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Five-Point Road Map of the State Administration Council

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

Message from Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Chairman of State Administration Council on the occasion of 54th Anniversary of ASEAN to the people

TODAY marks the 54th Anniversary of the founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). ASEAN was established with a common desire and collective will to live together in a region of lasting peace, security and stability, sustained economic growth, and shared prosperity and social progress. On this auspicious day, I have the pleasure to extend my warmest greetings and best wishes to our fellow citizens and to the peoples of ASEAN across the region.

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Tatmadaw will accept negotiation with any ethnic armed organizations except for organizations declared as terrorist groups: Senior General

Only when the country restores peace which can prevail stability and tranquility, will it carry out development of the country, said Chairman of the State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at the meeting 13/2021 of the State Administration Council at the SAC Chairman Office yesterday afternoon.

In his opening address, security and political situation of the State are being systematically managed despite high infection rate of COVID-19 at present. Terror acts could be wiped out as of August through cooperation of region and state administrative bodies and security personnel.

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Republic of the Union of Myanmar
State Administration Council

Notification No 224/2021

15th Waning of Waso 1383 ME

7 August 2021

Extension of public holidays for further
prevention, control and treatment over
infection of COVID-19

THE State Administration Council has set the successive public holidays for three times to head off the infection chains of COVID-19 for the people to abide by the restricted disciplines during the public holidays. In order to soonest reach the normal situation with controlling the infection of COVID-19, the notification was announced that the period from 9 to 15 August 2021 was further set as the successive public holidays (except for the Central Bank of Myanmar and its subordinate government banks and private banks under the specific situation) in accord with Section 25 of the Negotiable Instruments Act.

By Order,

Aung Lin Dwe
Lieutenant - General
Secretary
State Administration Council

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Central Committee on Prevention, Control
and Treatment of Coronavirus Disease 2019
(COVID-19)
Announcement

15th Waning of Waso 1383 ME

7 August 2021

IT is here announced that the basic education schools (including private schools and monastic schools) will be temporarily closed for one more week from 9-8-2021 to 15-8-2021 due to the need to continuously curb the spread of COVID-19.

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Central Committee on Prevention, Control and
Treatment of COVID-19

Announcement

15th Waning of Waso 1383 ME

7 August 2021

- The State Administration Council issued Notification No 224/2021 dated 7-8-2021 declaring from 9 to 15 August 2021 as successive public holidays.
- To effectively prevent the spread of COVID-19 during these public holidays, the people must obey the following disciplines: -
 - to reside at homes or dormitories, and not to travel at all except for duty and funeral services;
 - to open the Central Bank of Myanmar, its subordinate government banks and private banks as usual;
 - not to decrease productivity, operate the factories and industries under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour, Nay Pyi Taw Council, region/state governments in line with the COVID-19 health rules of the Ministry of Health;
 - to adopt the work-from-home system or other proper ways for important office work of the relevant departments;
 - to open the shops selling basic essential things like fuel, purified drinking water, livestock, fish and foodstuffs;
 - to open the pharmacy shops and medical companies;
 - to realize the take away system at restaurants;
 - to continue healthcare services (government hospitals/private hospitals and clinics);
 - to wear protective gears, including masks, if you go outside without fail;
 - to operate the land, sea and aviation services for those wishing to travel without fail under the supervision of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, Nay Pyi Taw Council, region/ state governments;
 - to comply the SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) of trucks to facilitate the flow of goods;
 - to continue opening of freight handling ports;
 - to strictly follow the COVID-19 health rules of the Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment of COVID-19 and the Ministry of Health without fail.
- Action will be taken against those who fail to abide by the above-mentioned disciplines under the existing laws.

Imports of required medical supplies, COVID-19 devices continue



A bowser of Oxygen Liquid.

AS the Ministry of Commerce is making continuous efforts to make sure import of anti-COVID-19 medicines, equipment and necessary medical supplies are being shipped from overseas, loosening restrictions to facilitate imports, in collaboration with relevant ministries and providing continuous import on a daily basis.

The ministry is also reportedly making diplomatic arrangements with China, Thailand, Bangladesh and India to import the medicines and equipment through the border trade points.

Yesterday, a total of 2,507 oxygen concentrators were imported through the Yangon International Airport, while 81 tonnes of liquid oxygen, 9 tonnes of oxygen cylinders, 8,422 empty oxygen containers, one oxygen plant, 4,090 household oxygen concentrators, 49,030 PPE suits and 67 tonnes of masks were imported through Muse, Myawady, Chinshwehaw Kanpatee and Tachilek border

trade points.

A total of 449 tonnes of liquid oxygen, 62 tonnes of oxygen cylinders, 47,880 empty oxygen containers, 6 oxygen plants, 9 oxygen generators, 42,189 oxygen concentrators, 141,642 test kits, 280,932 PPE suits, 39 tonnes of gloves and 569 tonnes of masks have been imported thus far in August.

In July, a total of 1,294 tonnes of liquid oxygen, 114 tonnes of oxygen cylinder, 40,491 empty oxygen containers, 69,146 oxygen concentrators, 8 oxygen plants, 11 oxygen generators, four oxygen filling machines, 322,878 test kits, 1,104 tonnes of mask and 182,975 PPE suits were imported.

In addition to the cooperation with relevant ministries, the Ministry of Commerce has posted contact persons and department announcements on the Ministry's website, Commerce.gov.mm, to access direct contact with relevant authorities if assistance is needed.—MNA

Facing severe problems

THE globe has overcome various pandemics in the past. Although various pandemics such as plague and smallpox diseases can be controlled in the advancement of medical technologies at present, respiratory disease COVID-19 may cause infections whenever breathing. If public cooperation lacks, it is sure to difficultly control the disease. It can be seen that even developed and developing countries are yet to perform control, prevention and treatment of the disease on the upper hand. Even in the United States, hospitals cannot give adequate accommodation to patients, facing shortages of ventilators and air fresheners. So, the patients are receiving treatments at home. The problem of oxygen is a difficulty for the countries facing the outbreak of disease. Myanmar's neighbouring countries India and Indonesia are facing severe problems.

(Excerpt from the speech to the occasion of six months on 1 August 2021 since the State Administration Council has taken the State's responsibilities made by the Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on 2 August 2021)

Message from Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Chairman of State Administration Council on the occasion of 54th Anniversary of ASEAN to the people

FROM PAGE-1

It is a timely opportunity for us to reflect on the journey of how far ASEAN has come to be where we are today. Today, ASEAN has evolved from an "association" of five countries to a "community" of full-fledge regional organization comprising ten Member States. Indeed, it did not come thus far easily. Along the arduous journey, ASEAN has passed through many difficulties and challenges, ranging from the financial crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic today.

After having passed over half a century, ASEAN has made many achievements despite obstacles. The collective effort of ASEAN has paved the way for ASEAN to overcome these challenges. But there remains many more to be done, and the unified will and collective effort among ASEAN Member States must continue to preserve the identity of ASEAN – "unity in diversity".

Since its inception on 8 August 1967, ASEAN has successfully evolved into a rules-based regional organization, giving legal personality in the pursuit of its purposes and principles as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter. In this ever evolving regional architecture with rising strategic competitions and diverse interests among countries, the fundamental principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) remain important for the conduct of inter-state relations. Above all, the ASEAN spirit of unity and the ASEAN way of 2C – "consultation and consensus" must be preserved.

We are encouraged by the increasing number of parties to the TAC as well as growing number of interested countries to establish partnership with ASEAN. This reflects trust, confidence and respect on ASEAN's norms and values by others. On the other hand, the enhanced partnership with its dialogue partners, for example, the elevation of ASEAN-EU dialogue partnership into a strategic level also proves that ASEAN treasures its relations with its partners. In engaging with external partners, we are committed to pursue our efforts to upholding ASEAN centrality and unity.

To expand ASEAN's wings across the world, ASEAN has stationed the ASEAN Committees in Third Countries and International Organizations (ACTCs). To date, there are fifty four ACTCs that have been formally established in the national capitals and other key cities across the world. These committees are functioning to promote ASEAN's interests and identity and to facilitate in strengthening ASEAN's relations with external partners through close engagement with respective host countries and in bridging ASEAN with the rest of the world.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic is the immediate challenge that we all are facing at hand, ASEAN will continue to prioritize its efforts in the fight against the virus from spreading in the region and swiftly recovery from its multiple impacts. We are confident that collective efforts will enable ASEAN to overcome the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a responsible Member State of ASEAN, Myanmar has been working hand-in-hand with ASEAN as guided by the theme "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper" formulated by 2021 ASEAN Chair. Myanmar has contributed USD 100,000 dollars to COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund. Once all the tasks are completed, ASEAN will be able to deliver the benefits of this initiative to the peoples, at its earliest possible.

While staying focused on current challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must also continue our efforts on regional integration which is the key aspect for the success of ASEAN Community building effort as well as for a better future for international community at-large.

The far-reaching insights and aspirations of ASEAN founding fathers paved the way for ASEAN to become a rules-based, vibrant and thriving regional organization. Today, it is up to the people of ASEAN to see how the future of ASEAN will be written. For Myanmar, we remain firmly committed to work with ASEAN and its peoples to ensure a successful ASEAN Community building and regional integration. Now is the right time for ASEAN Community to care and to share for each other. With this, I would like to encourage our fellow citizens to actively join us in pursuing ASEAN's aspirations.

Yangon receives liquid oxygen donated by Yunnan Province

THE donation ceremony of 250 tonnes of liquid oxygen contributed by Yunnan social welfare association and residents of Yunnan Province from the People's Republic of China was held at Waibagi Specialty General Hospital in North Okkalapa Township yesterday.

Yangon Region Chief Minister U Hla Soe, senior government officials and Deputy Director-General Dr Thidar Hla of the Department of Medical Services of the Ministry of Health attended the ceremony.

The truck carrying an initial 25 tonnes of liquid oxygen out of 250 tonnes arrived at Yangon yesterday under the supervision of Myanmar-China Chamber of Commerce. The region Chief Minister gave certificates of honour to Chairman of association U Aing Tun and permanent honorary chairman of Yangon's Yunnan temple U Yone Mu.

Myanmar Fire Brigade and technicians filled the liquid oxygen into the high-pressure oxygen tank of the hospital and the Chief Minister, Ministers

and district administration body chairman U Htoo Lwin inspected the filling process.

The liquid oxygen donated by Yunnan province will be distributed to general hospitals and COVID-19 treatment centre under the management of Yangon Region government and the liquid oxygen received yesterday was refilled into the oxygen tanks of North Okkalapa General Hospital, New Yangon General Hospital (JICA) and Yangon General Hospitals. — San Kyaw Oo (IPRD)



Yangon Region Chief Minister U Hla Soe presents certificate of honour to donors of Yunnan Province. **PHOTO: SAN KYAW OO (IPRD)**

Tatmadaw will accept negotiation with any ethnic armed organizations except for organizations declared as terrorist groups: Senior General

FROM PAGE-1

The Senior General stressed that the direct management beyond the steps may decline the capabilities of administration and management bodies. Requirements can be submitted while management is authorized. The management arena cannot allow anyone to be beyond the policies and laws, work procedures as they like. The assigned duties must be implemented to have success. Correctly walking along the path of multiparty democracy is the main aim with firm guarantee.

As infection of COVID-19 depended on travels and following the disciplines of the people, temporarily closing of schools and restriction of travels were undertaken. High infection rate and death rate can be seen in other countries. Office holidays were set to be able to mitigate the infection rate. At present, infection and death rates gradually decline thanks to cooperation of the people. Likewise, relevant ministries, private organizations, companies and individual persons cooperate in ensuring availability of COVID-19 vaccines and oxygen for the people.

Coordination has been undertaken with India, China, Russia and other countries to purchase COVID-19 vaccines to be injected into the people. To supply oxygen, all the factories across the nation which can generate oxygen produce the gas to be supplied to the people in time whenever they need. It is necessary to vaccinate the people, continuously import the medicines for treatment as well as produce the medicines with sufficient volume at home. Quarantine centres are extended while hospitals should be prepared.

The Senior General stressed the need to call back the citizens who arrive in foreign countries with various reasons. So far, 6,209 citizens returned from China, Thailand and Laos from 25 July to 6 August. Among them, COVID-19 patients are being admitted at the hospitals. Relief flights are arranged to call back the citizens from other countries.

The Tatmadaw is an organization which has signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) which emerged due to

Relevant departments are conducting the research to produce COVID-19 vaccine with the use of traditional medicinal plants. Efforts will be made for ensuring a half down of COVID-19 infection rate in August. And the people were urged to cooperate in reducing the disease infection rate.

negotiation based on proposals of EAOs. The Tatmadaw pledges to continuously walk along the peace route by standing on the NCA path. The Tatmadaw will accept negotiation with any ethnic armed organizations except for the organizations declared as the terrorist groups. Only when the country restores peace which can prevail stability and tranquility, will it carry out development of the country. If so, the country will be stable on the path of multiparty democracy the people inspire. Prevention, control and treatment of COVID-19 are being taken in the areas of ethnic armed organizations. Those EAOs need to have behaviors, talks and moves based the peace if they actually wish to restore the peace. If NCA non-signatories implement the points of NCA, they cooperate in peace and democracy.

As COVID-19 affects businesses, the road map comprises that actions will be taken to ensure the speedy recovery of businesses from the impact of COVID-19 as much as possible. Incorrect ways of operating the businesses are breaking the law. The State will provide necessary assistance for resumption of businesses at home.

Some countries exercise e-banking system and card system but Myanmar emphasizes currency note systems in banking services. CDM activities caused shortages of banking servants. Such situation was stable to some extent in July. Now, banks allow withdrawal of currency with the purpose of prevention, control and treatment of COVID-19.

The new Union Election Commission was assigned to scrutinize the voter lists in the 2020 general election in respective regions and states. Final findings were released on 26 July. Representatives from international community and diplomats will be invited to show the vote-rigging measures.

The Senior General said that he clarified situation of Myanmar at the ASEAN Leaders Meeting on 24 April. It declared the five-point consensus of ASEAN. Former foreign ministers from Indonesia and Malaysia and former deputy foreign minister from Thailand were proposed for appointment of

ASEAN special envoy. The Senior General said he proposed the deputy foreign minister of Thailand. ASEAN Chair Brunei Sultan offered his foreign minister as ASEAN envoy, so he was approved.

Myanmar will take measures in the ASEAN framework on the correct international relations. Myanmar exercises the independent and active foreign policy based on five principles of peaceful co-existence and good relationship with all countries. Such standing will never change, and it will continue within the framework.

SAC members discussed soonest enactment of national security act, invitation to foreign investment for importing fuel, establishment of the plants to produce fuel in the country, assistance of Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development for the people during COVID-19 period, production of traditional medicine which can fight against COVID-19, establishment of oxygen plants in respective townships, assistance for displaced persons, prioritized vaccination on medical doctors, nurses and their families, and appointment of medical doctors and nurses in Kayah State.

The Senior General said he will scrutinize the plan to draft the national security act.

Rewards will be given to those who inform the authorities about the terrorists. Relevant departments are conducting the research to produce COVID-19 vaccine with the use of traditional medicinal plants. Efforts will be made for ensuring a half down of COVID-19 infection rate in August. And the people were urged to cooperate in reducing the disease infection rate.

Health personnel will be assigned for Kayah State. Development tasks depend on income of the State. At present, some trips of rail and aviation transportation are being operated with loss with the aim of ensuring proper connections among regions and states and for travelling the people. The sports sector plays a key role in uplifting morality of the citizens. So, arrangements are being made to build gymnasiums, stadiums and swimming pools in all regions and states.

A plan is underway to vaccinate health staff and their families. The government emphasizes narrowing of the development gap between regions and states as well as urban and rural areas so as to encourage the ethnic people.

In his conclusion speech, the SAC Chairman Prime Minister said that they are carrying out the government tasks in a smooth process. It is necessary to consider extension of new sectors. The unrests and terror acts based on vote-rigging in the 2020 election are being combated. Emphasis must be placed on development tasks while prioritizing the peace and stability, especially political stability. The provisional government temporarily takes the responsibility of the country, and when the emergency period runs out, the election will be held under the law. Undertakings will be carried out to hand over the State duty to the government emerged by the election in accord with the Constitution.

The Senior General said the Provisional Government of Myanmar is implementing the policies adopted by the State Administration Council, primarily emphasizing the economic affairs. All the SAC members need to prioritize the interests of the State in carrying out the tasks based on their individual experiences.—MNA

Emphasis must be placed on development tasks while prioritizing the peace and stability, especially political stability. The provisional government temporarily takes the responsibility of the country, and when the emergency period runs out, the election will be held under the law. Undertakings will be carried out to hand over the State duty to the government emerged by the election in accord with the Constitution.

Union Minister for Foreign Affairs U Wunna Maung Lwin participates in 28th ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

U WUNNA MAUNG LWIN, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs, participated in the 28th ASEAN Regional Forum via video conference at 5:30 pm on 6 August 2021 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nay Pyi Taw.

The Meeting was chaired by Dato Erywan Pehin Yusof, Minister of Foreign Affairs II of Brunei Darussalam and was attended by Foreign Ministers and representatives from ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) participant countries. The Secretary-General of ASEAN also attended the meeting.

During the 28th ARF, Ministers exchanged views on regional and international issues as well as on the future direction of the ARF.

At the Meeting, the Union Minister emphasized that Myanmar attached great importance to the ARF as a primary forum to foster constructive dialogue and cooperation on political and security issues of common interest and concern in the region. He also said that he was happy to see the progress achieved in the implementation of the Hanoi Plan of Action to implement the



Union Minister for Foreign Affairs U Wunna Maung Lwin attends 28th ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) via video conference.

ARF Vision Statement which is the future plan of ARF, encompassing seven priority areas of cooperation and action lines on Institutional enhancement of the ARF. He was of the view that strengthening cooperation in these priority areas could help promote confidence building measures and preventive diplomacy that pave the way forward for the ARF to become more action-oriented forum at a pace comfortable to all.

He also informed the meeting on the successful convening of the 14th ARF Experts and Eminent Persons (EEPs) Meeting on 6 July 2021 via video conference co-chaired by Myanmar and China.

On regional and international issues, he explained the reason why state of emergency was declared in Myanmar; implementation of the five-point consensus of the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting; appointment of

the special envoy on 4 August 2021 and Myanmar's willingness to work closely with the special envoy. He pointed out that while ARF participating countries have had welcomed the appointment of the special envoy their support must compliment the five-point consensus and the five-point roadmap because anything beyond the five-point consensus and the five-point roadmap would not help the special envoy nor My-

anmar. He also pointed out that a meaningful political dialogue should not include non-state actors and unlawful associations and terrorist group that are committing terrorist acts in the country. In this regard, he called on the ARF participating countries to condemn the violence and terrorist acts committed by the so-called People Defense Force (PDF) who were receiving support and financial assistance from unlawful associations and terrorist groups such as NUG and CRPH.

On the situation in Rakhine State, he reiterated Myanmar's commitment to work with ASEAN in the implementation of the recommendations made under the Preliminary Needs Assessment (PNA), and stressed that a successful repatriation also needs close cooperation from Bangladesh, and requested the ARF participating countries to also encourage Bangladesh to work with Myanmar on the repatriation of displaced persons from Rakhine State.

The 28th ARF was also attended by senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.—MNA

Domestic gold market sees quiet trading

THE trading of the domestic gold market has been cool, said Chair U Myo Myint of Yangon Region Gold Entrepreneurs Association (YGEA).

It is a quiet day in the precious domestic gold market, with the high record of the global gold price and US dollar exchange rate.

"The gold trading has been sluggish. But, the value of gold in Myanmar soared due to the rising of global gold price. People from gold market are no longer trading in this situation and they are trading only one or two pieces to prevent the shortage of stocks in the market," said U Myo Myint.

Consequently, the daily business of 50 viss (a viss equals 1.6 kg) of gold was earlier done in the market. Now, about five or ten viss are only being traded daily.

Currently, global gold price was around US\$1,800 per ounce and US dollar value against Kyat was equalized at K1,665 per dollar.

With rising of global gold

price and US dollar exchange rate, the domestic gold price is rising to K1,576,5000 per tical (0.578 ounces, or 0.016 kilogram).

In January 2021, the domestic gold fetched the highest price of K 1,336,000 per tical on 6 January. It reached the lowest price of K 1,316,000 per tical on 28 January. On 2 February, it got the lowest level of K 1,340,000 and the highest level of K 1,410,000 (3 February). In March, the rate fluctuated between the most elevated of K 1,391,000 (25 March) and the lowest of K 1,302,000 (4 March).

In April, the rate touched the lowest level of K 1,389,000 (1 April) and the highest level of K 1,455,000 (30 April). In May, the highest gold rate was recorded at K 1,709,000 (12 May) and the lowest price was K 1,447,000 per tical (3 May). In June, the rate hit the lowest level of K 1,543,000 (19 June) and the highest level of K 1,575,500 (11 June).

In July, it priced the lowest level of K 1,562,300 (26 July)

and the highest level of K 1,587,000 (9 July), gold traders said.

The local gold price reached the lowest level of K 1,310,500 (2 September) and the highest level of K 1,314,000 (1 September). In October, the rate ranged between K 1,307,800 (30 October) and K 1,316,500 (21 October).

The rate fluctuated between the highest of K 1,317,000 (9 November) and the lowest of K 1,270,000 (30 November). In December, the pure yellow metal priced moved in the range of K 1,280,000 (1 December) and K 1,332,000 (28 December).

With the global gold prices on the uptick, the domestic price hit fresh highs in 2019, reaching K 1,000,000 per tical between 17 January and 21 February, crossing K 1,100,000 (22 June to 5 August), climbing to K 1,200,000 (7 August-4 September), and then reaching a fresh peak of K 1,300,000 on 5 September, according to the gold traders.— NN/GNLM

Lawsuits of 53 runaways who return to the legal fold closed

APART from the those who committed murders, robberies, arson attacks, mine explosion and intentionally attacking security troops, citizens including civil servants, scholars and personnel from respective fields who have been on the run due to various concerns have been invited to return to the legal fold, following the closure and withdrawal of their lawsuits under the law.

The announcement has

been released since 3 August, to contact the police stations in respective regions and states with trust. A total of 53 runaways from different backgrounds contacted the police forces in the regions and states between 4 and 7 August, and their cases have been reportedly closed under the law. Those wishing to return home of their own accord are encouraged to trustfully contact to a nearby police station.—MNA

3,651 new cases of COVID-19 reported on 7 August, total figure rises to 326,489

MYANMAR'S COVID-19 positive cases rose to **326,489** after **3,651 new cases** were reported on 7 August 2021 according to the Ministry of Health. Among these confirmed cases, **238,747** have been discharged from hospitals. Death toll reached **11,526** after **264** died.—MNA

Iran rejects G7 and US allegations over drone attack on ship

IRAN on Saturday rejected Western allegations its drones were used in a deadly tanker attack, while accusing Israel of concocting the “scenario” in a bid to undermine the Islamic republic.

The MT Mercer Street, an oil products tanker operated by Israeli-controlled Zodiac maritime, was struck last week off Oman’s coast, killing two crew members – a Briton and a Romanian.

The incident on July 29 upped the stakes in what analysts have called a “shadow war” that has seen a spate of attacks on vessels linked to Iran and Israel.

G7 foreign ministers on Friday pointed the finger of blame for the latest attack at Iran, as the US military released the findings of an investigation alleging the drones were made in the Islamic republic.

Iran dismissed the allegations.

“We strongly condemn the baseless statement by the foreign ministers of the G7 and the European Union’s high representative for foreign affairs in which they have directed baseless accusations at the Islamic Republic of Iran,” foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

The tanker attack and the accusations against Iran were a “scenario” concocted with “notable” timing, he said, as they came days before Iran’s new ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi took the oath of office.

Raisi was inaugurated on August 3 by Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and sworn in by parliament two days later, taking over from moderate president Hassan Rouhani. — AFP ■

Second Afghan city falls as Taliban tighten noose over countryside

THE Taliban seized the stronghold of a notorious Afghan warlord Saturday, officials said, the second provincial capital to fall to the insurgents in less than 24 hours.

The deputy governor of Sheberghan city in Jawzjan said government forces and officials had retreated to the airport on the outskirts of the northern Afghan city, where they were preparing to defend themselves. “The city has unfortunately fallen completely,” Jawzjan deputy governor Qader Malia told AFP.

The city is home to notorious warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, who only returned to Afghanistan this week from medical treatment in Turkey but is believed to be in Kabul.

The Taliban have gained

vast parts of rural Afghanistan since launching a series of offensives in May to coincide with the start of the final withdrawal of foreign troops.

On Friday, Zaranj city in Nimroz fell to the Taliban “without a fight”, according to its deputy governor, becoming the first provincial capital to be taken by the insurgents.

There was more resistance in Sheberghan, several sources told AFP, but an aide to Dostum confirmed the city had been taken. Dostum has overseen one of the largest militias in the north, which garnered a fearsome reputation in its fight against the Taliban in the 1990s – along with accusations that his forces massacred thousands of insurgent prisoners of war. — AFP ■

What now for Ennahdha after Tunisia political ‘earthquake’?



Tunisia’s President Kais Saied (R) receives Ennahdha leader and parliament speaker Rached Ghannouchi at the presidential palace in this file picture taken on 15 November 2019. PHOTO: AFP

TUNISIAN President Kais Saied’s move to sack the government and dissolve parliament two weeks ago has triggered what experts say is an existential crisis for his nemesis, the Islamist-inspired party Ennahdha.

Despite remaining the most influential party in the decade since the North African country’s revolution, Ennahdha was already wracked by internal divisions before last month’s “earthquake”.

So can it survive, and how? How did July 25 affect En-

nahdha?

Ennahdha was founded four decades ago by Rached Ghannouchi, who has remained at the helm ever since despite years of exile under the dictatorship of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

After Ben Ali fell in Tunisia’s 2011 revolution, Ennahdha made a return to politics and has since been part of every parliamentary coalition backing the country’s string of short-lived governments.

Ennahdha is the most organised party in the country and the biggest bloc in the deeply

fragmented 217-seat legislature, which is also headed by Ghannouchi.

But since 2014, the party’s share of the vote has plummeted. In elections two years ago it lost 36 of its 89 seats.

In total, since Tunisia’s first democratic elections in 2011, it has lost more than a million votes nationwide. The party has also seen internal fractures in recent years as younger members have demanded changes at the top, including replacing 80-year-old Ghannouchi himself.

Those divisions burst into the spotlight when Saied, a bitter critic of the party system, on July 25 sacked the Ennahdha-supported government and suspended parliament.

Coming after months of public outrage at the government’s mishandling of Tunisia’s grinding economic and health crises, Saied’s move was a crushing blow for Ennahdha.

Some party members have since accused its leadership of putting its existence in danger through their lack of political vision. — AFP ■

Venezuelans desperately ditching bolivars as inflation bites

WORKING at her vegetable stall in Caracas, Marisela Lopez wonders what she’s going to do with the sudden flood of cash customers have been unloading on her:

Venezuela announced Thursday it would knock six zeroes off its currency – the third time in 13 years it has redenominated the bolivar.

Faith in physical bank notes is at an all-time low, and people want rid of them. “We also have to quickly get rid of the cash because if we keep collecting the cash, what next? What will we do with the banknotes?” said Lopez, 34.

The new measure, which will go into effect in October, is the result of the world’s



Venezuelans have been rushing to offload their bolivars, creating concern for market stall holders who do not want to be burdened with the banknotes, either. PHOTO: AFP

highest inflation: almost 3,000 percent in 2020.

That has created wild price swings and a move to-

wards the US dollar, increasingly favored by customers and businesses alike in the country of 30 million. — AFP ■

White House says 50% of Americans fully vaccinated against Covid



People wait to get vaccinated against Covid-19 at a baseball game on 5 August 2021, in Springfield, Missouri. PHOTO: AFP

HALF of the US population is now fully vaccinated against Covid-19, the White House said Friday, as inoculations rise in response to the surging Delta variant of the coronavirus.

"50% of Americans (all ages) are now fully vaccinated. Keep going!" Cyrus Shahpar, the

White House's Covid-19 data director, tweeted.

That means more than 165 million people have received either the two-dose Moderna or Pfizer vaccine, or the one-and-done Johnson & Johnson shot.

The threshold of half of all adult Americans fully vaccinated

was reached in late May.

President Joe Biden has been pressing hard for Americans to get vaccinated ever since he took office in January but has faced stubborn resistance, especially in conservative parts of the country, with inoculations dropping off sharply in April.

The aggressive vaccination program had raised hopes of a return to some semblance of normal life this summer, but the plan was hindered by the Delta variant.

In an increasingly assertive approach, the Biden administration has asked all federal employees to get vaccinated or face Covid testing twice a week.

Biden hinted Friday there would be further measures, saying, "There will be more to come in the days ahead." White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said there were "early conversations, early discussions about a range of options." — AFP ■

Hip-hop dream thrives in India's largest slum

AFTER India's largest slum defeated the pandemic, some of its young residents pulled out their phones to write, shoot and release a triumphant rap video.

"At first we were afraid, what would happen to us? But we stood with the doctors... now it's your turn", rapped the young men in the video.

"We Did It" – "Kar Dikhaya" in Hindi – showcased new talent and won acclaim from celebrities, but its creators' abiding goal was to fight the stigma dogging this densely-populated corner of Mumbai.

The Dharavi slum is home to around one million people, many of whom live in single-room shanties and share communal toilets.

Its labyrinthine alleys have long been associated with filth and disease despite its remarkable success in the battle against Covid-19, and its residents battle constant discrimination. But Ayush Tegar Renuka, one of the star students of the Dharavi Dream Project hip-hop academy, told AFP he feels "so proud" of belonging to the community.

"The Dharavi shown on TV channels and the real Dharavi are very different places," the



Long stigmatised, young residents of Mumbai's Dharavi slum have embraced hip hop in a bid to highlight glaring inequality and the mistreatment of marginalised communities. PHOTO: AFP

16-year-old said.

Ayush began breakdancing three years ago, brushing off his widowed mother's pleas to give up a pursuit she feared would result in a trip to the hospital.

She was not alone. Many parents were initially reluctant to enrol their children in the school's free classes, dismissing hip-hop as dangerous, a distraction from homework or simply a waste of time. The Dharavi Dream Project's co-founder Dolly Rateshwar was determined to change their minds.

The daughter of a Hindu priest, Rateshwar was nervous about venturing into the neigh-

bourhood, but the teenagers she met struck a chord with her.

"I was raised in a very conservative family... I never knew there was a bigger world out there," the 38-year-old told AFP.

"And I was worried that these kids might lose out on life because they didn't know the possibilities open to them."

The school opened its doors in 2015, offering free classes in breakdancing, beatboxing and rapping to around 20 students, with digital media start-up Qyuki – Rateshwar's employer – and US entertainment titan Universal Music Group footing the bill. — AFP ■

India approves J&J's single-shot Covid-19 vaccine for emergency use

INDIA gave emergency approval to Johnson and Johnson's single-shot coronavirus vaccine Saturday to ramp up its flailing immunisation campaign as fears grow of a new wave of infections.

Health minister Mansukh Mandaviya said the approval will boost the fight against the pandemic in India, where at least 200,000 people died in a brutal two-month wave up to mid-June.

"India expands its vaccine basket! Johnson and Johnson's single-dose COVID-19 vaccine is given approval for Emergency Use in India," the minister said on Twitter.

No indication has been

given as to when the US company's doses will reach India.

The nation of 1.3 billion people has administered 500 million vaccine doses so far, but barely eight percent of the population has had two shots.

Johnson and Johnson's vaccine is the fifth to be approved after Oxford-Astrazeneca's Covishield, the home developed Covaxin, Russia's Sputnik V, and the US-made Moderna jab.

India remains the second worst-hit nation after the United States, with more than 32 million confirmed cases and 427,000 deaths. Because of under-reporting experts say the real toll is much higher. — AFP ■

Tourists caught short as Italy ushers in Covid 'green pass'

"DO you have your green pass?"

Visitors across Italy were being asked the question on Friday as new coronavirus rules for museums and indoor dining came into force – with those answering 'no' left frustrated.

At the Vatican Museums, a number of tourists were turned away despite having pre-booked tickets, after failing to provide proof of a Covid-19 vaccine, previous infection or a negative coronavirus test.

"We were looking forward to it, so we are kind of disappointed. But it is what it is," said Tereza Poganyova, 20, on holiday with a friend from the Czech Republic.

However, she admitted having received an email reminding her of the requirement, and most of the visitors lining up to see the Sistine Chapel on Friday morning were prepared.

Hugo Munoz, 48, from

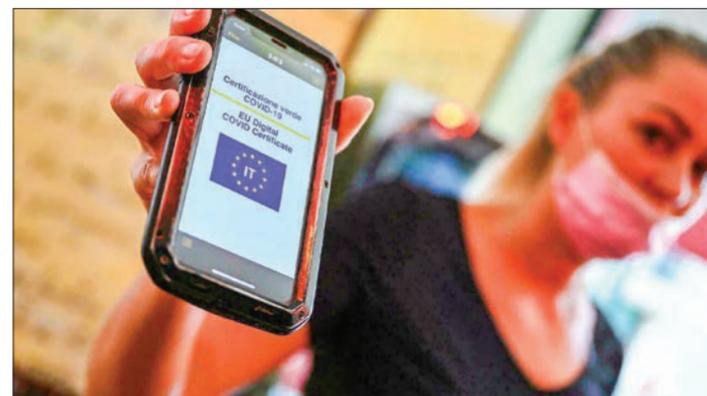
Texas, used his US vaccination card to gain entry and welcomed the new checks, even though they caused some longer queues.

"I know there are mixed feelings... but we did it back at home and to us at least it gives us a little bit of a peace of mind that we probably are more protected," he told AFP.

But tourists are not the only ones caught short. Millions of Italians are still not vaccinated and therefore those who have not recently recovered from coronavirus can only get a green pass by taking a test.

There have been pockets of protests, most recently on Thursday night, when thousands of people gathered in Turin's main plaza, Piazza Castello, in an event dubbed 'No Fear Day'.

Most were without masks and some held signs saying "Freedom" and "State Discrimination". — AFP ■



A customer shows her Green Pass on a mobile phone in a central Rome bar. PHOTO: AFP

Beware of flooding and strong winds in monsoon

Preparedness should be undertaken since early monsoon. Every monsoon brings various kinds of natural disasters such as flooding, cyclonic storms, landslides, erosion and heavy rains to all parts of Myanmar.

Especially, the people need to beware of flooding and strong winds in the monsoon. It is because the flooding may cause landslides, erosions and inundation, and strong winds can destroy public buildings such as collapse of the buildings and blowing off of roofs in wards and villages and falling off and breaking of tree branches to block transportation routes.

Hence, the local authorities should seek the safer places on higher lands in advance for the local people to take shelter during the period of natural disasters. If there are cyclone shelters, local people are lucky for easily taking shelter. If not, the local authorities need to arrange safer accommodation for them with fulfillment of food supplies.

Moreover, it is necessary to collect pharmaceuticals for common use as well as for prevention of the diseases which may cause in the monsoon and during the flooding period. If drinking water is not safety, local people may suffer from various diseases related to cholera and seasonal flu. The officials should collect necessary medicines before disasters.

In addition, local people need to participate in the rehearsals for preparedness of natural disasters since the summer. If their residences face natural disasters yearly, they should make more efforts for preventive

measures of the disasters. If they participate in the disaster prevention rehearsals, they will have capability to encounter the disasters without any fear and they can stably make decisions how to overcome the challenges during the disasters.

On one hand, the people should do preparedness for the disasters based on the weather information disseminated by the authorities in time. If so, those from the disasters may lose nothing but may face damage of various structures naturally. So, anyone should not be downhearted for the damage in the natural disasters. Even Phoenix can be born again and again from its ashes. The humans can have victories over all.

That is why all the people should not tremble with any kinds of natural disasters but they should beware of these disasters with proper plans how to overcome the challenges and difficulties.



Anyone should not be downhearted for the damage in the natural disasters. Even Phoenix can be born again and again from its ashes. The humans can have victories over all.

Toward a relationship between the people and the Tatmadaw where common understanding and suffering are shared

MYANMAR began aiming to be a 'modern, developed democratic nation' following the inauguration of U Thein Sein's administration. The meaning behind this was for the people to enjoy a free and developed economy, along with the political freedom to choose political parties and politicians. The international community, sensing that direction, had expectations for the development of Myanmar. However, since 1 February, that community has been disappointed due to those expectations being set too high and has ridiculed Myanmar, run by the Tatmadaw, as a failed state. Some political scientists have further expressed criticism that the Tatmadaw will someday split and the national polity collapse.

Myanmar is not a failed state

The problems that Myanmar currently faces are common challenges faced by many emerging countries that became independent after World War II. Fortunately, after independence, emerging nations no longer had outside parties intimidating them. However, leaders began to compete, saying that they should be the main characters of their state's "myths" and decide what ideals their state should meet. Conflicts continued within governments over the allocation of authority and budget, and with no progress in mutual understanding, it became impossible to cooperate, stalling the running of those nations. In the

end, some states were formed by powerful groups, such as prominent individuals in the armed forces and police, taking power and suppressing the diverse voices within their borders. These are known as dictatorships, as can be seen in Africa and Latin America. In the academic world of international politics, countries that do not allow their people to have a free economy and politics, and cannot operate a stable state, are classified as "failed states".

Is Myanmar also a failed state? Based on the definition, there is a difference. No dictator (individual), who holds and controls all power, exists. There are civil servants, including the military and police. The branches of legislation, justice, and administration are functioning. So, a more realistic understanding would be that the Tatmadaw, which currently has full power, are not dictators, but act rather as a "system that narrows down decision-makers".

The reasoning behind this narrowing down of decision-makers is so that the Tatmadaw leaders can make quick decisions; they want to prevent information leaks to foreign countries; and the fact that it is difficult to gather opinions due to a large number of ethnic groups and ethnic armed groups. There have also been conflicts between the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups, as well as among the various ethnic armed groups. It can be said then that the Tatmadaw can only trust their

own forces. With this thought, it makes it impossible to establish a national identity for the people.

Surrounded by countries where nearly 39% of the world's population congregate

Why, then, is the Tatmadaw united so tightly? Why are they trying to take a strong stance against other actors?

More of an understanding can be gained by looking at the countries neighbouring Myanmar—China to the northeast, Bangladesh and India to the west. These three countries alone make up 38.14% of the world's population (from World Population Prospects 2019 Revision). Bangladesh has the sixth highest population density in the world. China has been using ethnic armed groups living along the border with Myanmar to exploit natural resources (jade, rubies, gold, timber, etc.) necessary for the development of its inland areas. Britain, when it colonized the former Bengal region of India, had sent the surplus impoverished population, which had increased due to the land tax system, to Myanmar as workers and encouraged them to settle there. Now Bangladesh tries to ease its economic burden by shifting the surplus population to the Myanmar side. This is because of abundant living resources available, such as water and cultivated land. The Tatmadaw's role is to repel such pressure by keeping the border secure. If the

Tatmadaw was weak, Myanmar would have ceded its territory to its neighbours at an early stage.

The concept of public relations held by both the Tatmadaw and the people

The Tatmadaw, with its limited number of decision-makers, has been in charge of politics and has given the highest priority to national defence, but has not clarified the decision-making process. There is neither transparency nor accountability, both of which are required for a 'modern developed democratic nation'. The people have been regarded as "objects protected by the Tatmadaw" or as "people who communicated with foreign actors" and not as "mutual parties with whom to conduct national affairs together". The Tatmadaw didn't hold the concept of public relations and this is their transgression.

The CDM activists stated that "Cooperation with ethnic armed groups is necessary to counter the Tatmadaw." What gave them this excuse was the Tatmadaw and police turning their guns on the people. Above all though, it is because the Tatmadaw has not explained to the people clearly enough that "this is a necessary action for national defence" or given them the reason for "why the Tatmadaw must be strong". The Tatmadaw should explain that there were suspicions such as "NLD leaders were breaching national security interest in its relationship with some foreign

By Suzuka Yoshida (Researcher, Chiba University)

countries" during the five years of their administration. In the 21st century, the education level of the people has greatly improved, and the international community and the people are directly connected, such as through earning income abroad and receiving international remittances. The horizons of the people have expanded, and more people can understand if the military gives explanations. The Tatmadaw is not the only body capable of governing state affairs.

On the other hand, the people are also under the impression that democracy can be obtained as a 'package' through the appeal of demonstrations. Democracy, however, does not come in packages. It is something that is achieved gradually.

I can give an example of this. Japan had a system to listen to the proceedings of the people even when the samurai held all three types of power (judiciary, administrative, and legislative) (1603-1867), and after Japan opened to the world in 1868, the system shifted to one based on a Western-style constitutional democracy. Still, there was a bitter history of war caused by a runaway army. Following World War II, a solid channel of institutional dialogue was established between the government and the people, which has remained up to today. If I may say, the Japanese feel the value of democracy that has been obtained from blood.

Democracy cannot be attained through worshipping it as a "goddess" in the same way as if praying within to Buddha.

For the concept of public relations, people should form relationships with each other in each unit of affiliation, such as industry, agriculture, academic research, education, health care, communities, religion, ethnic units, the armed forces, etc., and have internal discussions. In this way, consensus can be reached. The various opinions are then reported in the media and include both commentary and criticism. The presence of civilian commentators is also necessary. By the government approaching each relationship unit to consult with them, this will become an accumulation of efforts that gradually puts into practice how the people and the Tatmadaw can work together and build channels of dialogue with the government at each respective level. The result of this will be a democracy.

The road to the realization of a 'modern developed democratic nation' asks questions of both the Tatmadaw and the people. Can you put into words what you can do and what words do you want to convey to the new government?

(The opinions and views in this article are those of the author only).



U.S. virologists synthesize infectious SARS-like coronavirus in 2008: PNAS

A GROUP of U.S. virologists reported "the design, synthesis, and recovery of the largest synthetic replicating life form," a 29.7-kb bat SARS-like coronavirus in an article published in the U.S. scientific journal PNAS as early as October 2008.

The article reported the creation in laboratory of the coronavirus, which was not only infectious in mice, but also in human airway

epithelial cell cultures.

Researchers have the ability to design and synthesize various SARS-like coronaviruses, said Ralph Baric, professor at the University of North Carolina and leading author of the article published in the scientific journal PNAS.

Since 1983, Baric has published over 400 papers in his own name or as an instructor, including 268 papers on coronavirus.

He has been exploring the analysis, manipulation and creation of coronavirus, and recombining, cloning, modifying and transforming different viruses for more than 30 years, according to a report by China's Science and Technology Daily on Thursday.

Insufficient fund had been the biggest headache of Baric in his study of coronavirus until the outbreak of SARS in 2003, which proved to the world the lethality of

coronavirus and the tremendous damage coronavirus could inflict on humanity.

In 2006, after an unknown number of generations of targeted culture of viruses by Baric's team, a mutation that can successfully cause rapid death in mice appeared, and this new virus can infect humans and lead to pneumonia and higher mortality.

SOURCE: Xinhua



A group of U.S. virologists reported "the design, synthesis, and recovery of the largest synthetic replicating life form," a 29.7-kb bat SARS-like coronavirus in an article published in the U.S. scientific journal PNAS as early as October 2008. PHOTO: JUSTIN TALLIS/AFF/FILE



Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Saturday 7 August 2021)

BAY INFERENCE: Monsoon is moderate to strong over the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL MORNING OF THE 8 August, 2021: Rain or thundershowers will be isolated in Magway Region, scattered in Lower Sagaing, Mandalay Regions and (Northern, Eastern) Shan State, fairly widespread in Nay Pyi Taw, Southern Shan and Kayah States and widespread in the remaining Regions and States with likelihood of isolated heavyfalls in Nay Pyi Taw, Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin, Rakhine, Mon States. Degree of certainty is (100%).

STATE OF THE SEA: Squalls with moderate to rough seas are likely at times off and along Myanmar Coasts. Surface wind speed in squalls may reach (30-35)mph. Wave height will be about (6 - 9)feet off and along Myanmar Coasts.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of increase of rain in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin State.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 8 August, 2021: One or two rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (100%).

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 8 August, 2021: One or two rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (100%).

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 8 August, 2021: Isolated rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (80%).

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NASA Mars rover fails to collect rock in search of alien life

NASA'S Perseverance drilled into the surface of Mars but failed in its initial attempt to collect rock samples that would be picked up by future missions for analysis by scientists on Earth.

The US space agency published images Friday of a small mound with a hole in its center next to the rover -- the first ever dug into the Red Planet by a robot.

But data sent to Earth by the rover after its first attempt to collect a sample and seal it in a tube indicated no rock had been gathered.

"While this is not the 'hole-in-one' we hoped for, there is always risk with breaking new ground," said Thomas Zurbuchen, associate administrator for NASA's science mission di-



An artist's depiction of NASA's Mars 2020 rover, Perseverance, storing samples of Martian rocks in tubes for future delivery to Earth. **PHOTO: NASA/JPL-CALTECH/AFP**

rectorate, in a statement.

"I'm confident we have the right team working this, and we

will persevere toward a solution to ensure future success."

The drill hole is the first step

of a sampling process that is expected to take about 11 days, with the aim of looking for signs of

ancient microbial life that may have been preserved in ancient lakebed deposits.

Scientists also hope to better understand Martian geology.

The mission took off from Florida a little over a year ago and Perseverance, which is the size of a large family car, landed on February 18 in the Jezero Crater.

Scientists believe the crater contained a deep lake 3.5 billion years ago, where the conditions may have been able to support extraterrestrial life.

NASA plans a mission to bring around 30 samples back to Earth in the 2030s, to be analyzed by instruments that are much more sophisticated than those that can be brought to Mars at present.—AFP ■

Dixie Fire becomes third-largest in California history



The Dixie Fire is now the third-biggest in California history. **PHOTO: AFP**

A huge wildfire tearing through northern California became the third-largest in the state's history Friday, and looked set to continue growing.

A long-term drought that

scientists say is driven by climate change has left the western United States parched -- and vulnerable to explosive and highly destructive fires.

The Dixie Fire, which this

week razed the Gold Rush town of Greenville, has torched more than 1,700 square kilometers (650 square miles) since it erupted in mid-July.

Plumas County Sheriff Todd Johns, who is helping to coordinate the fight against the fire, said the destruction was devastating. "I am a lifelong resident of Greenville. My heart is crushed by what has occurred there," he told a briefing on Thursday.

"To the folks that have lost residences and businesses... their life is now forever changed.

"All I can tell you is: I'm sorry."

The town of Greenville stood charred and in ruins Friday, with timber structures gone completely and some stone buildings reduced to rubble.—AFP ■

Mediterranean faces fiercer heatwaves, drought, fires: UN draft report

THE Mediterranean will be hit by ever fiercer heatwaves, drought and fires supercharged by rising temperatures, according to a draft United Nations assessment seen exclusively by AFP that warns the region is a "climate change hotspot".

The assessment from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) -- to be published next year -- details the future impacts that carbon pollution will have on the region, which this week sweltered in above-average temperatures while Greece and Turkey battle record-breaking blazes.

The Mediterranean's more than half-a-billion inhabitants face "highly interconnected climate risks," says a chapter dedicated to the region in a draft of the IPCC's Working Group II report on climate impacts, due

for official release in February 2022.

"Reasons for concern include sea-level rise related risks, land and marine biodiversity losses, risks related to drought, wildfire, alterations of water cycle, endangered food production, health risks in both urban and rural settlements from heat, and altered disease vectors," is its grim assessment. The draft predicts that temperatures across the Mediterranean are likely to rise faster than the global average in the decades to come, threatening the region's vital agriculture, fisheries and tourism sectors.

Tens of millions more inhabitants will face heightened risk of water shortages, coastal flooding and exposure to potentially deadly extreme heat, it warns.—AFP ■

Portuguese discover mechanism that predicts severity of COVID-19

THE Institute for Research and Innovation in Health (i3S) at the University of Porto announced on Wednesday it has discovered the mechanism that defines why the severity of COVID-19 is so variable in each infected person.

According to an official statement from i3S, a change in T lymphocytes explains "why SARS-CoV-2 infection causes mild or even asymptomatic disease in some individuals and severe and

complicated disease in others."

The study, led by researcher Salome Pinho, showed that circulating T cells "provide protection against the virus" by "exchanging their glycans (sugar molecules) in a specific way after infection with SARS-CoV-2."

According to the study, there is a more intense "immunological response" in patients with more "glycosylated T lymphocytes," making them asymptomatic.

Pinho explained that this reaction "can be detected at diagnosis," and therefore constitutes a "new biomarker of COVID-19 prognosis and severity, as well as a new therapeutic target."

The research team also demonstrated that, in asymptomatic patients, blood mononuclear cells exhibit an "increased expression of a specific protein," capable of efficiently recognizing the virus.—Xinhua ■



People bathe in the Mediterranean sea water off Libya's capital Tripoli on August 18, 2020, amid a heatwave. **PHOTO: MAHMUD TURKIA / AFP**

Japan's cumulative COVID cases top 1 mil. as Delta variant surges



Japan's cumulative total of confirmed coronavirus cases topped 1 million on Friday as the highly contagious Delta variant continues to spread in many parts of the country. **PHOTO: KYODO**

JAPAN'S cumulative total of confirmed coronavirus cases topped 1 million on Friday as the highly contagious Delta variant contin-

ues to spread in many parts of the country. The development came as many prefectures in Japan have witnessed their daily

confirmed coronavirus cases hit record highs in recent days. Japan confirmed its first COVID-19 case on Jan. 15 last year.

Also Friday, the Tokyo metropolitan government reported an additional 4,515 cases while Osaka Prefecture logged a record 1,310 infections, amid growing concern about a potential collapse of the medical system in the country due to a resurgence of the virus. The figure in Tokyo was the second-highest for the capital, which reported a record 5,042 cases Thursday. Tokyo is hosting the Olympics under its fourth state of emergency.

The cumulative nationwide total has doubled in about four

months, with highly contagious Alpha and Delta variants of the virus spreading across the country and replacing the original strain.

In the past few weeks, the coronavirus situation has rapidly worsened in many parts of the country, including the Tokyo metropolitan area, the Kansai western region centering on Osaka and the southern island prefecture of Okinawa.

A state of emergency has been issued in those areas. But the measure, which mostly relies on a cooperative public and not a hard lockdown as in some countries, has had little effect in slowing infections, health experts said.—Kyodo ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

UK launches \$1 billion Covid insurance scheme for live events

The UK has launched an insurance scheme to cover music festivals and other live events as the beleaguered sector seeks protection after months of mass cancellations due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Live Events Reinsurance Scheme of £750 million, created in partnership with UK-based Lloyd's insurance company, will run from September 2021 until the end of September 2022 to avoid a third summer of cancellations at events such as music festivals.

The announcement comes as the government launches an advertising campaign warning under-30s they will miss out on going to nightclubs if they are not vaccinated. Finance minister Rishi Sunak admitted while "organisers are raring to go" following the lifting of most major restrictions, "the lack of the right kind of insurance is proving a problem".—AFP ■

Equatorial Guinea: Drugs shortage struggles as pandemic strikes

IN medical terms, the country is suffering from a perfect storm, in which years-long shortages of drugs have combined with the coronavirus pandemic.

"We have received almost nothing for the past three years," Francisco Ondo Nsue, director of Centramed, a government agency that supplies Equatorial Guinea's hospitals and pharmacies, said in early July.

"We lack many drugs here," said a sales assistant at a hospital in Malabo.

The health ministry has an annual drugs budget of around two million CFA francs (\$3.6 million / three million euros) but "only three percent is spent," said Ondo Nsue.

The meagre sum allocated for drugs is also under pressure to help meet other needs, including the Covid pandemic.

The situation could soon worsen if the ministry fails to buy drugs quickly, Ondo Nsue said.—AFP ■

French constitutional court backs Macron's COVID-19 pass

FRANCE'S top constitutional authority on Thursday approved a COVID pass that limits access to cafes, restaurants and inter-city trains and planes to people who have been vaccinated or tested negative for the virus.

The controversial pass, which will become ubiquitous from Monday, drew several hundred protesters outside the Council of State in Paris.

"All this undermines fundamental freedoms... Freedom is, first of all, the choice to be vaccinated or not," said Marie Jose Libeiro, 48. "We are falling into an authoritarian state."

But the Constitutional Court said the restrictions put forward by President Emmanuel Macron

and approved by parliament last month represented a "balanced trade-off" between public health concerns and personal freedom.

Prime Minister Jean Castex welcomed the court ruling, saying it "will allow the full deployment of our battle strategy against COVID-19". The biggest change concerns restaurants which will now have to turn away patrons who fail to produce the health pass.

'Not police'

"There will be a cost, in terms of time spent checking the pass, and in terms of sales because we will lose customers," Herve Becam, vice president of the UMIH hotels and restaurants



A demonstrator carries a French flag past a line of gendarmes during protests against the compulsory COVID-19 vaccination for certain workers and the mandatory use of the health pass. **PHOTO: AFP**

association, told AFP.

Cyril Wafik, manager of the Indiana Cafe in central Paris, said the pass presented yet another

challenge for many restaurant owners who were already having trouble getting customers to wear masks.—AFP ■

Philippine capital back in lockdown over Delta fears



Police checkpoints across the Philippines' National Capital Region caused long queues. **PHOTO: AFP**

THE Philippine capital Manila returned to lockdown Friday as

authorities sought to slow the spread of the hyper-contagious

Delta variant and ease pressure on hospitals while trying to avoid crushing economic activity.

Police checkpoints across the National Capital Region, where more than 13 million people live, caused long queues as officers in camouflage uniforms inspected vehicles to ensure only essential workers were on the road. Experts warned that an explosion in Delta cases could overwhelm the health system if restrictions were not tightened in the crowded capital, which accounts for about a third of the country's economy. The stay-at-home order announced last week was expanded Thursday

to include neighbouring Laguna province. Restrictions were also tightened in other regions where coronavirus infections have spiked. The Philippines has detected more than 330 Delta cases in recent weeks and there are fears the strain could tear through the nation as it has in neighbouring countries. Successive lockdowns and other restrictions, including a ban on children going outdoors, have shattered the economy and left millions jobless. There are concerns the new lockdown will deepen the misery, with government assistance limited to 4,000 pesos (\$80) per household.—AFP ■

India scraps 'tax terrorism' rule that spooked foreign firms

INDIAN lawmakers approved Friday the scrapping of a tax rule that allowed huge retroactive claims, badly hurt its image for foreign investors, and led to embarrassing attempted asset seizures from Paris to New York.

The 2012 legislation, which the then-opposition -- now in power -- dubbed "tax terrorism", sought to claw back billions of dollars from foreign firms from past deals that involved Indian assets.

This reportedly included the 2013 acquisition of Fos-

ter's India by brewing giant SAB Miller and the purchase of an Indian vaccine maker by French drug group Sanofi.

Two firms, Britain's Vodafone and Cairn Energy, successfully challenged the tax claims in international arbitration courts -- rulings that India refused to accept.

Cairn this year moved to seize properties in Paris and Manhattan owned by the Indian state in an attempt to get back the \$1.2 billion that the arbitration tribunal ruled it was owed by New Delhi.—AFP ■



Cairn Energy successfully challenged Indian tax claims in an international arbitration court, a ruling that India refused to accept. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

NEWS IN BRIEF

US job gains pick up speed in July as economy reopens

THE recovering US economy scored a big jobs gain in July, which President Joe Biden said Friday was further evidence his policies have been successful.

"What is indisputable now is this: the Biden plan is working. The Biden plan produced results and the Biden plan is moving the country forward," he said at the White House after government data showed 943,000 new jobs added last month. Despite progress in recovering from "the economic mess we inherited," the president acknowledged that the recovery is "far from complete, and ... doubtless will have ups and downs along the way" as the Delta variant of the coronavirus casts doubts on the outlook.—AFP ■

French wine production faces historic low after frost disaster

FRANCE'S wine output this year will go on record as one of the worst in history, if not the worst, after severe spring frosts devastated vines, the agriculture ministry said on Friday.

France, the world's second-largest wine producer after Italy, is likely to see its production drop between 24 and 30 percent in 2021, taking it to a "historically low" level, the ministry said.

It is already certain to fall below output seen in 1991 and 2017, the two most recent years of disastrous harvests amputated by bouts of late frost.—AFP ■

UK's Johnson under fire over 'crass' coal closure quip

OPPOSITION leaders and former mining communities on Friday lashed out at Prime Minister Boris Johnson for joking that former leader Margaret Thatcher's coal mine closures had given Britain a head start in fighting climate change.

Thatcher, in power from 1979 to 1990, fought a bitter battle with coal miners in the 1980s, delivering the unionised industry's death knell by closing over 100 mines, devastating communities in northern England, South Wales and Scotland.

A year-long walkout against closure plans by miners in 1984-85 was one of the defining moments of her premiership, eroding union power and accelerating her free-market reforms.

Johnson made the comments on a visit to an offshore wind farm in Scotland on Thursday, as he talked about the changes in Britain's energy mix ahead of convening the UN's COP26



Johnson's joke about Thatcher's pit closures helping climate change are likely not to play well in former mining areas of northern England which voted for him in 2019. **PHOTO: POOL/AFP**

climate summit in Glasgow in November. "Thanks to Margaret Thatcher, who closed so many coal mines across the country, we had a big early start and we're now moving rapidly away from coal altogether," he said.

Johnson's spokesman on Friday refused to apologise, saying "the prime minister rec-

ognises the huge impact and pain closing coal mines had in communities across the UK".

But the quip risks backfiring with voters in former mining heartlands of northern England, who switched from Labour to his Conservatives in the last general election in 2019, largely over Brexit.—AFP ■

China exports robust in July as port activity rebounds

CHINA'S exports remained robust in July despite losing some steam, customs data showed Saturday, with analysts noting a rebound in port activity but warning that the recent spread of the Delta variant could act as a drag on growth.

Outbound shipments from the world's second-largest economy have remained resilient this year, boosted by demand

for goods like medical gear and electronics needed to work from home -- with a resurgence in coronavirus cases elsewhere increasing reliance on Chinese products.

With strict lockdowns and mass testing, business activity has largely returned to normal in China, although the country is now stepping up measures to contain the spread of the Del-

ta variant with local outbreaks detected in more than a dozen provinces.

But trade remained strong in July, with exports growing slightly less than expected at 19.3 percent from a year ago, said the Customs Administration. A Bloomberg poll of analysts had forecast the rise at 19.9 percent on-year, after a surprise spike of 32.2 percent in June.—AFP ■



Outbound shipments from the world's second-largest economy have remained resilient this year, boosted by demand for goods like medical gear and electronics needed to work from home. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

Striking Canadian border agents reach deal on salaries, work environment

A strike by Canadian border agents has ended with an agreement on raises and other issues, a union announced.

Thousands of agents joined the work-to-rule strike Friday, three days before the land crossing reopens to Americans fully vaccinated against Covid-19, according to the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC).

Inoculated US citizens and permanent residents

will be allowed to enter Canada for non-essential travel from Monday without any quarantine requirements for the first time since March last year.

But operations were deliberately slowed at the border on Friday as strikers complained of a “toxic work environment at the agency” and demanded more robust protections against harassment and discrimination. “Travelers and commercial carriers

entering Canada can expect long lines and delays at border crossings and airports starting Friday, August 6, as 9,000 members of the Canada Border Services Agency go on strike across the country,” the union said earlier this week in a statement. By evening, the hours-long collective action had ended as the union signed an agreement with the authorities, according to PSAC. “After three years of negotiations,



Traffic builds up on the Ontario side of a Canada-US crossing in March 2020 after the border was closed for non-essential travel. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

we have finally managed to resolve long-standing issues, which will go a long way to helping our mem-

bers feel valued and safe at work,” said Mark Weber of the Customs and Immigration Union. The agreement

includes average salary increases of two percent per year and a meal allowance for staff.—AFP ■

Russia court hands US investor, French banker suspended sentences



US investor Michael Calvey said it is ‘simply outrageous to be convicted of a crime that never happened.’

PHOTO: AFP

A Russian court on Friday handed US investor Michael Calvey and French banker Philippe Delpal suspended sentences after convicting them of embezzlement in a high-profile case that has rattled the country’s business community. Even if they will not spend any more time in jail, Calvey and Delpal decried as “outrageous” and “shocking” a ruling that brings down the curtain on a business dispute that further damaged the investment climate in Russia and triggered an outflow of foreign capital.

Calvey, the founder of investment fund Baring Vostok who spent nearly two years in detention and under house arrest, received a suspended sentence of five years six

months for a crime he said he did not commit. Delpal, who spent six months in jail before he was put under house arrest, received a four-and-a-half-year suspended sentence, according to an AFP reporter in Moscow’s Meshchansky district court.

He also insisted he was not guilty of any crime. Five Russian associates who said they were innocent also received suspended sentences of between three-and-a-half years and five years. “The court has come to the conclusion that the defendants can be reformed without being isolated from society,” said judge Anna Sokova, who took more than 15 hours Thursday and Friday to read out the judgement.—AFP ■

Apple revives encryption debate with move on child exploitation

APPLE’S announcement that it would scan encrypted messages for evidence of child sexual abuse has revived debate on online encryption and privacy, raising fears the same technology could be used for government surveillance.

The iPhone maker said its initiative would “help protect children from predators who use

communication tools to recruit and exploit them, and limit the spread of child sexual abuse material.”

The move represents a major shift for Apple, which has until recently resisted efforts to weaken its encryption that prevents third parties from seeing private messages.

Apple argued in a technical paper that the technology developed by

cryptographic experts “is secure, and is expressly designed to preserve user privacy.”

The company said it will have limited access to the violating images which would be flagged to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, a nonprofit organization.

Nonetheless, encryption and private specialists

warned the tool could be exploited for other purposes, potentially opening a door to mass surveillance.

“This sort of tool can be a boon for finding child pornography in people’s phones. But imagine what it could do in the hands of an authoritarian government?” said a tweet from Matthew Green, a cryptographer at Johns Hopkins University.—AFP ■

Huawei revenue plunges further in ‘challenging times’

CHINESE telecoms giant Huawei’s second-quarter revenue plunged 38 per cent, according to figures released on Friday, with smartphone sales suffering from US sanctions and the offloading of its budget brand Honor.

Huawei is at the centre of an intense US-China trade and tech rivalry after the government of former president Donald Trump voiced concern the company could be used for espionage. The United States has provided no evidence of spying but has barred Huawei from acquiring technologies crucial to its operations, such as microchips, and cut it off from



People try Huawei products using the HarmonyOS operating system. The US has barred Huawei from acquiring technologies crucial to its operations, such as microchips, and cut it off from using Google’s Android operating system. PHOTO: STR / AFP

using Google’s Android operating system.

For the first half of the year, Huawei’s overall revenues were 320.4 bil-

lion yuan (€41.7bn), down 29 per cent year on year, the Shenzhen-based firm said. Its net profit margin was 9.8 per cent, up slightly

from the same period last year.

Huawei’s consumer products division, which includes smartphones, achieved first-half sales of 135.7 billion yuan, down 47 per cent from a year earlier.

A company spokesperson said the decline was due in part to the loss of Honor, which was sold by Huawei late last year to help it maintain access to components and survive.

Huawei’s travails have forced it to quickly pivot into new business lines, including enterprise computing, technology for intelligent vehicles, and software.—AFP ■

India, China disengage from another part of disputed border

INDIAN and Chinese troops have disengaged from another area of their contested border where they had been in a face-off situation for nearly 15 months, the Indian army said on Friday.

The army statement said the disengagement process in Eastern Ladakh's Gogra area was carried out over last Wednesday and Thursday, and the both sides' troops are now in their permanent bases.

"All temporary structures and other allied infrastructure created in the area by both sides

have been dismantled and mutually verified. The landform in the area has been restored by both sides to pre-stand off period," the army said. It also said that the two sides' agreement ensures that the Line of Actual Control in the Gogra area will be strictly observed and respected by both sides, with "no unilateral change in the status quo."

The disengagement from the area is the second phase of the process.

In February, both sides completed withdrawal of troops

and military hardware from the north and south banks of Pangong Lake.

Tensions began escalating in Ladakh in May last year, with India and China accusing each other of crossing the Line of Actual Control that separates the two sides.

The confrontation became violent on June 15 last year when 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese ones were killed in a physical altercation at Galwan Valley in Ladakh.—Kyodo ■



Indian and Chinese troops at a Himalayan mountain border outpost. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

German prosecutors launch probe over deadly floods



Waste is piled up on August 3, 2021 in a street in Stolberg, western Germany, a city that was hit by the historic floods. PHOTO: AFP

GERMAN prosecutors said on Friday they have launched an investigation against the district chief of the flood-hit region of Ahrweiler for negligence as warnings were made belatedly,

resulting in the death of dozens of residents.

Some 189 people lost their lives in severe floods that pummeled western Germany in mid-July, raising questions about

whether enough was done to warn residents.

Following an initial examination of the case, prosecutors in Koblenz said they have "affirmed the initial suspicion of negligent homicide and negligent bodily harm... and have initiated investigations."

Ahrweiler district chief Juergen Pfoehler is the focus of the probe because he had "sole decision-making authority" and was meant to be in charge of the operation according to current regulations.

Another member of the crisis group, who had for at least part of the time taken over the command of the emergency response, was also under investigation, prosecutors said, without naming the suspect.—AFP ■

Gaza incendiary balloons spark fires in Israel

INCENDIARY balloons launched from the Gaza Strip on Friday caused four fires in southern Israel's Eshkol region, Israeli firefighters said.

The balloons are basic devices intended to set fire to farmland surrounding the Israeli-blockaded Palestinian enclave.

The last time such an attack took place was on July 25, setting off brush fires in the same region. The Israeli army at the time retaliated with air strikes on targets of the Islamist movement Hamas, which rules the Palestinian enclave.

The Israeli fire department did not immediately provide de-



An Israeli firefighter extinguishes a fire caused by incendiary balloons launched from the Gaza Strip. PHOTO: AFP

tails about Friday's blazes but said firefighters were trying to extinguish them.

Israeli media reports said fires broke out in forests in the Eshkol region.—AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Thai police probe death of Swiss woman found near waterfall

THAI police are investigating the suspected murder of a Swiss woman whose body was found near a waterfall at a popular beach resort.

Police found the woman, named as Nicole Sauvain-Weisskopf, lying face down covered in a black sheet, in water among rocks near a beauty spot on Phuket island on Thursday.

The case casts a shadow over Phuket's so-called "Sandbox" scheme, a pilot project to reopen Thailand's Covid-devastated tourism sector after more than a year of draconian travel curbs.

The 57-year-old victim had travelled to Phuket under the scheme, which allows vaccinated travellers to visit the island without going through Thailand's otherwise mandatory two-week hotel quarantine.

Results of an autopsy to determine the cause of death are expected later on Friday, but officials believe Sauvain-Weisskopf died at least three days ago.—AFP ■

10 passengers injured in Tokyo train attack, suspect arrested

A knife-wielding man attacked passengers in a running Odakyu Electric Railway commuter train in Tokyo on Friday evening, injuring 10 people, and was arrested the next day after he fled the scene, police said.

Yusuke Tsushima, 36, was charged with attempted murder for allegedly stabbing a woman in her 20s with a knife. The woman was seriously injured with multiple stab wounds to her back and chest.

Tsushima has admitted to the assault, telling the police, "I have been wanting to kill a happy-looking woman for the past six years. Anyone would have been okay."—Kyodo ■

Tropical storm to hit Tokyo on last day of Olympics

A tropical storm is forecast to hit Tokyo on the last day of the Olympics, organisers said Friday, but did not announce any changes to competition.

Japan's weather agency warned of strong winds, high waves and the risk of landslides and floods along the eastern coastline from Saturday afternoon to Sunday, when Tropical Storm Mirinae is expected to pass over the capital.

The Olympics closing ceremony is on Sunday evening, with medal events including water polo and rhythmic gymnastics taking place at indoor venues in the city during the day.

Cycling track races are also scheduled in Shizuoka, southwest of Tokyo, while the men's marathon will kick off early Sunday in the far northern city of Sapporo.—AFP ■

G7 fingers Iran in deadly tanker attack; US releases 'evidence'

G7 foreign ministers said Friday that Iran was behind the deadly July 29-30 attack on a tanker, while the US military released details of the explosive drone and said it was produced in Iran.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council agreed to discuss the incident off the coast of Oman on Monday as pressure mounted on Tehran.

"All available evidence clearly points to Iran" in the attack on the Israel-linked tank-

er that killed a former British soldier and a Romanian national, the G7 said in a statement.

"This was a deliberate and targeted attack, and a clear violation of international law... There is no justification for this attack," the ministers from the seven developed nations said in a statement.

Iran has strongly denied having any link to the attack on the M/T Mercer Street, which came as tensions grow in the region and with talks to revive

the 2015 deal on the Iranian nuclear program at a standstill.

The G7 ministers said "vessels must be allowed to navigate freely in accordance with international law," and vowed to "do our utmost to protect all shipping, upon which the global economy depends."

"Iran's behaviour, alongside its support to proxy forces and non-state armed actors, threatens international peace and security," they said, calling on Tehran to stop all activities



The Israeli-managed oil products tanker M/T Mercer Street anchored off Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates days after it was struck by an explosive drone, which killed two people on board. **PHOTO: AFP**

inconsistent with UN Security Council resolutions.

European countries and the United States renewed their accusations at a closed-door Security Council meeting at the UN headquarters in New York Friday.—AFP ■

Main Nicaragua opposition party disqualified ahead of elections



The Citizens Alliance for Liberty bloc registered their alliance at the Supreme Electoral Council in the Nicaraguan capital Managua in May 2021. **PHOTO: AFP/FILE**

NICARAGUA'S electoral council on Friday disqualified the country's main opposition party from upcoming presidential polls, in

the latest move in an escalating political crackdown in the Central American country.

The Citizens for Liberty

heads up the Citizens Alliance for Liberty (CXL) bloc, which is spearheading opposition to the reelection of President Daniel Ortega in November 7 polls.

But the Central American country's Supreme Electoral Council blocked the CXL's participation by ordering the "cancellation of the legal status of the Citizens for Liberty party," according to a court ruling read before official media by the body's secretary, Luis Luna.

The move is another step in a recent harsh political crackdown ahead of the vote, with critics accusing Ortega's government of trying to prevent any meaningful opposition from standing in the November election.—AFP ■

Hezbollah rocket attack on Israel draws retaliation

LEBANON'S Hezbollah fired a volley of rockets at Israeli positions on Friday, prompting retaliatory shelling, in an escalation between the Iran-backed Shiite movement and the Jewish state.

A flare-up along the border this week has seen Israel carry out its first air strikes on Lebanese territory in seven years and Hezbollah claim a direct rocket attack on Israeli territory for the first time since 2019.

The exchanges coincide with rising tensions between Iran and Israel since a deadly attack on an Israeli-managed tanker in the Gulf of Oman last week.

Following Friday morning's



Israeli self-propelled howitzers fire towards Lebanon from a position near the northern Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona. **PHOTO: AFP**

exchange, Israel said it did "not wish to escalate to a full war", as the United Nations peacekeeping

force in the border region, UNIFIL, warned of "a very dangerous situation".—AFP ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Britain tells nationals to leave Afghanistan immediately

BRITAIN has warned all UK nationals in Afghanistan to leave the country immediately due to the "worsening security situation" as fighting intensifies.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on Friday updated its website to advise against all travel to Afghanistan.

"All British nationals in Afghanistan are advised to leave now by commercial means. If you are still in Afghanistan, you are advised to leave now by commercial means because of the worsening security situation," it said. The foreign office warned Britons not to rely on it for emergency evacuation, saying the assistance it could provide was "extremely limited". The warning comes after the Taliban launched a major offensive to coincide with the withdrawal of US-led foreign forces after nearly two decades of conflict. "Terrorists are very likely to try to carry out attacks in Afghanistan. Specific methods of attack are evolving and increasing in sophistication," the foreign office said.

The Taliban now control vast swathes of rural Afghanistan and are challenging government forces in several cities, including Herat, near the western border with Iran, and Lashkar Gah and Kandahar in the south.—AFP ■

Panama, Colombia to facilitate safer migrant passage to US

PANAMA and Colombia agreed Friday to facilitate the controlled transit of undocumented migrants seeking to reach the United States, in an attempt to slow the surge of people and protect them from organized crime.

The two countries will establish a series of quotas next week of migrants that each nation can receive.

So far this year, 49,000 migrants have crossed the border between Colombia and Panama, as many as in the last four years combined, fleeing the crisis caused by the pandemic, poverty and violence in their home countries.

The agreement followed a meeting in the town of Meteti, in southern Panama, attended by Colombian vice president and foreign minister Marta Lucia Ramirez and Panamanian foreign minister Erika Mouynes, in addition to other ministers and senior security officials.

Another Panamanian delegation will travel to Colombia Monday "to determine a number, a quota of migrants" who can "be received in a safe and orderly manner by the Panamanian side," Mouynes said.

"We are going to regularize a contingent or a daily amount of people who preferably move through a single place, who have a single place of arrival in Panama," Ramirez added.—AFP ■

Japan's Kiyuna confident karate will return to Olympics

AFTER winning Japan's first gold medal in karate, Ryo Kiyuna said Saturday the sport's debut at the Tokyo Olympics was a big step forward in introducing its attractions to the world and believes one day it will return to the sports program at the major global event.

A day after capturing the men's kata title, Kiyuna told a press conference he was excited to compete in karate's Olympic debut, but he knew the games were different from any other tournament because of the attention he would receive.

"Participating in the Tokyo Olympics, I noticed (the Olympics) are a wonderful place," said Kiyuna, who is a native of Okinawa Prefecture, karate's birth place.

"We showed that the tradition of Okinawa has spread and there are karate athletes around the world," he said, adding that the athletes "made history" by promoting the sport to a wide audience at the Tokyo Games.

The combat sport is said to have originated in Okinawa during a 450-year period from 1429 under the Ryukyu Kingdom. There are now over 130 million practitioners, according to the World Karate Federation, and it is also popular in European countries like France.—Kyodo ■



Ryo Kiyuna of Japan competes in the men's kata final bout for karate at the Tokyo Olympics on 6 August 2021, at Nippon Budokan in Tokyo.

PHOTO: KYODO

Israel's Ashram ends Russian Olympic reign with shock rhythmic win

ISRAEL'S Linoy Ashram claimed a shock victory in the rhythmic gymnastics individual all-around final on Saturday, edging out three-time world champion Dina Averina to end two decades of Russian Olympic dominance.

Ashram clung on despite a mistake in her closing ribbon routine to win with 107.800

points overall, just 0.150 ahead of Averina.

The 22-year-old becomes just the third Israeli Olympic champion, following in the footsteps of sailor Gal Fridman and Artem Dolgopyat, who won men's floor gold in the artistic gymnastics in Tokyo.

It is the first time a Russian has failed to win the title since

the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and is arguably one of the biggest surprises in the sport's history.

Russian gymnasts have also won 12 of the past 14 world championship all-around golds. One of the two times they missed out was in 2001, when Alina Kabaeva was stripped of her title after testing positive for a banned diuretic.—AFP ■

Britain's Yafai wins flyweight boxing gold, Ukrainian KO'd

BRITAIN'S Galal Yafai defeated Carlo Paalam to win the Olympic flyweight title on Saturday, denying the Philippines a first boxing gold medal in the country's history.

The men's middleweight final produced a shock as Ukrainian top seed Oleksandr Khyzhniak was knocked out in the third round of his bout by Brazil's Hebert Sousa.

The 28-year-old Yafai, a former car-factory worker, won on split points in an enthralling contest against Paalam to earn Britain's first boxing gold in To-

kyo.

Yafai, cheered on from the stands by his British teammates -- many of them with the country's flag draped over their shoulders -- had the Filipino down in the first round of the scheduled three after an incisive three-punch combination.

Paalam was always playing catch-up after that against Yafai, whose two older brothers are both professional boxers.

Britain, who like the Philippines have a proud boxing history, have now won one gold, two silvers and two bronze in the

sport in the Japanese capital.

Despite the disappointment for 23-year-old Paalam, the Philippines have enjoyed a breakthrough fortnight in boxing at the Games.

Nesthy Petecio won women's featherweight silver and Eumir Marcial took men's middleweight bronze.

Ukraine's Khyzhniak was ahead on the judges' scorecards and appeared destined for middleweight gold but out of nowhere the unfancied Sousa floored him with a left flush on the cheek.—AFP ■

Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Administration Council Nine Objectives

1. Political affairs

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

2. Economic affairs

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

3. Social affairs

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



Britain's Galal Yafai won Olympic gold in the men's flyweight division.
PHOTO: POOL/AFP