr Zelenskyy tweeted that “We will fight for as long as needed to liberate our country.” Zelenskyy has refused to leave Ukraine and has asked citizens to stand against the Russian siege. — AFP ■

China envoy to Ukraine postpones evacuation of citizens

CHINA’S envoy to Ukraine said Sunday current conditions were too unsafe to evacuate citizens, days after the embassy said it would prepare plans to help people leave after the Russian invasion.

In a lengthy video message on the embassy’s official WeChat account, Chinese ambassador Fan Xianrong sought to dispel rumours he had left

Kyiv and reassure Chinese nationals left stranded in the war-torn country.

“We must wait until it is safe before leaving,” said Fan from his office, seated in front of a Chinese flag and what appeared to be a fold-out camp bed frame. “As long as safety conditions are met and everyone’s safety is guaranteed, we will make appropriate arrange-

ments.”

The United Nations says Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which began on Thursday, has forced almost 150,000 people to flee to neighbouring countries.

In the weeks before, multiple countries, including the UK, US and Japan, evacuated diplomats and urged citizens to leave as fears of war grew. — AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hungary offers capital as venue for Russia-Ukraine peace talks

HUNGARIAN Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjarto has offered Budapest as a venue for peace talks between Russia and Ukraine on late Friday night on his Facebook account.

“Due to a dispute on the possible location – in Minsk, Warsaw – of peace talks, I recommended Budapest to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and to Andriy Yermak, chief of cabinet of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy,” Szijjarto said in a video message posted on his Facebook page.

He added that neither party rejected the proposition during the telephone conversations. Budapest can serve as a safe place for both the Russian and Ukrainian negotiating delegations, the top Hungarian diplomat said. — Xinhua ■

US responsible for Ukraine crisis: North Korea

NORTH Korea has accused the United States of being the “root cause of the Ukraine crisis” while defending Russia, in Pyongyang’s first official response to Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.

RUSSIA ordered troops into neighbouring Ukraine this week, prompting global outcry and punishing sanctions from the West, some directed against Russian President Vladimir Putin himself. BUT North Korea, in a muted response issued in the form of a commentary posted on the Foreign Ministry’s website, said the United States was to blame for the unfolding disaster. — AFP ■

Russia needs to be completely isolated, say UK and Ukraine

BRITISH Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy agreed during a phone call Saturday that the world needs to isolate Russia “completely diplomatically and financially,” Downing Street said.

“THE Prime Minister spoke to Ukrainian President Zelenskyy this evening. The leaders agreed on the need for the international community to isolate Russia completely diplomatically and financially,” said a statement from Johnson’s office. — AFP ■

Myanmar Futsal teams to compete in Thailand Invitational Tournament

THE Myanmar men's and women's Futsal teams, which are under training for the 31st Vietnam SEA Games, will compete in invitational events in Thailand ahead of the tournament.

The Thai Football Federation will host the Invitational Futsal Tourney in preparation for the SEA Games, while the Myanmar Futsal Team will compete in both events.

The Thailand Invitational Futsal Tournament will be held from 15 to 21 March, with participation of six teams.

The tournament will be

hosted by Thailand, and Myanmar, Oman, Maldives, Tajikistan and Mongolia will compete in the tourney.

The women's invitational Futsal tournament is scheduled for April and dates will be announced with the participant teams, officials said.

The Myanmar national Futsal team, which will compete in the SEA Games, has been taking training with 22 preliminary players since January and is coached by Thai national Boonlert Charoenwong.

The Myanmar National

Futsal Team will stay in Thailand after the Thai Invitational and will continue to compete in the ASEAN Futsal Championship in Thailand in April.

Head coach U Tin Maung Htay will handle the Myanmar women's Futsal team and the team consists of more than 20 preliminary players.

The team is also headed by national team head coach Boonlert Charoenwong as a technical adviser. The Myanmar women's Futsal team has been reorganized after the 2017 SEA Games.—Ko Nyi Lay/GNLM

Czechs refuse to play Russia in 2022 World Cup play-offs: FA



The Czech Republic will not play Russia in a potential 2022 World Cup play-off due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine the Czech federation said joining Poland and Sweden in refusing to do so. **PHOTO: AFP**

THE Czech Football Association said Sunday the national team would not play Russia in a potential 2022 World Cup play-off in March following the invasion of Ukraine.

"The Czech national team will in no case play a potential game against Russia in the World Cup play-offs," the Czech FA said in a statement, following the same decision by Sweden and Poland.

The Czechs would have to beat Sweden away and Russia would have to beat Poland to set up a clash between the two countries on 29 March.

Sweden and Poland said they would not play Russia on Saturday.

The Czechs are due to play Sweden in the first round of the play-offs in Stockholm on 24 March, while Russia were due to host Poland in Moscow on the

same day.

The Polish, Swedish and Czech federations had issued a statement on Thursday — the day the invasion began — demanding FIFA play the matches away from Russia.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said on Thursday they hoped the "situation (the conflict between Ukraine and Russia) will be resolved" by the time the matches are played. — AFP ■

Martinez upsets Ancajas to seize IBF super flyweight world title

UNBEATEN Argentinian Fernando Martinez ended Filipino Jerwin Ancajas' long International Boxing Federation super flyweight reign with a 12-round unanimous decision victory in Las Vegas on Saturday. Martinez pressed the action in a lively bout at The Cosmopolitan, consistently outworking the champion to earn the upset victory, with two judges

scoring it 118-110 and a third seeing it 117-111 for the 30-year-old challenger. Martinez improved to 14-0 with eight wins inside the distance. Ancajas, who was making his 10th defence of the title he won in 2016, fell to 33-2-2 with 22 knockouts. Ancajas, also 30, said after the fight he would take advantage of his contractual right to a rematch.— AFP ■

Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Nine Objectives

1. Political affairs

- To build a Union based on democracy and federalism, through a disciplined and genuine multiparty democratic system that is fair and just.
- To emphasize the achievement of enduring peace for the entire nation in line with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).
- To continue implementing the principle of peaceful co-existence among countries through an independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy.

2. Economic affairs

- To enhance production based on agriculture and livestock through modern techniques and strengthen all-round development in other sectors of the economy.
- To develop a stable market economy and promote international investment in order to enhance the economic development of the entire National people.
- To promote and support local businesses to create employment opportunities and increase domestic production.

3. Social affairs

- To ensure a strong and dynamic Union spirit, the genuine spirit of patriotism.
- To respect and promote the customs and traditions of all National peoples and preserve and safeguard their cultural heritage and national characteristics.
- To enhance the health, fitness and education quality of the entire nation.

Abramovich hands over control of Chelsea to club's foundation



Chelsea's Russian owner Roman Abramovich said Saturday he was handing over the "stewardship and care" of the Premier League club to the trustees of its charitable foundation. **PHOTO: AFP**

CHELSEA'S Russian owner Roman Abramovich said Saturday he was handing over the "stewardship and care" of the Premier League club to the trustees of its charitable foundation.

The move comes with Russia under intense scrutiny following its invasion of Ukraine this week.

Billionaire Abramovich, who took over at Stamford Bridge in 2003, said in a statement: "During my nearly 20-year ownership of Chelsea FC, I have always viewed my role as a custodian of the club, whose job it is ensuring that we are as successful as we can be today, as well as build for the future, while also playing a positive role in our communities.

"I have always taken decisions with the club's best interest at heart. I remain committed to these values. That is why I am today giving trustees of Chelsea's charitable foundation the stewardship and care of Chelsea FC. — AFP ■