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THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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Sunday, 6 March 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.

Bamboo handicraft transactions rise

THE transactions of Myanmar’s bamboo handicrafts is high early this year.

In some ASEAN countries, they produce value-added products and foodstuffs using forest products and receive incomes from local and foreign travellers. The regional countries create bamboo handicrafts to earn foreign income and Myanmar also lures the interest of tourists with Myanmar traditional artworks such as lacquerwares and utensils. Myanmar boasts of various handicraft industries and can earn foreign income with the exports of bamboo products, commodities and value-added foodstuffs and it can also create opportunities to promote the socio-economic status of bamboo farmers and entrepreneurs.

“We grow bamboos in 2,500 acres of land in Yedashe Township of Toungoo District to produce commodities, foodstuffs and decoration materials



Myanmar boasts of various handicraft industries and can earn foreign income with the exports of bamboo products, commodities and value-added foodstuffs. **PHOTO: KANU**

from the bamboo. Depending on the age of bamboo and the year of production, the quality

of exported products will be also correct, and so we need the systematically cultivated bamboo

plantations under a plan. Bagan, Inlay, hilly region, Upper and Lower parts of Myanmar pro-

duce bamboo products. China earns billions of yuan yearly

SEE PAGE-2

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Objectives of 77th Anniversary Armed Forces Day

1. THE Tatmadaw to participate in the leading role of national politics for the emergence of the Union based on democracy and federalism while safeguarding the Constitution (2008) of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
2. The Tatmadaw to take responsibility for substantial contribution to measures of peace and prosperity of the country and food sufficiency as a national task the government primarily emphasizes
3. The Tatmadaw to join hands with all ethnic national people in the national reconciliation and peace processes
4. The Tatmadaw to provide necessary assistance for convening a free and fair multiparty democracy general election for ensuring the emergence of the Union based on democracy and federalism upon completion of endeavours in accord with the provisions of the State of Emergency
5. To build a powerful, capable and modern patriotic Tatmadaw to protect the national interest of the State

Bamboo handicraft transactions rise

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from bamboo exports. Our country has large forest areas and if we make efforts to earn local/foreign incomes from the bamboo sector, it will bring benefits to the government, bamboo farmers and business persons," said U Hla Htay Win, General Secretary of Myanmar Bamboo Industry Development Association.

The ASEAN member countries like Indonesia, Viet Nam, Thailand, Malaysia

and Laos produce bamboo handicrafts and foodstuffs and China also produces beer and alcohol from bamboo shoots and toothpaste and soap including other commodities from bamboo leaves, and they export the products.

"The sales of bamboo products are good again early this year than the period of COVID-19. Although there is no foreign tourist, the transaction becomes better than before due to the high numbers of

local visitors. We mainly transport the products to Bagan, Chaungtha, Patheingyi, Yangon, Mawlamyine, Mandalay and Sagaing.

The bamboo hats and purses are suitable for this season and most of the customers make orders to the main sales centre. As the bamboo industry mainly relies on tourism, the sale is good as the numbers of local travellers are high during the public holidays," said U Aung

Lwin, the bamboo handicraft maker from Ngathaingchaung Township.

The local bamboo industry depends on the tourism industry and the sales of bamboo products are high again since early this year in Yangon and Ayeyawady regions. About 100 bamboo-based products such as caps, purses, chairs and mats are being produced in the country.—Nyein Thu (MNA)/GNLM

KSDV1-NE2 Model electric car penetrates Yangon market

AS Myanmar-China friendship, KSDV1-NE2 Model, which is China's high-tech electric car, was installed in Thadukan industrial zone, Shwepyitha Township, Yangon Region. Those vehicles will enter the Yangon market beginning from early March, said Mr Yu Jian Chen, managing director of the Khaing Khaing Sangda Motorcar Factory.

The first electric cars made in Myanmar with the technology of the People's Republic of China are designed to be affordable to the people of Myanmar. The battery installed in an electric car can be easily recharged wherever

there is electricity.

"While we are driving the long-distance trip, the car battery could be charged with a fully automated system. It can also reduce the cost of fuel oil. The car has no sound and no smoke. Therefore, the natural environment has been preserved," said Mr Yu Jian Chen.

The KSDV1-NE2 model electric car can drive up to 800 kilometres on a single charge. It can reach speeds of up to 80 kilometres per hour and can have seats of five people. The vehicle includes the electronic charger engine machine 796 CC which

can be used to fully recharge the battery quickly using 92 petrol to recharge the battery on the road.

The battery used for the KSDV1-NE2 model electric car is guaranteed for five years and the factory will take responsibility for all the mechanical defects of the car during the five-year warranty.

Besides, these hybrid electronic vehicles – KSDV1-NE2 – are issued with a Yangon licence number YGN-5 (S--). So, the customers can change their name easily, according to the Khaing Khaing Sangda Motorcar Factory from Myanmar. — Pwint Thitsa/GNLM



The KSDV 1-NE2 model electric car can drive up to 800 kilometres on a single charge. It can reach speeds of up to 80 kilometres per hour and can have seats of five people. **PHOTO: SOE MYINT AUNG**

Surging food prices hit consumers on hike fuel oil prices

THE rising oil price contributes to the escalating food prices and the consumers are struggling with inflation, the consumers stressed.

"Rising fuel oil price drives the food price surge. The crude oil price has tremendously soared. Consequently, the prices of consumer goods and grocery go higher," said U Zaw Win, in charge of the freight forwarding terminal in Monywa city.

There are three main causes of the higher imported edible oil price, said U Tun Tun Oo, vice-chair of the Myanmar Edible Oil Millers Association.

"Edible oil import slash, Kyat depreciation on the US dollar and rise in the global oil price are the contributing factors to the escalating edible oil prices. The palm oil was earlier worth over US\$500 per tonne and it increased to three times to \$1,500 per tonne. The price is expected to remain an upward trend," U Tun Tun Oo was quoted as saying.

The transportation cost from Monywa to Mandalay increased from K130,000 to K190,000 per truck. This being so, the food price keeps going up, he added.

The prices of palm oil have jumped to nearly K8,000 per viss (a viss equals 1.6 kilograms) in two or three days accordingly. The prices of peanut oil are relatively high to K10,000 per viss, said a trader.

"The low-income people are battered by the oil price surge. The daily wages are K7,000-8,000 yet the prices of food price are rocketing. The low-income family are struggling to survive," a worker stressed. There is a government-subsidized scheme of edible oil distribution, however, it cannot cover many households, he continued.

"The price of peanut is also rising on the back of strong demand by oil millers and exporters," said a miller.

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 the domestic market, about 700,000 tonnes of cooking oil are yearly imported through Malaysia and Indonesia.

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

Further State responsibilities to be discharged

- There are many examples of the consequences of the instability of the state in the world.
- Tatmadaw is not an institution for seeking its own sakes or for only one organization. It is an institution to protect all national people. It conducted defence services by cooperating with the people in successive eras and it faithfully served to be a firm multiparty democracy pathway for 10 years. I pledge that we will carry out it in line with such a process.
- If we review the situations, the desires of the local/foreign terrorists and their supporters lead to the absolute destruction of the country rather than democracy. The state defence is to protect the people and we cannot let the anarchy and we cannot neglect it. Therefore, we have to sacrifice in some places.

(Excerpt from the speech made by State Administration Council Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on one-year State responsibilities discharged by the State Administration Council on 1-2-2022)

“Hlapa Thaya Pyi Myanmar” colour photo competition award-giving ceremony held

UNION Minister for Information U Maung Maung Ohn, accompanied by Yangon Region Chief Minister U Soe Thein, regional ministers, departmental officials, the Photo Selecting Team chairman and members, award winners and guests attended the award-giving ceremony of “Hlapa Thaya Pyi Myanmar” (Beautiful & Pleasant Myanmar) colour photo competition marking the 74th Independence Day in Yangon yesterday.

First, the Union minister said there were 140 photographers from different regions and states who participated in the photo contest with 338 photos. There will be eight prizes – first, second and third and the other five special awards.



MoI Union Minister U Maung Maung Ohn, Yangon Region Chief Minister U Soe Thein and officials take the documentary photo with awardees at the event yesterday.

He then talked about the important role of media in this changing technological era, spreading of different cultures in a good momentum to the world via IT, some impacts of media faced by world countries and he mentioned the media sector as a main pillar of the country to ensure the stability, peace and socio-economic status of the country.

Then, Yangon Region Chief Minister U Soe Thein made a greeting speech and Photo Selecting Team Chairman Painter Soe Moe briefed the selecting processes. Then, the Union minister and other officials presented awards to the winners of the photo contest.

The first prize winner U Zaw Min Lwin expressed words of thanks on behalf of the recipients of awards. The Union minister and party then viewed the photos.

The Union minister and the region chief minister also watched the recording processes of the “Chit Thae Swal MRTV Orchestra” Friday Night Live Show at Studio (A) of MRTV on 4 March.

Before the entertaining processes, the Union minister and party cordially greeted the artistes. Then, the Union minister, the region chief minister and the chairman of the Myanmar Press Council gave the flower basket and cash-prizes to MRTV Orchestra. –MNA



The MoI Union Minister views the Friday Night Live Show programme at the MRTV Studio A.



1,596 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 5 March, total figure rises to 597,417

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to 597,417 after 1,596 new cases were reported on 5 March 2022 according to the Ministry of Health. Among these confirmed cases, 545,865 have been discharged from hospitals. Death toll reached 19,386 after three died.—MNA

Union Construction Minister inspects production of bridge girders, accessories in Yangon Region

UNION Minister for Construction U Shwe Lay visited the J&M Steel Solutions Co., Ltd., a joint venture between the Ministry of Construction and JFE Engineering Corporation of Japan on Shukhintha circular road, Thakayta Township in Yangon Region yesterday morning.

On his arrival, an official from the J & M Steel Solutions Co., Ltd explained the steel production inside the factory.

After that, the Union minister and party inspected the production of bridge piers to be sent to Bangladesh.

The J&M Steel Solutions plant in Yangon, a joint venture between the Ministry of Construction and Japan's JFE Engineering Corporation, manufactures bridge piers and accessories locally as well as bridge piers ordered from



The MoC Union Minister and party pay an inspection tour around the J & M Steel Solutions Co., Ltd yesterday.

abroad.

Afterwards, the Union minister and party visited the office of (11) Bridge Task Force, Department of Bridges

and Bridge Construction Team (1) and met the staff.

“It is necessary to follow the instructions of the Ministry of Health in carrying out activ-

ities during the COVID-19 period,” the Union minister said.

“It is also necessary to abide by the nine objectives and five future activities of the

State Administrative Council. Employees must be free from party politics. It is necessary to follow the staff rules and regulations.

“We need to meet the quality standards and innovations of the bridge designs for which we are responsible. The role of staff is very important for the development of the country. It is needed to attend training courses to enhance quality and capacity,” the Union minister added.

He also instructed responsible persons to work hard for the success of their works. Next, the director-general and officials clarified the reports.

Next, the Union minister and party visited the Department of Bridges and inspected the design department rooms and office buildings and made necessary instructions. — MNA

Smithy works in Myothit almost diminishing due to declining demand

THE smithy works are almost disappearing due to declining

demand in Myothit Township, Magway Region, according to

Myothit smithy business owners.



Myothit was once a famous place for its handicrafts such as scissors and swords. Scissors and swords, which were made in Myothit, can have a guarantee for 10 years. PHOTO: THAN WIN TUN (IPRD)

There used to be about seven smithies in Myothit. They produced swords, carpenter tools, agricultural implements.

“Myothit was once a famous place for its handicrafts such as scissors and swords. Scissors and swords, which were made in Myothit, can have a guarantee for 10 years. Smithies also ensure that each one is strong and sells with a guarantee. The number of people using our products was decreasing as other new products came into the market. The price was around K1,500-K2,000 but without guarantees. A scissor made in our smithy is worth between K4,500 and K7,000,” said U Maung Oo, an owner of the smithy in Myothit.

The smithy businesses are diminishing due to the high costs of firewood, charcoal and labour. There are several types

of products like betel cutters, scissors, various kinds of carpenter tools, sickles, diggers, weeding hoes, pickaxes, mattocks, ploughs, harrows and agricultural implements.

“We have been producing swords only since the time of our parents. These swords are made with the iron of vehicle jack and they have a guarantee. A knife sells for K4,500 to K30,000 depending on their types. We also produce and sell different categories of swords and knives,” explained U Maung Oo, the smithy owner in Myothit.

Nowadays, the smithy businesses are gradually diminishing due to the scarcity and expensive cost of firewood and charcoal, labour shortage and cheap prices of foreign-made ironwares, according to the smithy business owners in Myothit Township. — Than Win Tun (IPRD)/GNLM

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14 rural roads construction completed in 13 townships of Mandalay Region

DURING the six-month mini-budget period of the 2021-2022 financial year, 14 rural roads have been built in 13 townships in Mandalay Region that will benefit 18,902 acres of agriculture, and farmers are using them at present, according to the Department of Rural Development.

These rural roads were constructed in the first six months of this financial year at the cost of over K880 million from the Union Fund for farmers' crops. Director U Soe Than of the Rural Development Department in Mandalay Region said that each road of these 14 rural roads is built 19 miles and four furlongs long, 12 feet wide

and two feet and nine inches deep since in December. The construction work of all roads have been completed, and the work is underway on beneficial acres.

"In October, tenders were called for the construction of 14 rural production roads. In December, ground construction work began. Road construction was carried out in 14 villages. Currently, all the construction work is completed. There are 18,902 acres that can be benefited. With the aim of helping to bring agricultural products to the market and to get them to cities and towns in real-time. In some areas, the process of delivery to homes and warehouses



One of the rural roads in Gwegyi village in Pyawbwe Township. **PHOTO:** Min Htet Aung

from the fields is not available immediately. So, there will be losses if the weather condition isn't good in a lack of produc-

tion roads. We launch the construction of production roads to avoid losses. We urge farmers to maintain these roads for the

long run use," he explained.

During the mini-budget period of the 2021-2022 financial year, the rural production roads have been built to produce the crops in all seasons for the benefits of the farmers in Patheingyi Township, Madaya Township, Thabeikkyin Township, PyinOoLwin Township, Ngazun Township, Taungtha Township, Myingyan Township, Wundwin Township, Thazi Township, Pyawbwe Township, Yamethin Township, Myittha Township and Kyaukpadaung Township in Mandalay Region.

These 14 rural roads will benefit 18,902 acres of agriculture and 90,774 houses. — Min Htet Aung (MdySub-Printing House)/GNLM

Stock trading up in Feb 2022



The YSX was launched four years ago to improve the private business sector. It disseminates rules and regulations regarding the stock exchange and knowledge of share trading through stock investment webinars and training courses.

THE equity market rose in February 2022 against the trading in January, the Yangon Stock Exchange's price data indicated.

A total of 61,435 shares valued at US\$282 million by seven listed companies were traded on the exchange in January 2022 and the trading volume rose to 80,291 shares in February, with an estimated value of K414.9 million, according to the monthly report of the YSX.

At present, shares of seven listed companies — First Myanmar Investment (FMI), Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings (MTSH), Myanmar Citizens

Bank (MCB), First Private Bank (FPB), TMH Telecom Public Co. Ltd (TMH), the Ever Flow River Group Public Co., Ltd (EFR) and Amata Holding Public Co., Ltd. (AMATA) were traded in the equity market. The share prices per unit slightly fell to K7,900 for FMI, K2,900 for MTSH, K7,800 for MCB, K19,000 for FPB, K2,600 for TMH, K2,800 for EFR and K4,900 for AMATA respectively in February.

Regardless of the collapse of the stock markets worldwide, the local equities market has been able to continue operating without stopping trading.

Additionally, YSX launched a pre-listing board (PLB) on 28 September 2020 to provide unlisted public companies with fund-raising opportunities and build a bridge toward listing on YSX.

Next, the Securities and Exchange Commission of Myanmar (SECM) has allowed foreigners to invest in the local equity market since 20 March 2020.

Only K4.63 billion valued 887,969 shares by seven listed companies were traded on the exchange in 2021, showing a significant drop of 63 per cent as against 2020, according to the annual report released by the exchange.

In 2020, K12.6 billion worth of 1.87 million shares by six listed companies were traded on YSX, whereas over 2.4 million shares from five listed companies, valued at K13.39 billion, were traded on the exchange in 2019.

The YSX was launched four years ago to improve the private business sector. It disseminates rules and regulations regarding the stock exchange and knowledge of share trading through stock investment webinars and training courses. — KK/GNLM

Salt prices jump by more than double

THE price of salt from Mon State has risen, according to the Mawlamyine Commodity depot.

On 5 March, the raw salt price (normal) ranges between K164 and K170 per viss (a viss equals 1.6 kilogrammes), while the raw salt (pure) is K190 per viss. Last January, the raw salt price (normal) hit K75-K80 per viss while the raw salt (pure) fetched only K100 per viss.

Nevertheless, this year's salt season is better than last year. Last year, the raw salt price (normal) was K65 per viss while the raw salt (pure) was K85 per viss.

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

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

Annually, Mon State produces nearly 40,000 tonnes of sun-dried salt beyond magnesium chloride (MgCl₂), iodized salt (I₂) and table salt (NaCl).

There are about 5,000 salt pitches in Mon State. Among them, nearly 4,000 acres of salt pitches produce nearly 40,000 tonnes of salt and domestic salt consumption is 10,000 tonnes.

The 2019-2020 statistics showed 14 iodine salt processing plants and one factory each for magnesium chloride (MgCl₂) and table salt (NaCl) production, with the production capacity of 60 tonnes of magnesium chloride, 204 tonnes of table salt and 12,132 tonnes of iodized salt. — NN/GNLM

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MoC oversees daily imports of essential anti-COVID-19 equipment

THE Ministry of Commerce is facilitating the importation of essential medical supplies plus anti-COVID devices that are critical to the COVID-19 prevention, control and treatment activities,

including liquid oxygen and oxygen cylinders, through trading posts, international airports and seaports.

A total of 100 oxygen concentrators was imported via interna-

tional seaports yesterday.

From 1 to 5 March, 100 oxygen concentrators, 6.8 tonnes of gloves, and 7.6 tonnes of masks were imported via respective trading zones.

Officials from the relevant departments are cooperating to facilitate and expedite the standard operating procedures for the import process. It is reported that the Ministry of Commerce

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

Illegal teak, utensils and vehicles seized this week



Officials confiscated goods in Shan State.

ration ID.

Raw materials of cotton and cloth not specified in the import declaration ID (estimated value of K11,344,950) were also seized on the same day.

Thus, items worth a total of K57,015,350 were seized and action is taken under the Customs Law.

Managed by the Anti-Illegal Trade Task Force, Customs officers from the Kyaukchaw inspection station patrolled and seized illegal plastic water tanks (estimated at K1,200,000) piled up at Mile Post No. 16/3 on the

Mandalay-PyinOoLwin Highway and are taking action under the Customs Law.

Similarly, a joint inspection team led by the Lashio Township Customs Team carried out inspection works on the Hsenwi-Chinshwehaw Road, near Namsalap village on 5 March.

Illegal foodstuff and agricultural products (estimated at K15,300,000) and five vehicles carrying such items (estimated at K61,000,000) were seized and action is taken under the Customs Law.

In addition, under the man-

agement of the Anti-Illegal Trade Task Force, a joint inspection team led by the Myanmar Police Force inspected and seized two unlicensed vehicles (estimated at K4,500,000) and one motorcycle without a licence (estimated at K100,000) in Sagaing and Kanbalu townships.

Action is taken under the Import and Export Law.

As a result, a total of 18 arrests was made on 4 and 5 March and the estimated value is K139,115,350, according to the Anti-Illegal Trade Steering Committee. — MNA



Seized toy at Asia World port.



Seized items in Mandalay Region.

BY the Anti-Illegal Trade Steering Committee, effective action is being taken to prevent illegal trade under the law.

On 4 March, a port inspection team from the Port Authority

Customs and the Anti-Trafficking and Trafficking Unit conducted an inspection at the Asia World Container Terminal and seized toys (estimated at K45,670,400) that exceeded the import decla-

AGD Bank robbery suspects arrested

THE robbers exploded a hand-made mine at AGD Bank in Thingangyun Township and took banking documents, CCTV, computers and K63,959,701 on 5 March.

According to the investigation of the combined security force, they found out that the owner of Toyota Hiace (grey) used by the bank robbers is Dr Kaung Chit Soe who lives in Hninsiphyu street of Yangon Thit Ward of Thuwunna Myothit in Thingangyun Township. The security force watched his house and arrested Shine Htet Aung with a 4N/7883 Nissan car in Patheinyunt Ward of Mingala Taungnyunt Township.

According to the confession of Shine Htet Aung, the police raided the house of Dr Kaung Chit Soe who led the robbery case and arrested Dr Kaung Chit Soe, Thiha Aung, Pyi Thein Khaing and Paing Sitt (aka) Paing Sitt Thway with K5,069,500, US\$8,000, four mobile phones, one CCTV, nine hard disks, other materials used in the robbery case and 8K/2658 Toyota Hiace on the same evening.

According to the confes-

sions of suspects, Dr Kaung Chit Soe opened a pharmacy with his wife in 2019 and faced losses and financial related disputes with the pharmaceutical companies.

Therefore, he discussed with his workers Shine Htet Aung, Thiha Aung, Pyi Thein Khaing, Paing Sitt (aka) Paing Sitt Thway to rob the AGD bank on a public holiday in January 2022.

They bought the requirements, including explosives and fake pistols from an online shop and rented 8K/2658 Toyota HIACE from Kyaw Sein Win at K50,000 per day.

Then, the five suspects studied the structure of AGD Bank disguising themselves as customers.

On 5 February, they drove an 8K/2658 car rented by a pharmaceutical company located in Hninsi Phyu street of Yangon Thit Ward of Thuwunna Myothit in Thingangyun Township and changed the number plate with 5M/5959 at Kankaw Yeiktha street and used Myanmar Net stickers.

The five suspects went to the vicinity area of the bank as Myanmar Net staff and Kaung Chit Soe entered the bank



Confiscated Toyota Hiace in Thingangyun Township on 4 March 2022.



Five arrestees are seen along with seized cash and materials.

saying to the security that he needed to charge his Laptop. Then, Thiha Aung tried to enter the bank holding a fake pistol in his hand with Pyi Thein Khaing and Paing Sitt Thway. They tied the bank's security members and cut the CCTV wires. They entered the safe by breaking the ceiling of the bank and taking the money. Then, Kaung Chit Soe and Pyi Thein Khaing installed five handmade mines around the bank and also poured the petrol.

Kaung Chit Soe gave K3 million each to Thiha Aung, Paing Sitt Thway, Pyi Thein Khaing and Shine Htet Aung out of K61 million, and he took all the remaining money. Of the money, he changed K16 million to the

dollar and received \$8,000. Although he returned the rented vehicle to Kyaw Sein Win on 8 February 2022, the security forces investigated the vehicle and so he bought that car from Kyaw Sein Win. Moreover, he bought another 4N/7883 Nissan at K9 million.

The suspects committed the robbery by taking the chance of threats conducted by CRPH, NUG and PDF terrorist groups. Therefore, the public should report the activities of terrorist groups and unscrupulous persons secretly to the security forces. The informers will be awarded. The AGD Bank robbers will face actions under the law. — MNA

Cashew nut growers from Popa area expect to get good price in early harvest season

THE cashew nut cultivated around the Popa area in Kyaukpadaung Township, NyaungU District, Mandalay Region, are richly flowering. But the local growers are worried that the price will not be as good as the previous year when the fruits are started harvesting, said U Maung Nyo, a cashew nut grower from Shaw Taw village.

The cashew nut is grown mostly in Hsinhsin, Naga Laehsae, Seema and Shawtaw villages around Popa Mountain area, Kyaukpadaung township, Nyaung U district. Last year, the cashew nut price was ranged between K50,000 and K60,000 per basket. But this year, the cashew is sold for only K18,000-K20,000 per basket due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the



Last year, the cashew nut price was ranged between K50,000 and K60,000 per basket. But this year, the cashew is sold for only K18,000-K20,000 per basket due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

grower clarified.

Normally, cashew planta-

tion is a perennial plant and it is good yielded in ten years.

This year, there is an increase in the cultivation of the other

marketable fruits instead of mango trees due to the deteriorating market conditions. Now, people cut the cashew trees and they are growing kilo guava, six months guava, dragon fruit and Seintalone mango, said U Aung Win, the local grower from Shaw Taw village.

Normally, cashew plantations start to deliver their yields in early February. Only Shawtaw village yielded over 300 baskets of cashew.

More than two acres of cashew farmland owned by U Ohn Maung from Thitdaungmyaut village, NyaungU township are arranged to grow other marketable crops due to the collapse of the cashew market, according to U Ohn Maung. — Ko Htein-KPD/GNLM

CBM grants Baht-Kyat direct payments on Thailand-Myanmar border

MYANMAR has granted Baht-Kyat direct payments on the Thailand-Myanmar border, according to a notification issued by the Central Bank of Myanmar on 3 March.

The CBM said that announcement was issued by exercising its authorities under Sections 17 and 22 of the Foreign Exchange Management Law.

According to the announcement, direct payment in Thai baht or Myanmar kyat will be allowed in borders areas to boost bilateral trade, to simplify the smooth flow of goods, to make easy access to cross-border payment between the two countries and to promote local currency in line with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Financial integration.

Then, the Designated banks have also been allowed to open baht accounts of importers and exporters for cross border trade.

Hence, the designated banks are required to obey the guidelines for the direct use of baht and kyat in Thai-Myanmar border trade. And, this notice shall take effect from the date of the is-

suing, the CBM announced.

Myanmar mainly conducts border trade with neighbouring Thailand through seven borders – Tachilek, Myawady, Kawthoung, Myeik, Hteekhee, Mawtaung and Maese checkpoints.

Myawady border trade accounted for the largest volume of trade with Thailand, followed by Hteekhee, according to the statistical report of the Ministry of Commerce.

But this year, Maese and Sittway border trade points are not able to trade.

The trade volume between Myanmar and Thailand from 1 October and 18 February in 2021-22 financial year hit a total of US\$ 1 billion in total, Ministry of Commerce statistics show. According to the ministry, Myanmar's exports to Thailand reached \$ 1.33 billion while imports hit \$675.18 million.

In the 2020-21FY, Myanmar-Thailand border trade totalled \$4.9 billion which included \$2.98 billion in exports and \$1.93 billion in imports, Ministry of Commerce statistics show. — NN/GNLM

Mustard farmers enjoy good prices this year

THE local farmers from the villages beside the Daungmyu Creek from Kawlin and Wuntho townships, Sagaing Region are happy to get a good price for mustard this year than last year, according to the local growers.

“About 0.50 acres of mustard are grown every year. We have grown them for over 20 years. Last year, we sold them for K250 per viss. This year, the regular customers come and buy mustard at the farmland for K500 per

viss,” said U Aung Win, a mustard grower from Oakpho village.

More than 5,000 plants can be able to be grown at 0.50 acres of mustard farmland. Each mustard can be a weight of around one viss depending on the soil and preparation. It can be harvested around 3,500 or 4,000 visses. The cultivation costs are only about K100,000, including seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and labour charges. — Myat Tun Min (Kawlin)/GNLM

Fennel seed producers receiving handsome profit in Sagaing Region

RESIDENTS in Myinmu Township of the Sagaing Region are cultivating the lucrative herbal fennel seeds, allowing them to generate a handsome income.

Fennel seed cultivation is a cost-effective business. About 15,000 plants can be cultivated on two and a half acres of land. The cultivation cost is estimated at only K21,000. Yet, the income reaches about K400,000, a seller U Cho Win from Alatkpa village said.

The fennel seeds from Myinmu Township are primarily sent to Monywa and Shwebo in Sagaing Region and Mandalay Region.

Myanmar's herbal fennel seeds and black fennel seeds are also shipped to Bangladesh.

The prices of fennel seeds stood at K2,600 per viss. (a viss equals 1.6 kilogrammes), while the black fennel seeds soared to K7,500 per viss. The price of

black fennel seeds edged up to a record high last year.

Bangladesh consumers use this as a spice and herbal medicine. There is a regular demand from Bangladesh every year, according to the Soe Win

Myint warehouse from Mandalay city.

The fennel seeds are cultivated as winter crops in Mandalay and Sagaing regions, with a view to export targeting. — Aung Soe Phay, KK/GNL



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Efficiently spend State budget on essential projects

CURRENTLY, global countries are experiencing the downtrend of the economy in the power struggle of superpower countries which trigger the instability of prices in general commodities, gold, oil and depreciation of Myanmar kyats in the forex process.

Such impacts also hit the small and least developed countries including Myanmar. Hence, the government eased revenue restrictions for assisting in the operation of businesses on one hand in order to overcome the challenges while providing monetary assistance to respective sectors.

Despite bringing loss to the year-wise income of the State, the government adopts the plans to spend its funds on the surge of the State economy and that of the private sector without fail.

Now, global countries are facing financial problems based on global political issues. Myanmar is facing impacts of global issues as well as disadvantages of terrorism at home. Hence, the entire people need to cooperate with the government in controlling the country on the right track to a peaceful and prosperous goal.

The Financial Commission formed by the government overviews various arenas for earning incomes through levying the taxes flowing into the State budget to be allotted to the region and state governments and to be managed to implement the national level projects benefiting the people across the nation.

Due to the aforesaid root causes, the government reduced to earmark the State budget based on its incomes in the 2022-23 financial year. Depending on the availability of funds, the government allots its budget to Union level authorities and relevant governments. Union level organizations should prioritize the measures to earmark the expenditures to be spent on socio-economic development of the State, regional development tasks, and prevention, control and treatment activities of the COVID-19 pandemic.

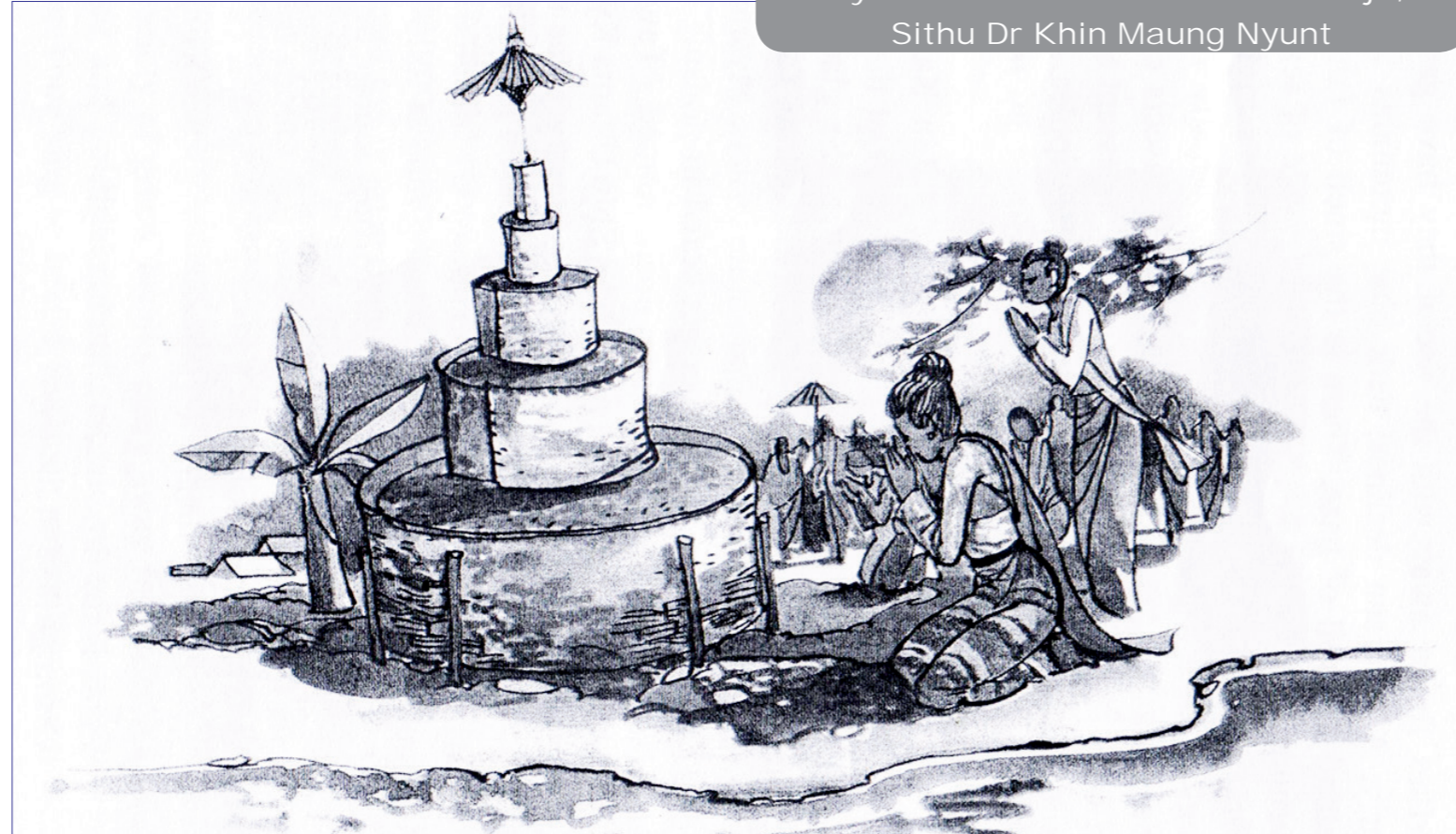
Especially, the government decided to cut the spending of foreign exchange on the import of fuel as prices of fuel are hiking day by day because of international instability. Moreover, the government issued the directives for efficient use of fuel for relevant departments and departmental heads as of April 2022 for minimizing waste and loss of fuel according to the thrifty process depending on the income situation of the nation.

As the Ministry of Planning and Finance adopted the seven points for the current expenditure sector and four more points for the capital expenditure sector to scrutinize the budgets, drawing the budgets should give coverage to important projects and plans in compliance with the relevant financial restrictions and basic principles.

Now, global countries are facing financial problems based on global political issues. Myanmar is facing impacts of global issues as well as disadvantages of terrorism at home. Hence, the entire people need to cooperate with the government in controlling the country on the right track to a peaceful and prosperous goal.

Tabaung, the month of Sand Pagoda Festival

By Maha Saddhamma Jotika Dhaja, Sithu Dr Khin Maung Nyunt



Tabaung (March) is the 12th month of the Myanmar calendar and it is the last month of the year. Being a transition between Winter and Summer Tabaung still covers Winter for its first half which is from the 1st to the 15th and enters into Summer in its second half which is from the 16th to the 30th. Days in this month are getting warm while nights remain still cold. This peculiar weather gave rise to an old Myanmar saying “နေ့ပူလို့ ညချမ်း တပေါင်း လသာရမ်း” (Days are warm and nights are chilly, Tabaung is the month so unruly). The astrological name of Tabaung is Mina (Pisces) and its zodiacal sign is two fish. Ou tara phala guni (ဥတ္တရဖလဂုဏ်) which is an asterism of two stars in Leo resembling the rear leg of a couch is the star of this month. Although many trees and plants bloom in Tabaung as it is the beginning of springtime, Tharaphi (Orchocapus Siamensis) and Pon Nyet (Calophyllum Inophyllum) are traditionally marked as flowers of this month.

The word “Tabaung” has two meanings according to Wawhaya Linahta Dipani Kyan (Book on Vocabulary). First, it means it is the month for yearning or longing or reminiscence. As the month is so beautiful and pleasant that one recalls one’s sweet memories or one longs or yearns for one’s loved

The word “Tabaung” has two meanings according to Wawhaya Linahta Dipani Kyan (Book on Vocabulary). First, it means it is the month for yearning or longing or reminiscence. As the month is so beautiful and pleasant that one recalls one’s sweet memories or one longs or yearns for one’s loved ones.

The second meaning is that it is the month during which jaggery (palm sugar) is made from toddy juice (natural juice from sugar palm). Tabaung is described as the queen of all months because it is in this month that the natural landscape bursts forth all its beauties and splendours – sky and clouds change their colours and designs, woodlands put on all hues, foliage bears a variety of green, brooks carry away fallen leaves of copper and gold, lakes turn emerald green or sapphire blue, cuckoos sing to herald Summer, doves coo continuously to prepare for their mating game. Sparrows repair and renovate their nests in anticipation of the monsoon. The swarm of wasps

that Ashin Kaludayi composed sixty stanzas of Pali poem to request the Lord Buddha to make a long journey through the glades to Kapilavatthu which was his royal father’s kingdom. Tabaung is the favourite theme of Myanmar nature writers. Myanmar poets of past and present never get bored in praising the beauties of Tabaung. The long poem named “Tawla” (Travelogue) composed by monk poet Shin Uttama Kyaw of the Innwa Period is an unsurpassed literary piece that described nature in Tabaung. In Twelve season poems that flowed from the prolific pen of Pho Thudaw U Min of the late Konbaung Period, the stanza on Tabaung runs as follows: -

“ဝန်းရွှေစိ ငြိုငံ လျှောက်လို့၊
ဝိတောက်ကယ်တဲ့ သင်းချို၊
ဥတ္တရာဘရဂုဏ်ကံ၊ တိမ်ဘုံမှာ
ရောင်ခြည်လင်းလို့၊ လမ်းသော်တာနှင့်
တူမကွာ ထိန်ဝါလို့၊ ထွန်းတဲ့ခါတို့၊
သောင်သဲငယ်မို့၊ ရေညိုကရစ်မို့၊
လေညှင်းငယ်လာ၊ စုံဟေမာမြိုင်ထဲက၊
ဝမ်းဘဲ ရွှေစင်ရောက်တို့၊ ဖော်သံ
အမောင်မယ်ကူးတယ၊ မြူးပျော်ကြည့်လို့”
“This is the time when climbing high,
Orion glitters in the sky,
And shining with the moon at night
Mingles with her’s his yellow light
“The sweet scent of the Tharaphee
And faint smell of the Padauk tree

Is wafted from the misty trees

Upon a gentle southing breeze

About the sandbanks of the stream

The white arms of a river gleam

I hear the clamorous return Of wild duck and silver Tern.”

The traditional festival held in Tabaung is Sand Pagoda Festival. The earliest historical evidence so far traceable is found in the literature of the Innwa Period. Shin Maha Thilawuntha, one of four noted monk poets of the Innwa Period composed many Pyo (Poem of epic proportions) verses of which one Pyo named “Buddhu Pati” (History of His Enlightenment) Pyo has the description of the month Tabaung and the Sand Pagoda festival. It runs as follows: -

Catfish, carps and all their members

Frolie in the river:

Seagull and sheldrake make the lovely call

Aquatic birds brahminy duck, hamsa and river tern

Gleefully greet each other in ecstasy.

On the silvery sandbank is celebrated

the Festival of Sand Pagoda.”

From this description, we may safely assume that Sand Pagoda Festival was annually held in Tabaung in the Innwa Period. As all Pagoda festivals are associated with Buddhism and since Buddhism was well established in Myanmar long before the Innwa Period, it is possible that the Sand Pagoda festival originated in the time much earlier than the Innwa period. One fact to support the existence of Sand Pagoda in the Bagan Period was the world-renowned Shwezigon Pagoda of Bagan. Its history says that King Anawrahta (A.D. 1044-77) built that pagoda on the sandbank of the Ayeyawady River. Its original name was Shwe The Khon (ရွှေသံခုံ) meaning golden pagoda on the sandbank.

In Buddhist literature, we find the origin of the Sand Pagoda. Buddha Sasanika Kyans (ဗုဒ္ဓသာသနိကကျမ်း) say that the building and worship of Sand Pagoda was a cultural tradition of Buddhist religion dating far back to aeons of time. History of the first building of Sand Pagoda is mentioned in Apadan Pali, Palinupadaka Mahathera Apadan (အပဒါနိပိတိတော်ပုလိနပ္ပိဒကမဟာထေရ်အပဒါနိ) It is as follows: -

“In the time of hundred thousand kabas (Cosmic Aeon) ago there lived a hermit named Devala in a hermitage at the Himalayas. The hermitage was created by the Devas. He had several pupils and disciples. One day he came out from his hermitage and made a Sand Pagoda which he decorated with flowers and reverently worshipped it as representative of the Lord Buddha. He received peace of mind and spiritual bliss. His pupils and disciples asked the hermit why he built and worshipped the Sand Pagoda. The hermit replied that ancient literature of Vedas say that the Lord Buddha was attended by many pupils and disciples and he was the Exalted Sage to revere. I built this Sand Pagoda dedicated to the Lord Buddha and worshipped it as his representative. The hermit further explained the peculiar marks, extraordinary traits, glories, infinite qualities, moral character and Sila of the Lord Buddha. On hearing the hermit’s explanation, the pupils and disciples became inspired to pay homage to the Lord Buddha. So, they also made Sand Pagodas to worship.

In the hagiography of Pulinahtupiya Mahathera, it was mentioned that the hermit Narda who was the future Pulinahtupiya Mahathera made Sand Pagoda to worship all previously extinct Buddhas who had entered Parinivirna. He decorated the Sand Pagoda he made with three thousand small bells and worshipped it day and night.

In the month of Tabaung water in the rivers, streams and lakes

SEE PAGE-10



Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Saturday 5 March 2022)

BAY INFERENCE: According to the observations at (17:30) hrs MST today, the Deep Depression over Southwest Bay of Bengal moved Westwards. It is centred at about (660) Nautical miles West-Southwest of Coco-Island, (745) Nautical miles West-Southwest of Hainggyigyun (Myanmar), (190) Nautical miles North-Northeast of Trincomalee (Sri Lanka), (160) Nautical miles East-Northeast of Nagapattinam, (150) Nautical miles East-Southeast of Puducherry and (150) Nautical miles East-Southeast of Chennai (India). Weather is partly cloudy over the Andaman Sea, Southeast Bay and East Central Bay and cloudy elsewhere over the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL MORNING OF THE 6 March 2022: Rain or thundershowers are likely to be isolated Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway, and Taninthayi regions and Kachin, Northern Shan, Chin and Rakhine states. Degree of certainty is (60%). Weather will be partly cloudy in the remaining regions and states.

STATE OF THE SEA: Sea will be moderate in Myanmar waters. Wave height will be about (5-8) feet off and along Myanmar Coasts.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of scattered rain or thundershowers in Taninthayi Region and isolated rain or thundershowers in Shan, Kayah, Kayin and Mon states.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 6 March 2022: Partly cloudy.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 6 March 2022: Partly cloudy.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 6 March 2022: Likelihood of isolated rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (60%).

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01 860 4530

Tabauing, the month of Sand Pagoda . . .

FROM PAGE-9

ebbs, and sandbanks appear in them. On these fertile sandbanks, Myanmar cultivators grow seasonal crops such as maize, corn, groundnut, sweet potatoes, peas, tomatoes, tobacco, and many vegetables and fruits. After these agricultural products are sold out, the cultivators have cash and enough rest time until the next rain comes. With money and leisure, they turn to religious activities. Myanmar kings made the Sand Pagoda festival the seasonal festival of Tabauing and it was held at the Palace as well as at every riverside town and village. The King, the Chief Queen and the whole court came out to the sandbanks where Sand Pagodas were made and homage given them ceremonially, followed by

public entertainments and festivities.

Sand Pagodas are of graduated five tiers, tapering to the top. Each tier of white sand is flanked by bamboo mattings and posts. The five tiers represent five layers of Mt. Meru the legendary Mountain in Buddhist cosmology. After all, five tiers are filled with clean and pure white sand, paper streamers, prayer flags, festoons and flowers are artistically arranged on them. With fruits flowers and other offertories, devotees come in a procession accompanied by folk dancers and musicians. They circumambulate the Sand Pagoda three times and finally pay homage to it. Sayadaw the head monk who leads the invited monks pre-

sides the occasion and he gives the devotees five moral precepts to observe. Libation ceremony is performed to share out the religious merit with all sentient beings.

Sand Pagodas last till the next rainy season. But some sand pagodas were encased by brick and cement to last long. So, in some waterfront towns, we find sand pagodas of permanent nature. Though they are still called Sand Pa-godas they are like any other solid pagoda of brick and plaster. Nowadays, the Sand Pagoda festival is no longer held on a national scale. Only a few towns and villages along the rivers hold it annually as their local event. In its place Tabauing festival has come in. For example,

at the Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon, the Tabauing festival is held yearly in Tabauing. It was on the full moon day of Tabauing in the Maha Sakarit year 103 that the Shwedagon Pagoda was built. To commemorate the founding date of the Pagoda, Tabauing Festival is held every year. In the days of the Myanmar monarchy, the Governor of Hanthawaddy on behalf of the King paid a ceremonial visit to the Shwedagon Pagoda, on the full moon day of Tabauing. He worshipped it and donated many offertories. Theatrical performances were held for public entertainment. The following is an excerpt from the book *The Burman, His Life and Notions* by J.G. Scott who used a pen name, Shwe Yoe. It is his

remark on Tabauing Festival he saw in 1882.

“The greatest of all the pagoda feasts is, of course, that of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, with its pilgrims, not only from the furthest parts of Myanmar and far-away Shan hills but also from over the seas, from Siam and Cambodia and Korea. But the vastness of the gathering and the proximity of the great town spoil the national character of the festival, and introduce too many elements of nineteenth-century civilization in the shape of merry-go-rounds and hack carriages. A “jungle” feast is not only more characteristic but more appreciated in its way by both town and country folk.”

■ ■ ■

Failure to launch: War scuppers Russia-West space collaboration



A handout photograph released by the Russian Space Agency Roscosmos 21 July 2021, shows workers preparing the module “Nauka” (Science) at the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

RUSSIA'S invasion of Ukraine has had repercussions not just

around the world but beyond it, bringing to a grinding halt joint

space projects between Moscow and the West that began in the

aftermath of the Cold War.

When the head of Russian space agency Roscosmos Dmitry Rogozin announced on Thursday that Russia would stop supplying the United States with rocket engines, his message was blunt: “Let them fly to space on their broomsticks.”

He also said Roscosmos would dramatically “adjust” its programme to prioritize making military satellites, adding that all future spacecraft will be “dual purpose” — with one of those purposes in the Russian defence ministry’s interest.

In response to the sweeping sanctions imposed on Russia by most of the Western world, Roscosmos also told the German Aerospace Center that it will no

longer take part in “joint space experiments” on the International Space Station.

Roscosmos had earlier suspended launches from Europe’s spaceport in French Guiana’s Kourou, which use Russian Soyuz rockets, withdrawing around a hundred of its workers.

Another victim is the Rosalind Franklin rover, whose launch under the joint Russian-European ExoMars mission had already been postponed from 2020 due to the pandemic.

The rover, which is designed to drill into Mars to search for signs of life, is now “very unlikely” to launch this year, the European Space Agency said. — AFP ■

Lions, tigers evacuated from Ukraine to Poland

SIX lions and six tigers evacuated from near Kyiv arrived at a zoo in Poland on Thursday following a two-day odyssey skirting battle frontlines and coming face to face with Russian tanks, a zoo spokesman said.

A Ukrainian truck drove the animals, along with two wild cats and a wild dog, nearly 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) to the Polish border while avoiding the Zhytomyr region, which the invading Russian forces have bombarded, spokeswoman Malgorzata Chodyla told AFP.

At one point, the truck had to stop overnight opposite Russian tanks.

The driver rested under his vehicle while the owner of the Ukrainian shelter fed the animals because the transport crew did not know how to, the spokeswoman said.

At the border, the animals were transferred to a Polish truck while the Ukrainian driver returned home to his children.

For now, the animals will be cared for at the Poznan zoo.

Zoo director Ewa Zgrabczynska, who helped arrange the evacuation, said she is already in contact with several western organizations that want to take in the animals. — AFP ■

UNEP urges world to embrace science to curb environmental pollution

THE United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on Friday called on the global community to invest in science and technology in finding solutions to environmental pollution.

Countries also need to invest in the development of skills in youths through capacity-building to inculcate in them digital transformation techniques, UNEP executive director Inger Andersen said.

She urged global nations to invest in engineering institutions to help design new products with recycled products.

“We need to invest in academic institutions to help find solutions to the global environ-

mental problems that threaten humanity and the environment,” Andersen said during the launch of Kenya’s national

sustainable waste management policy and national marine litter management action plan. — Xinhua ■



In Paris’s André-Citroën Park, a balloon is used to measure air pollution. PHOTO: BERTRAND GUAY/AFP

China vows to maintain radical “zero COVID policy” to curb outbreaks

CHINA pledged Friday to maintain its radical “zero COVID policy,” including complete quarantine and lockdowns when necessary, emphasizing that it has proved effective at containing outbreaks of the coronavirus.

“It is the right and effective way,” and the outcome is “good,” Zhang Yesui, spokesman for the Chinese legislature, said at a press conference ahead of the annual session of the National People’s Congress from Saturday.

All of the data, such as the number of infections and fatalities, as well as economic indicators, suggest China is “one of the most successful countries in the world” in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, Zhang said.

Zhang’s remarks came as many Chinese citizens are believed to be frustrated by all-en-



The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference convenes its annual meeting in Beijing on 4 March 2022. PHOTO: KYODO

compassing constraints under the ruling Communist Party’s policy, now in place for more than two years.

In recent months, authorities have imposed full lock-

downs on some cities since the highly contagious Omicron variant was first confirmed in China last December.

“Of course, any prevention and control measures have

costs, but compared with protecting people’s lives and health, these costs are worth it,” Zhang said, adding the negative impact of the strict anti-epidemic policy on life is “limited.” — Kyodo ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Life to normalize in Belgium as COVID-19 measures dropped

COVID-19 measures such as wearing masks in public places will be dropped in Belgium from 7 March, after the federal government agreed on Friday to move the country to code yellow. This means the epidemiological situation is under control, according to an official report published by the National Crisis Centre.

The decision to lift coronavirus measures in the hospitality sector and most public places marks the end of the federal phase of the “national emergency plan to fight COVID-19”, launched two years ago in Belgium.

Wearing a mask will no longer be mandatory in schools, universities and public places, and the COVID safe ticket (CST) will no longer be required to enter bars and restaurants, or to attend public events.

However, rules for wearing masks on public transport, as well as in hospitals and health-care centres, “will continue to be applied for a certain time,” said Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo. — Xinhua ■

Top Hong Kong Covid expert says mass-testing plan ‘unhelpful’



Citizens queue for COVID-19 testing at a mobile testing station in Hong Kong, south China, 11 February 2022. Hong Kong registered 1,325 new cases of COVID-19 over the past 24 hours, according to data from the Centre for Health Protection on Friday. PHOTO: XINHUA/LO PING

ONE of Hong Kong’s top coronavirus experts on Thursday joined a growing chorus of criti-

cism over plans to test the entire city, saying doing so during its worst-ever outbreak would have

little impact.

The Asian financial hub is registering tens of thousands of new cases each day, overwhelming hospitals and shattering the city’s zero-Covid strategy.

China has ordered local officials to stamp out the current wave even as studies estimate as many as a quarter of the city’s residents may have already been infected.

Authorities plan to test all 7.4 million residents later this month and are scrambling to build a network of isolation camps and temporary hospitals, with China’s help, to house the infected.

The criticism from Yuen Kwok-yung, a veteran microbiologist who led the city’s fight

against SARS in 2003, follows multiple other local health experts taking issue with the strategy this week.

Yuen, a key government pandemic adviser, said mass testing can help break transmission chains when there are “only a few dozen or a few hundred cases a day” and has been deployed successfully in mainland China when outbreaks first emerge.

“If we are recording over 50,000 new cases every day, I don’t think (mass testing) will be very helpful,” he told reporters.

“If we do not have sufficient isolation facilities, the effectiveness of compulsory testing will be very low.” — AFP ■

Sri Lanka ends widely condemned Muslim burial policy

SRI Lanka on Thursday ended a heavily criticized policy that required Muslim Covid-19 victims to be buried at a remote government-designated site in the absence of their families or final religious rites.

Only a year ago, Colombo reversed an initial policy of enforced cremations — prohibited by Islam — under intense international pressure, while still refusing to allow traditional burials at cemeteries.

In Thursday’s new directive, the country’s top health official said the bodies of virus victims could now be handed over to relatives for burial at any cemetery of their choosing.

“The method of disposal, burial or cremation, at any cemetery or burial ground is at the discretion of relatives,” Health Director-General Asela Gunawardena said. — AFP ■

COVID-19 takes centre stage at Africa sustainable development forum

CONTINENTAL response against the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and rebuilding Africa from the impacts of the pandemic took centre stage at the ongoing 8th African Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (ARFSD-8).

This year’s edition of ARFSD is underway in a hybrid format in Kigali, Rwanda and virtually from 3 to 5 March under the theme “Building forward better: A Green, Inclusive and Resilient Africa Poised to Achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”.

Senior experts and policymakers attending the high-level meeting called on Africa to

acknowledge the progress the continent has made towards targets in 2030 and 2063 and to improve upon them while mitigating the impacts induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNECA said in a statement issued Friday.

The ARFSD-8, organized by the United Nations Economic Commission of Africa (ECA) and the government of Rwanda in collaboration with the African Union (AU) Commission, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and other entities of the UN system, envisaged reviewing and catalyze actions to achieve the Sustainable Development



People wait to take the COVID-19 test in Johannesburg, South Africa, 1 February 2021. PHOTO: XINHUA/CHEN CHENG

Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and goals of the Africa’s 50-year continen-

tal development Agenda 2063. — Xinhua ■

NEWS
IN BRIEF

China's military spending to rise 7.1% on year in 2022

CHINA said Saturday that it will increase its military spending in 2022 to 1.45 trillion yuan (\$229 billion), a 7.1 per cent increase from last year, in a report delivered at the annual session of its parliament.

The rate of growth was faster than the 6.8 per cent year-on-year rise in 2021.

In another report mapping out policy directions for 2022, China acknowledged that the country's economy has been facing downward pressure, while pledging to take measures to facilitate the healthy development of the real estate sector.

China also expressed resolve to strengthen restrictions to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus "in a scientific and targeted manner". — Kyodo ■

Brazil exits recession, but faces tough year

BRAZIL exited recession in the fourth quarter, the government said Friday, though weak growth and high inflation still dog Latin America's biggest economy as President Jair Bolsonaro gears up to seek re-election in October.

Gross domestic product (GDP) grew 0.5 per cent for the period from October through December, reversing its 0.3-per cent and 0.1-per cent contractions in the previous two quarters, said the national statistics institute, IBGE.

That brought GDP growth for 2021 to 4.6 per cent on the year, erasing the economy's painful contraction in pandemic-battered 2020, which was revised to 3.9 per cent.

But the economy remains a headache for far-right leader Bolsonaro, with growth still weak and inflation hitting Brazilian households hard.

Uncertainty fuelled by Bolsonaro's expected election showdown with leftist ex-president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and international turmoil around Russia's invasion of Ukraine will likely weigh heavily on the Brazilian economy this year, analysts say. — AFP ■

China-led development bank freezes projects with Russia, Belarus



REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE: The AIIB bank has suspended its project with Russia related to the rail sector worth \$300 million while freezing its two activities with Belarus, it added. PHOTO: XINHUA

THE China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has decided to freeze projects with Russia and Belarus as Western countries expand sanctions against the two nations in the wake of Moscow's aggression against Ukraine.

The Chinese government has not changed its policy toward continuing its trade and business engagements with Russia, but the AIIB, comprised of dozens of member countries, has decided to keep in step with the United

States and other democratic countries.

In a statement released Thursday, the bank said given the current circumstances, it has "decided that all activities relating to Russia and Belarus are on hold and under review" in the bank's "best interests." Belarus, which borders both Russia and Ukraine, has supported the Russian invasion.

The bank has suspended its project with Russia related to the rail sector worth \$300 million while freezing its two activities with Belarus, it added.

The bank said its management "will do our utmost to safeguard the financial integrity of AIIB, against a backdrop of the evolving economic and financial situation."

The AIIB, a multinational financial organization launched in 2015 by Beijing, has sought to promote Chinese President Xi Jinping's "Belt and Road" infrastructure development initiative.

Russia is the third-biggest stakeholder of the AIIB after China and India, holding 6 per cent of the voting power in the bank's management.

On Friday, meanwhile, the Chinese government reiterated that it hopes the Ukraine crisis will be resolved through dialogue and negotiations. Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin also called for the safety of nuclear facilities in Ukraine after reports that Europe's largest atomic power plant located in Ukraine came under attack by the Russian military. — Kyodo ■

World food prices reach all-time high over supply issues, Ukraine crisis

WORLD food prices reached their highest point in the 61-year history of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's Food Price Index, pushed higher by supply chain issues and the Ukraine crisis.

The monthly index, released Friday by the organization, best known as FAO, averaged 140.7 points in February. That is 3.9 per cent higher than in January, 24.1 per cent higher than in February 2021, and 2 per cent above its previous all-time high set in February 2011.

The index, which measures prices dating back to 1961, uses the average for prices between 2014 and 2016 as the value of 100. It is adjusted for inflation.

Four of five sub categories in the index rose, with the index for grains and cereals — the largest component in the index



Experts say the Russia's war against Ukraine could send food prices rising and increase global hunger. PHOTO: AFP

— climbing 3.0 per cent, with wheat prices pushed higher by supply worries given that both Russia and Ukraine are major

wheat exporters.

Other sub-indexes rose even more, with prices for vegetable oil up 8.5 per cent compared to

the previous month and dairy prices climbing 6.4 per cent.

Meat prices rose by a modest 1.1 per cent. — Xinhua ■

US oil logs highest finish since 2008 on supply fears

OIL prices spiked on Friday as the ongoing military conflict between Russia and Ukraine kindled fears about energy supply disruptions.

The West Texas Intermediate (WTI) for April delivery added 8.01 US dollars, or 7.4 per cent, to settle at 115.68 dollars a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange, the highest finish since September 2008.

Brent crude for May delivery increased 7.65 dollars, or 6.9 per cent, to close at 118.11 dollars a barrel on the London ICE Futures Exchange, the highest settlement since February 2013.



On 24 February 2022 Russia launched a military invasion on Ukraine. Already inflated oil prices have since skyrocketed to over \$110 per barrel. PHOTO: AFP

The oil rally came as the news regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict is still dominating the

developments on the markets.

As the fighting continues, the West has imposed further sanc-

tions and more and more Western companies are withdrawing from Russia.

Concerns about energy supplies persist and markets remain correspondingly nervous, You-Na Park-Heger, analyst at Commerzbank Research, said Friday in a note. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, a group known as OPEC+, announced on Wednesday that it would stick to existing plans for a modest oil output increase of 400,000 barrels per day in April, despite supply fears amid the Ukraine crisis. — Xinhua ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Gas prices hit record highs in Canada

GAS prices have hit record-breaking highs in Canadian cities, Natural Resources Canada revealed on Friday.

According to the daily average retail prices for regular gasoline published by the agency, the price per litre reached 200.1 Canadian cents (1.57 US dollars) in Vancouver and 201.3 cents (1.58 US dollars) in Labrador City, for the first time in the Canadian history. The average price per litre in Canada reached 176.2 cents (1.38 US dollars). — Xinhua ■

Microsoft 'suspends' new sales of products, services in Russia

MICROSOFT is halting new sales of its products and services in Russia, the tech giant announced Friday, in the latest fallout over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Western governments, sporting organizations and big companies have cut Russia off or dealt it punishing sanctions over the internationally condemned attack on its neighbour. — AFP ■

Californians resigned as gasoline prices spike

CALIFORNIANS filling up their cars on Friday winced at the spiralling cost of gasoline, but largely shrugged as residents of the state that has long had the highest gas prices in the United States.

California drivers are paying an average of more than \$5 for a gallon (\$1.34 per litre), according to the American Automobile Association (AAA), up more than a third from a year ago, as Russia's invasion

of Ukraine sends world oil prices rocketing.

"It's going to affect the prices," Mike Hernandez told AFP.

"I'm not really into politics or anything like that, but now that this thing is going on between Russia and Ukraine, it's just that sad."

Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of neighbouring Ukraine has sent financial markets into meltdown.

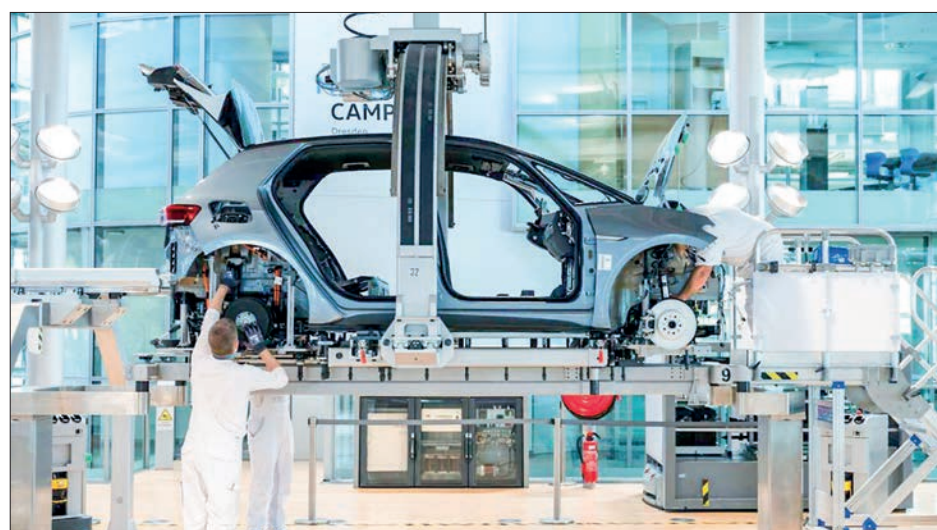
Prices for crude oil — the raw material for gasoline — have been hit hard, and are up well above \$110 a barrel, with players fretting about the impact on Russian supplies, as sanctions choke Moscow off from the global economy.

While all countries have access to the same gasoline, subsidies or taxes imposed locally mean the ultimate cost to consumers varies wildly. — AFP ■



Average petrol prices in California are just above \$5 per gallon (\$1.34 per litre), but some gas stations have much higher prices. PHOTO: KESQ/AFP

Volkswagen plans 2 bn euro electric car plant in Germany



An assembly line for the Volkswagen ID 3 electric car in Dresden, Germany. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

GERMAN auto giant Volkswagen said on Friday it had approved a 2 billion euro investment in a new electric car plant, as it seeks to overhaul its business in the face of stiff competition from US rival Tesla.

Construction on the new German factory next to the group's historic home in Wolfsburg will begin "as early as spring 2023" for a production start in 2026, VW said in a statement.

The new site will be dedicated to the production

of mass-market "Trinity" vehicles, the centre point of Volkswagen's new all-electric fleet.

The decision was an "important milestone" for the company, the head of the VW brand Ralf Brandstätter said in a statement, as it plans its move away from traditional combustion engines.

The Volkswagen group — whose 12 brands include Audi, Porsche and Skoda — is pumping 35 billion euros into the shift to electric vehicles and aims to become the world's largest

electric carmaker by 2025.

The announcement of the \$2.2 billion investment came on the same day as Volkswagen's rival, electric car pioneer Tesla got the green light from local officials to start production at a new plant near Berlin, Tesla's first "gigafactory" in Europe.

With Tesla's ambitions parked on its front lawn, Volkswagen is hoping to match its US rival with the new purpose-built factory by producing new electric vehicles in the space of 10 hours. — AFP ■

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Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V CONTSHIP PEP VOY.NO. (029N)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **6-3-2022** 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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Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S GOLD STAR LINE PTE LTD

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

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Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V NAKSKOV MAERSK VOY.NO. (208W)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **6-3-2022** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **MITT/MIP** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

Phone No: **2301185**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S SEALAND MAERSK ASIA PTE LTD

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

M.V HAN XIN V.2206

Consignees of cargo carried on **M.V HAN XIN VOY. NO. (2206)** are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on **5-3-2022** and cargo will be discharged into the premises of **WILMAR** where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

Phone No: **2301928**

Shipping Agency Department
Myanma Port Authority

Agent For:

M/S WILHELMSSEN SHIPS SERVICE (S) PTE LTD

NEWS IN BRIEF

German chancellor says NATO will not play active role in Ukraine conflict

GERMAN Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Friday that his country and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will not play an active role in the Ukraine conflict.

"It is absolutely clear to us that there will be no NATO military involvement in this conflict," Scholz said at a press conference after visiting the Bundeswehr's operations command. "We will rule that out with all that we do".

Scholz said that the German government would use all diplomatic means "to ensure that the possibility of a joint way out of this crisis is attempted, although it has already come this far."

Meanwhile, he said it would be necessary to ensure that no attacks occurred on NATO territory. Efforts to secure the allies' borders with Russia and Ukraine had been stepped up, Scholz added. "But they are purely defensive and they remain on NATO territory." — AFP ■

Army of cyber hackers rise up to back Ukraine

AN army of volunteer hackers is rising up in cyberspace to defend Ukraine, though internet specialists are calling on geeks and other "hacktivists" to stay out of a potentially very dangerous computer war.

According to Livia Tibirna, an analyst at cyber security firm Sekoia, nearly 260,000 people have joined the "IT Army" of volunteer hackers, which was set up at the initiative of Ukraine's digital minister Mykhailo Fedorov.

The group, which can be accessed via the encrypted messaging service Telegram, has a list of potential targets in Russia, companies and institutions, for the hackers to target.

It's difficult to judge the effect the cyber-army is having. — AFP ■

Over 200 students from Ahmedabad still stranded in Ukraine: Official

AS many as 205 students from Ahmedabad district of Gujarat are still stranded in war-torn Ukraine and its neighbouring countries, a senior official said on Friday. Ahmedabad Collector Sandip Sagale, during the day, met the parents of one such stranded student, Shivam Sharma, and gathered information about his situation.

"Of the total 259 students who were stranded in Ukraine, 54 have come back and efforts are on to bring back remaining students. The Union government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched Operation Ganga to evacuate stranded Indians," Mr Sagale said after meeting Shivam's parents at their residence in Ranip area. — ANI ■

More than 400 Nigerians who fled Ukraine return home

A first batch of more than 400 Nigerians who fled Ukraine following the Russian invasion were flown home on Friday.

The group, most of whom were students, arrived shortly after 0630 GMT on a chartered flight from Romania's capital Bucharest, one of the hubs from where African governments are scrambling to extract stranded citizens.

Nigerian foreign ministry official Gabriel Aduda tweeted pictures of the group inside an aircraft late on Thursday, saying "415 Nigerians mostly students fleeing the Ukraine-Russian war from Bucharest".

Many looked tired but relieved that their journey was over. — AFP ■

Putin signs law introducing jail terms for 'fake news' on army



Ekho Mosvky, a liberal-leaning radio station, said it was shutting down after being taken off air over Ukraine war coverage. PHOTO: AFP

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin on Friday signed into law a bill introducing jail terms of up to 15 years for fake news about the Russian army, as Moscow pushes forward with its invasion

of Ukraine.

The bill, adopted by lawmakers earlier on Friday, sets out jail terms of varying lengths and fines against people who publish "knowingly false information"

about the military, with harsher penalties to hit when dissemination is deemed to have serious consequences. Putin also signed a bill that would allow fines or jail terms of up to three years for calling for sanctions against Russia with Moscow facing harsh economic penalties from Western capitals over the invasion.

The past year has seen an unprecedented crackdown on independent and critical voices in Russia that only intensified after the start of the invasion.

Russia's media watchdog said Friday it had restricted access to the BBC and other independent media websites and blocked social media giant Facebook. — AFP ■

Russians pack trains into Finland as sanctions bite

IT'S one of the few remaining routes from Russia to the EU: trains to Finland are packed with Russians fearful that now is their last chance to escape the impact of Western sanctions.

After two years of pandemic, the 6:40 am from St Petersburg was full of largely Russian passengers as it pulled into Helsinki station on Thursday.

"We decided with our families to go back as soon as possible, because it's unclear what the situation will be in a week," Muscovite Polina Poliakova told AFP as she wheeled her suitcase along platform 9. Travelling "is hard now because everything is getting cancelled," added Beata Iukhtanova, her friend who studies with her in Paris, where the

pair were headed.

The Allegro express train linking St Petersburg to the Finnish capital is currently the only open rail route between Russia and the EU. It is therefore one of the few remaining ways out of the country since the widespread airspace closures in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine a week ago. — AFP ■

Chinese envoy calls for joint efforts to ensure safety of nuclear facilities in Ukraine



The New Safe Confinement seals off the Object Shelter, also known as the Sarcophagus, a temporary structure built in 1986 over the debris of the 4th reactor of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, Kyiv Region, northern Ukraine. PHOTO: FUTURE PUBLISHING/XINHUA

A Chinese envoy on Friday called on parties to the Ukraine conflict to act with caution and work together, with the assistance of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to ensure the safety of relevant nuclear facilities inside Ukraine.

China pays close attention to the latest developments in Ukraine and expresses its concern over the relevant reports

about the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, said Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the United Nations.

According to information the IAEA received from the Ukrainian nuclear authority, the main equipment of the nuclear power plant remains intact, and the level of radiation unchanged. China also takes note of the information and clarification pro-

vided by Russia on the relevant matters, Zhang told a Security Council emergency meeting.

Noting the Ukraine crisis is still undergoing complex changes, he said the most important thing right now is to ease tension, avoid more civilian casualties, intensify diplomatic efforts, and get back as soon as possible to the track of political settlement. — Xinhua ■

Ukraine port city Mariupol blockaded by Russian forces

INVADING Russian troops have blockaded the strategic Ukrainian port city Mariupol, its mayor announced on Saturday, as Moscow and Kyiv aimed to hold new talks over the weekend.

While laying siege to Mariupol for days, Russian forces also cut its electricity, food, water, heating and transportation in the depths of winter, prompting comparisons to the Nazi blockade of Leningrad in World War II.

“For now, we are looking for solutions to humanitarian problems and all possible ways to get Mariupol out of the blockade,” said mayor Vadim Boychenko. He called for a ceasefire and a humanitarian corridor for food and medicine.

Since President Vladimir Putin’s army invaded on 24 February, Russia has pummelled Ukrainian cities, killed hundreds of civilians and assaulted Europe’s largest atomic power plant.



This screen grab obtained from a handout video released by the Russian Defence Ministry on 4 March 2022, shows a destroyed Ukrainian army tank in the settlement of Gnutovo outside Mariupol. **PHOTO: RUSSIAN DEFENCE MINISTRY/AFP**

The invasion has drawn condemnation and severe sanctions from Western nations balancing punishment of the Kremlin with fears of a hazardous escalation.

Moscow has seized two key cities in its 10-day-long invasion, Berdiansk and Kherson on Ukraine’s southern Black

Sea coast.

But capturing Mariupol, a city of about 450,000 people on the Azov Sea, would represent a bigger prize for Russian forces as it would deal a severe blow to Ukraine’s maritime access and connect troops coming from annexed Crimea and the Donbas. — AFP ■

22 donor countries: Western arms arrive quickly and discreetly

ON a runway near the Ukrainian border, 14 wide-body aircraft arrive on average each day — a carefully calibrated operation mounted at top speed to deliver tonnes of Western military assistance to Kyiv.

General Mark Milley, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, inspected the site on Friday

— its location is being kept secret for security reasons — where the Pentagon is coordinating the activities of 22 donor countries.

A handful of journalists accompanying Milley were allowed to observe as personnel prepared about 100 Javelin anti-tank missiles for delivery to the border. Pictures were forbidden.

Men in civilian clothes used forklifts to move the missiles, which were stacked on pallets and only covered in plastic.

On the runway, the cargo hold of a US Air Force C-17 transport plane has just been shut — the delivery was complete. At the same moment, another C-17 was landing. The missiles did not stay in one place for long: they were quickly taken by land to their final destination, military officials said.

As many as 18 deliveries have taken place in a single day at the site. Only about four or five a day are American.

The operation is coordinated by a mix of soldiers and civilians, mainly from NATO member countries, who have come to support Ukraine in its battle against a Russian invading force that is bigger and better equipped. — AFP ■



Given Russian troops’ superior weapons, air power and devastating use of artillery, Western defence analysts expect them to continue grinding forward. **PHOTO: RUSSIAN DEFENCE MINISTRY/AFP/FILE**

US, Russian militaries set up ‘deconfliction line’

THE US and Russian armed forces have set up a direct phone line to reduce the risks of “miscalculation” amid the war in Ukraine, the Pentagon said Friday.

The “deconfliction line” between US European Command and the Russian Ministry of Defence was established earlier this week, Pentagon spokesman John

Kirby said.

“I don’t have any information about whether it’s been used,” Kirby told reporters. “It’s only been in place for a couple of days.”

The line is manned by “staff level officers” from US European Command.

“We know it works,” Kirby

said. “When we tested it they did pick up the other end and acknowledged that they got the call.”

The Pentagon spokesman noted that a “deconfliction line” had been used previously between the United States and Russia to prevent incidents in Syria. — AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Zelensky condemns NATO decision to rule out no-fly zone

UKRAINIAN President Volodymyr Zelensky lashed NATO on Friday for ruling out a no-fly zone over his country saying the Western military alliance knew further Russian aggression was likely.

“Knowing that new strikes and casualties are inevitable, NATO deliberately decided not to close the sky over Ukraine,” he said in a video published by the presidency.

“Today the leadership of the alliance gave the green light for further bombing of Ukrainian cities and villages, refusing to make a no-fly zone.”

Russia at risk of expulsion from Council of Europe

PRESSURE is growing among member states for Russia to be expelled from the Council of Europe after it was suspended in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine, the pan-European rights group’s secretary-general said on Friday.

The Council of Europe’s executive body, the committee of ministers, had a day after the invasion on 25 February suspended Russia from all its rights of representation — but an expulsion would be unprecedented.

“Today, more and more voices are demanding that the next step is the expulsion of the Russian Federation,” Marija Pejcinovic Buric told AFP in an interview.

“I call, once again, on the Russian authorities to immediately and unconditionally cease hostilities and to return to diplomacy and dialogue,” she said.

Over 1.3 million have fled from Ukraine

THE latest figures from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees indicate the following arrivals of refugees in other countries:

650,000 in Poland

149,000 in Russia, including 96,000 who were evacuated before the Russian invasion began from occupied Donetsk and Luhansk regions

145,000 in Hungary

103,000 in Moldova

90,000 in Slovakia

57,000 in Romania

111,000 in other European countries

In addition, 384 arrivals have been reported in Belarus.

Latest developments

HERE are the latest developments in Russia’s war in Ukraine:

West slams ‘recklessness’

At a United Nations Security Council meeting, the US ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield says Russia’s “reckless” overnight attack “represents a dire threat to all of Europe and the world”.

Moscow’s UN ambassador Vassily Nebenzia denies that Russian forces had shelled the plant, saying the statements “are simply untrue”.

Putin ready for dialogue

Russian President Vladimir Putin in a phone call with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz says Moscow is ready for dialogue over Ukraine if all its demands are met.

New talks?

Ukraine plans to hold a third round of talks this weekend with Russian officials to try to end the fighting, one of Kyiv’s negotiators says.

Russia’s Black Sea push

Russian forces take the Black Sea port of Kherson as it appears Moscow is trying to cut Ukraine’s entire access to the sea, with the besieged port of Mariupol in the east without water or power.

‘Numerous rapes’: Kyiv

Ukraine’s foreign minister claims there have been “numerous cases” of Russian troops raping Ukrainian women and calls for an international tribunal on war crimes.

Hunger threat

The United Nations’ World Food Programme warns about a looming food crisis in Ukraine in conflict areas, while disruptions in production and exports could lead to food insecurity globally.

SOURCE: AFP

Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Nine Objectives

1. Political affairs

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

2. Economic affairs

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

- (b) To develop a stable market economy and promote international investment in order to enhance the economic development of the entire National people.
- (c) To promote and support local businesses to create employment opportunities and increase domestic production.

3. Social affairs

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

ONE former champion Aung La N Sang to take on more challenges



Aung La N Sang (front) attempts to unlock the guillotine chokes by Vitaly Bigdash in their catchweight fight at Singapore Indoor Stadium on 25 February. **PHOTO: ONE CHAMPIONSHIP**

ONE CHAMPIONSHIP former two-division champion Aung La N Sang lost to Vitaly Bigdash in their catchweight bout on 25 February, so he will not have a chance to fight for the world title and only focus on the challenging bouts, MMA expert predicted.

If Aung La N Sang beats Baigdash, he will have a chance to fight for the world middleweight title again, but for now,

the Burmese Python will have to wait a while for the championship fights.

So the Burmese Python will have to wait for that opportunity again, and he will be able to get it back only if the upcoming results are good.

In July 2021, after missing out on the middleweight world title, Aung La fought with Brazilian fighter Leandro and beat

him in the first round.

However, in his previous challenge on 25 February this year, Aung La lost to Bigdash with a unanimous decision and the opportunity to challenge his former championship title was farther away.

Aung La N Sang wrote on his social media account that he will try to get back in top form after the defeat. — Ko Nyi Lay/GNLM

Manchester clubs face tricky derby as Leeds launch new era

MANCHESTER United make the short trip to Premier League leaders Manchester City on Sunday buoyed by their recent record at the Etihad as Leeds begin a new era under Jesse Marsch.

Elsewhere, Liverpool will seek to make it seven league wins in seven against high-flying West Ham, one of only two sides to beat the Reds this season.

Arsenal could take advantage of visits to the

top two for the Hammers and United by moving into fourth with games in hand to come when they travel to Watford.

AFP Sport takes a look at some of the key talking points ahead of the weekend action. Can City end United Etihad jinx? Even though they are now indisputably the top dogs in Manchester, City have had real problems beating United on their own turf in recent years. — AFP ■

Overcoming challenges, Beijing 2022 Paralympic Winter Games officially open

LESS than two weeks after the closing of the Beijing Winter Olympics, China's iconic National Stadium burst into the lime-light again as the Paralympic Winter Games opened on Friday night with a ceremony highlighting accessibility and inclusion. Chinese President Xi Jinping declared open the second Paralympics in the country after the 2008 Summer Games. Under the theme of "Improve, Go Beyond, Together," which is inspired by an ancient Chinese saying "One should aim to improve oneself as long as the days go by", the opening ceremony featured performers from all walks of life as individuals with and without disabilities came together to welcome friends from all over the world. The one-and-a-half-hour-long ceremony reached its climax when Li Duan, Paralympic long jump and triple jump champion at Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008, placed the Paralympic torch in the middle of a giant snowflake-shaped cauldron which later ascended to the top of the stadium. Belgium led the parade of athletes of 46 National Paralympic Committees (NOCs), as hosts China marched into the stadium last behind Italy, the hosts of the 2026 Winter Games, with Guo Yujie and Wang Zhidong holding the Chinese national flag together.

Athletes paraded through Beijing's national stadium as the Winter Paralympics opened Friday after a storm of controversy that surrounded the banning of Russian and Belarusian athletes due to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. High tension in the athletes' village, threats of competition boycotts and organisers' eleventh-hour reversal of a previous decision to let Russian athletes and those from ally Belarus compete as neutrals, marred the lead-up to the Games. — Xinhua/AFP ■



Chinese Paralympians wave their national flag as they enter Beijing's "Bird's Nest" stadium on Friday. **PHOTO: JOE TOTH OIS/IOC/AFP**