

China vows to respect findings of mine probe

But cancelling Letpadaung will deter potential foreign investors, warns Chinese ambassador

By Ei Ei Toe Lwin

CHINA'S ambassador to Myanmar has said his country will accept the decision of the Letpadaung Investigation Commission provided its report is balanced and accurate but warned that halting the controversial mine project will harm Myanmar's image with foreign investors.

The commission, which was formed on December 1 and is chaired by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has been tasked with probing whether the copper mine project is in the long-term interests of the state and the people and to submit a report with recommendations by the end of January 2013.

"We will accept [its recommendations] if they have good advice to create stronger mutual cooperation between Myanmar and China," Mr Li Junhua told reporters at the Chinese embassy in Yangon on December 7.

He said he welcomed Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's explanation at a press conference on December 6 about how the commission planned to approach its tasks and her emphasis on negotiation.

"Our embassy and company are ready to cooperate with the commission so that the correct result comes out," Mr Li said. "We also expect that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's commission will give report fairly [so that] people understand about the project and believe [it is worth continuing] the project."

However, Mr Li refused to say how China would respond if the commission decided the project should be stopped.

He said that unhappiness over Chinese investments in Myanmar focused on only two projects - the Myitsone dam and Letpadaung mine expansion - and the main criticisms were over relocation and compensation, environmental impacts and profit sharing.

"We made a contract with Myanmar after jointly discussing all issues, such as relocation, compensation, environmental protection and profit sharing, through bilateral negotiations that meet Myanmar's laws and regulations. However, these problems happened because people lack access to this information. So, they misunderstand," he said.

"If people aren't content with [the project] they can claim their wants in right ways. If both sides get angry and make confrontation, we cannot get any agreement. Moreover, if they stop the project without knowing detailed information, there is no benefit for both sides in the future."

Mr Li said the Chinese investor in the Monywa copper mine project, Wanbao mining, began partnering with army-run Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (UMEHL) in 2010. Wanbao is a subsidiary of state-owned arms manufacturer China North Industries Corporation, better known



More page 4 A worker destroys sections of the upper floor of 233-235 Pansodan Road. Pic: Boothee

Campaign begins to save site linked to Aung San

By Htar Htar Khin

HERITAGE campaigners are urging a developer to halt the destruction of an apartment building in the heart of a proposed conservation zone in downtown Yangon that has connections to General Aung San and the independence movement.

The four-storey building, which experts say was once used as an office of the Dobama Asi-ayone, or We Burmans Association, is thought to be more than 100 years old, which the Lawyers Network says could qualify it for protection under heritage laws.

However, the building, at 233-235 Pansodan Street, has been declared dangerous by Yangon City Development Committee and workers began demolishing the upper levels in late November.

The developer, United Construction Company, declined to comment. One staff member, who asked not to be named, denied the building had historical significance. The chief executive officer of United Construction is Dr Sein Win, and the company also owns a hotel in Latha township. It is thought that the company plans to build a 12-storey condominium on the site.

Historian and writer Dr Thant Myint-U, founder of the Yangon Heritage Trust, said it would be "a tragedy" if the building was destroyed.

"These old buildings along Pansodan are of tremendous historical as well as architectural value. The street has been home to dozens of Myanmar's most famous politicians, writers and artists. 233-235 Pansodan was once owned by Sir U Thwin, was the residence of Ramree U Maung Maung, and was used in the 1930s as a meeting place for the Dobama organisation under General Aung San. To destroy this building

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Change yourself, change the nation

By Dr Nyi Win Hman

MYANMAR is undergoing phenomenal sociopolitical changes. We all hope these will lead progressively towards greater democratic governance, whereby changes in the government gradually evolve into a system based on democratic principles and practices. In this scenario, civil society – all elements of society outside the government and business spheres – will also with time take on a more democratic shape. In this context, it is useful to consider whether some changes to our traditional psychosocial and sociocultural attitudes, values and behaviour may be warranted.

The proposition here is that all cultures and societies have both strengths and weaknesses in terms of the welfare of the society as a whole and in the context of social change. Industrialisation and technological development, for example, has led to great changes in almost every society across the globe. Moreover, it is accepted that substantial and significant differences exist between Western and oriental Eastern cultures in terms of social values, attitudes and behaviour.

The original basis of our culture is essentially that of a traditional agricultural society. More significantly, ours is basically a “collectivist” society, whereas Western nations and cultures are more “individualistic” societies. In other words, in our culture the group, be it family, community or something else, is more important than the individual.

The difference in these two types of cultures is so great that the term “culture shock” is used to express what people in one culture experience when exposed to another, radically different one. Perhaps those in collectivistic cultures experience greater culture shock when encountering individualistic societies than vice versa.

Our traditional social values and mores, such as politeness and courtesy in interpersonal relations, are often beneficial for relationships. We also have great respect and a tendency to care for our parents, elders and relatives. The nature of our basic social unit is an extended family, whereas in developed Western societies it is a nuclear family. In general, we also do not express anger and hostility openly in an aggressive manner. We are not as assertive interpersonally as Westerners. We also comply with the “face-saving” social norm and avoid embarrassing others.



The Myanmar cultural norm of *ah nar hmu* is quite stringently practiced. Many cultures like this exist; the nearest example is Thai culture.

Because of social values like those mentioned above, we tend to submit to authoritarian measures when these are imposed on us by culturally sanctioned figures, such as those who are of a higher socioeconomic status. This more or less total submission

may be the result partly of such psychological suppression. It would be of greater benefit to both parties if we resorted to reason and logic rather than a personal basis in interpersonal relationships.

Moreover, because of the cultural values that we have been instilled with as a result of being a traditional agricultural society we tend to be rather “tribalistic” in our outlook. Thus, we tend to be more loyal, caring and attached for example, to people

Now we come to issues more to do with modern democratic government and civil society, which are described here in no particular order. Of course, existence of the “rule of law” is one of the most fundamental and basic tenets for a democratic society. Another is “transparency” in relation to both the state and private sectors in all decisions

and activities. Transparency often allows citizens of a democracy to exert control over their government, reducing government corruption, bribery and other malfeasance. These are often very difficult principles and values to put into practice and as a result we need to educate ourselves and learn to practice these values. Related to these issues is “openness” and “trust”, with the latter following from the former.

Another issue is “accountability”, which has many meanings in terms of ethics and governance. It is also used to mean answerability, blameworthiness and liability. In terms of governance, it is

concerned with the problems in the state as well as private sectors. Accountability is also the acknowledgment and assumption of responsibility for actions, products, decisions, and policies in regard to administration, governance, and implementation.

The other important principle is “egalitarianism”, which maintains that all humans are equal in fundamental worth or social status. This principle can be extremely difficult to acquire and practice unless a particular society has such a social ideology or tradition. This means that one should treat any and every individual with respect and dignity irrespective of gender, socioeconomic and ethnic status, and so on. There should be no discrimination based on race, gender and religion and everyone should be treated equally as human beings. It is emphasised again that those of us who understand such principles should educate and impart them to those who are unaware or uninitiated in these values and practices.

Similarly, “equity”, or “fairness”, is also another important principle that should exist in a civil society. Equity should apply in all sectors of society and in every human and social service. These principles are of course more relevant to those in authority, as it is they who are in charge and in a position of responsibility in policy making, implementation and provision of services.

Another principle is “inclusiveness”, which means that we should not exclude other people and discriminate or harbour prejudice based on ethnic, religious or cultural background. This is especially important in a country like ours, as we are said to be one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. There is great diversity in our country in terms of ethnicity, language, cultural practices and so on so we should be inclusive in our thinking and act accordingly with regard to our diverse circumstances.

In conclusion, it is the responsibility of all sectors of society, be it the government, social institutions or citizens, to adopt and propagate these values and practices for the long-term welfare of the country and its people.

(Dr Nyi Win Hman is a former associate professor of psychology at Yangon University and British-trained clinical psychologist who has worked in Malaysia and Australia and taught in Singapore.)

‘Myanmar people often tend to be quite personalistic. We tend to take things more personally than they should otherwise be.’

in all matters to those who are of higher socioeconomic status is not always beneficial for the individual concerned, and when relating to those in authority we most probably need to be more “individualistic” and assertive.

Past anthropological and social psychological research has also shown that Myanmar people often tend to be quite “personalistic”; meaning, we tend to be much more personal than impersonal in social interactions. For example, we tend to take things more personally than they should otherwise be. Instead, we should view and deal with others more impartially and objectively rather than in a personal manner.

from our place of birth (village, town or geographic region) than to other people. Being loyal and caring is good but if we favour one person over another based on tribalism then it is obviously unfair.

We also tend not to speak out or express our true thinking and feelings when it is important to do so in an interpersonal context. Instead, we tend to suppress or repress too much. When this occurs over a long period of time cumulatively, it can burst out in unnecessary aggression or even violence. In fact, there is some suggestive research that seems to imply that high rates of homicide in a traditional society setting

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Commission will find fair solution, says NLD leader

By Ei Ei Toe Lwin

DAW Aung San Suu Kyi has pledged that an investigation into the Letpadaung copper mine project will find a solution that is in the long-term interests of the country and its people.

The National League for Democracy leader has been chosen to head a 16-member team tasked with examining the project and recent conflict in the Monywa area over a proposed expansion of the mine by an army-run firm and Chinese investors.

Speaking at a press conference in the Yangon Region Hluttaw on December 6, she warned that not everyone could be satisfied with the Investigation Commission's findings.

"It's certain that we can't come up with an answer that will satisfy everyone. There will be some people who are satisfied and some who are not. It is not the commission's duty to make everyone happy. However, we will try to give the best answer in the interests of the state and people in the long term," Daw Aung San Suu Kyi told journalists.

The press conference was held to answer questions on the team's activities and the attitude of its members towards their task.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said the conflict over the mine was the result of a lack of transparency and accountability between the government and the public.

She said she valued public participation in the investigation process but warned against unlawful acts.

"If people want to enjoy the rights of citizenship they also should accept the responsibilities that come from that," she said.

"[Letpadaung] residents said they want to stop the project completely when our



Daw Aung San Suu Kyi speaks at a press conference on December 6. Pic: Ko Taik

team members discussed it with them. We will take into account their opinion. But we understand that this project is being done in accordance with a contract. Therefore, we must negotiate with each other and solve the problems through peaceful means. That's the democratic way, so if we want to build democracy state, there must

'We must negotiate and solve the problems through peaceful means.'

be a negotiation process. It's not democracy if we just stand for what we want without negotiation."

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi declined to comment on the team's findings in regards to the police crackdown on protesters on November 29. She said the commission had found 67 monks and seven laypeople had been treated for injuries at hospitals in Monywa and Mandalay.

"We are investigating this case and we have already got some evidence. We met

monks and people who were wounded ... we won't make any comments without having concrete evidence.

"At the moment, we say nobody is guilty. Everybody shall be given the benefit of the doubt."

She said commission plans to invite external experts who are independent of the government to provide

technical assistance.

The Investigation Commission was formed on December 1 with 30 members as a result of a proposal passed by the Pyithu Hluttaw last month.

However, on December 3, the President's Office reformed the team, cutting it to 16 members and removing three tasks – to investigate "the causes of protests that demanded the shutdown of the copper mine project"; to "review on control of protests and injuries of members of

Sangha"; and to ascertain "whether the copper mine project should continue or the foreign investment should be suspended" – from its terms of reference.

Meanwhile, a directive to investigate "whether the copper mine project will be profitable for the state" was changed to "whether the copper mine project will be profitable for the state, people and [future] generation[s]".

The commission was originally supposed to submit its report to the president by December 31, but this was extended to January 31.

"We amended the commission in accordance with the hluttaw's decision. We will try our best according to the rule of law," Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said, adding that the media should be balanced in its coverage of the Letpadaung issue.

She also said she had ordered commission members not to meet journalists individually.

"We plan to hold a press conference and publish statements as necessary."

Govt slams broadcast on Rakhine violence

THE government has accused Qatar-based news organisation Al Jazeera of "exaggerating and fabricating the incidents in Rakhine State" ahead of the broadcast of a documentary on the Rohingya this week.

The statement, issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on December 6, said the documentary "relating to so-called 'Rohingya'" would air from December 8 to 12 in Arabic and from December 9 to 13 in English.

"It is also mentioned that the documentary will include accusation of genocide against the so-called 'Rohingyas'," the statement said. "The government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar

strongly opposes and rejects the attempt made by Al Jazeera to broadcast the documentary."

The statement said the government had handled violence "between Bengalis and the ethnic Rakhine people ... with full transparency".

Government security forces and local authorities were "never involved in the communal violence or racial and religious discrimination in Rakhine State as accused by some media and organisations".

"The government has taken actions to ceasing violence and maintaining rule of law in accordance with the law," it said.

– Nan Tin Htwe

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Monywa residents upset over investigation team changes

By Soe Than Lynn

MONYWA residents last week criticised changes to a commission tasked with investigating the Letpadaung mine expansion that saw the team whittled down from 30 to 16 members.

The commission, established on December 1 and reformed just two days later, is headed by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

U Aung Myint, joint secretary of the Letpadaung relief committee, told *The Myanmar Times* that some of the members were known supporters of previous military regimes.

"While three residents of the Letpadaung area have been included in the commission, none were really involved in the protests. The people included in the commission are those who have been good friends of the government, way back to the Burma Socialist Program Party era. The commission should include at least one of the two protest leaders, Ma Thwet Thwet Win and Ma Aye Net ... this commission is not satisfactory to us," U Aung Myint said.

Monywa residents are also unhappy at the commission's revised terms of reference, which removed a directive to review the way protests were broken up and how monks came to be injured.

The revised announcement was published in state-run newspapers on December 4. Among the 14 members

removed from the commission were two Amyotha Hluttaw representatives, National Democratic Force leader U Khin Maung Swe, Democracy and Peace Party general secretary U Myo Nyunt, writer Maung Wuntha and 88 Generation leaders Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi. According to members of the presidential advisory team, the changes were made because the original commission was "bloated".

U Ko Ko Gyi said at a press conference at the 88 Generation

U Oattama of Mandalay's Masoeysin Monastery, who was present when police raided the Letpadaung protest camp on November 29, said Daw Aung San Suu Kyi should ensure those responsible for the raid were "brought to justice".

Failure to do so would hurt the National League for Democracy leader's reputation, he warned.

"It is not enough just to inquire about the incident in which monks were wounded ... we won't be pleased just with the disclosure of facts. If she

let our benefactors and relatives get into trouble or be harmed. Why did they attack using violence towards the monks who were peacefully protesting? Why did they do this while they didn't attack Bengalis who were carrying out arson attacks? We expressed our desire because we believed that no violence would be used at a time when we have a president who always reiterates his commitment to establishing a democracy state."

U Oattama said that 89 monks and nine laypeople, including 30 monks who suffered serious injuries, had been transferred to Mandalay for treatment.

"All monks who were hospitalised in Monywa are now in Mandalay hospital. They were transferred because we felt that staff at Monywa hospital were not friendly towards the monks," he said.

He also criticised claims by the police that only tear gas was fired at protesters.

"If you want to know whether it is tear gas or a fire bomb, come and see at the hospital. These wounds were not caused by tear gas. They have lied like this from one era to another. We can prove with the wounds that it was fire bomb," he said.

"We would also like the commission to disclose clearly whether it was a chemical device and who ordered to use this kind of device and strictly take legal action against them," he said.

- Translated by Thit Lwin

'The commission should include at least one the two protest leaders.'

office on December 3 that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's presence on the commission meant the 88 Generation leaders were not needed. "We will gather information on the opinions of locals and activists. We will negotiate with the commission and officials. We did not join the commission [because] locals and activists prefer to discuss the problems freely with us. We will take this opportunity to cooperate with the responsible people and the commission led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi," he said.

Min Ko Naing said 88 Generation would also seek the release of those arrested for taking part in the protests.

cannot ensure action is taken, the affection of monks and the public for her will lessen."

While police formally apologised for the raid to members of the clergy on December 1, the apology drew criticism because a police official at the ceremony said the protesters used monks as cover and fled when police arrived. He also insisted the police used only tear gas bombs, contrary to images of monks who sustained burns in the incident.

"It is not true that strikers used monks as cover," one local monk said in response to the claims. "We voluntarily took a leading role in the peaceful protest without anyone else's persuasion because we cannot

From page 1

Letpadaung

as Norinco.

Under the terms of the 30-year contract for the Letpadaung expansion at Monywa, Wanbao will invest US\$1 billion, he said, with the Myanmar government to receive 16.8 percent of the profits, followed by UMEHL with 13.8pc and Wanbao with 13.3pc.

He said the company had paid more than \$5 million in compensation for the more than 6000 acres confiscated for the expansion - or about \$830 an acre - and built more than 200 replacement homes, as well as a school, monastery and hospital.

He said Myanmar's relations with China would not be affected if the project is cancelled but warned it could dissuade other Chinese companies from investing in Myanmar.

Responding to rumours that Wanbao supplied the weapons police used to break up a protest camp near Letpadaung on November 29, a clash that resulted in scores of monks suffering injuries, he said it would be the job of the investigation commission to ascertain the truth.

"We should not allege Wanbao produces weapons, although their mother company, Norinco, produces weapons. Wanbao produces mainly copper and doesn't produce weapons. I say openly, I don't know where these weapons come from that were used by the police. I have not yet got any information

[to indicate the] company gave these weapons [to the police]. Now, commission is investigating this case so we will know clearly when its report comes out," he said.

He also declined to comment further on the protests at the mine, saying only that China didn't "want to criticise and interfere in the internal issues of another country", but added that he felt "sad" when he heard people saying they didn't want Chinese companies to invest in Myanmar.

He said Chinese companies would be more transparent about their dealings in Myanmar in future to avoid the problems that have plagued the Letpadaung project.

"We will give information openly to the public if the government and [partners are] also willing to do so," he said.

"These current problems are a challenge for the Chinese government and our companies. But we expect these problems to last only a short period and we can solve them by negotiation for mutual benefit."

would be a tragedy," he told **Pansodan**

The Myanmar Times by email last week.

"[Number] 233-235 Pansodan is right at the heart of the conservation area that we are currently discussing with the government. We shouldn't only think of the grand colonial buildings, but also buildings like this that are of historic value

and add to the unique charm of the entire neighbourhood," he said.

"What we need is a comprehensive plan for downtown Yangon that brings together the concerns of business and local people, understands the tremendous tourism potential of this area and respects its importance to Myanmar's history. We can create jobs whilst protecting our heritage and make the conservation and revitalisation of downtown Yangon a showcase for economic development in Myanmar."

The trust's deputy chair, Daw Moe Moe Lwin, said an investigation should be undertaken to understand the exact condition of the building.

"If it is actually in a dangerous condition, we might think the old building should be demolished but it very much depends on how precise and accurate the assessment was," she said.

"But one thing to keep in mind is that often these buildings can be saved through modern preservation methods."

U Ko Ni from the Lawyers Network said the Pansodan building had "high historic value" but the legal issues surrounding heritage building preservation were "seriously complicated". He said the government needed to show leadership on the issue and step in to halt the destruction of the building and others like it.

"Conservation of heritage buildings is weak in our country ... even though a heritage law has existed since 2004, typically there are weaknesses in implementation," U Ko Ni said.

"It's quite painful to hear that developers are trying to knock down historical buildings in Yangon's [proposed heritage zone]. I want to say that the Ministry of Culture has the responsibility to take care of this issue. The ministry should announce a list of all buildings in Yangon that have historic value. Then the heritage law should be applied to prevent developers demolishing them," he said.

"I don't want to blame the developers but the way most businesspeople look at it is they can't make money from the history of the building; only redevelopment can bring them a profit."

But Walter Koditek from the Urban Development Agency, a body under Vietnam's Ministry of Construction, said there was "huge potential" for the city's heritage buildings to contribute to its economic development.

"Some rapid steps and actions should be taken in order to protect the most important buildings, such as a rapid assessment of the city's inventory, what is there, and also more activities to create awareness among stakeholders, especially among decision makers and developers," he said at a preservation conference in Yangon last week.



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NLD to open HIV prevention and care centre

By Yamon Phu Thit

THE HIV/AIDS section of the National League for Democracy is planning to open a centre for people living with HIV during 2013, the NLD's spokesperson told *The Myanmar Times* in an interview on December 7.

The centre will be in a three-storey building in East Dagon township on land donated by Sayadaw Ashin Zawana (known as Myittarshin sayadaw), said Daw Phyu Phyu Thin, Pyithu Hluttaw representative for Mingalar Taung Nyunt, who runs the NLD's HIV/AIDS prevention and care section.

She said the centre would aim to solve the problem of space constraints for more than 300 HIV patients who are receiving treatment and care at the NLD's existing centre, and to make room for more patients.

"We receive more patients every day and we have inadequate space for them," she said.

The centre received more than 80 patients in 2010, more than 200 in 2011, and 300 people are receiving treatment and care at the centre. Space constraints have forced the centre to use two locations, one each in North Dagon and South Dagon.

"We can provide more treatment and care at one place rather than separating them in two places," she said.

The new centre will be able to accept more patients, and additional services for HIV and AIDS patients such as education and counselling and development programs for people living with HIV, she added.

"Our greatest challenge is space. If we have enough room, we can do much more," she said.

The estimated cost for the centre is K3 billion. The HIV/AIDS section founded an organising committee on December 1 to raise funds and manage the centre. The committee will be run under the aegis of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Sayadaw Ashin Zawana, and Daw Phyu Phyu Thin and other well-known celebrities such as director Kyi Phyu Shin, singers Lynn Lynn and Chit Thu Wai, and actor Nay Toe. Those who want to make donations can contact committee members and Daw Phyu Phyu Thin at 09-5024056, or 09-73137790.

The HIV/AIDS prevention and care centre of NLD's HIV/AIDS section was founded in 2002 and is based in South Dagon township. It has been providing HIV prevention and care services for people living with HIV for 10 years.

Monks protest over police attack

Monks in several cities stage sit-in protests after government fails to respond to demands

By Phyo Wai Kyaw and Than Naing Soe

MONKS in Mandalay, Taunggyi and Mogoke staged peaceful protests at monasteries on December 6 after the government failed to respond to a set of five demands issued following the crackdown at Letpadaung on November 29.

The monks have pledged to protest again on December 8 and 12 if the government fails to meet their demands, which include a formal apology to the injured monks, action against those involved in the raid, the release of those arrested for protesting and a solution to the Letpadaung conflict that benefits people from the area around the mine.

In Mandalay, monks at Eindawyar Pagoda also accused state media of misleading the public over the police crackdown, which left scores of monks injured, many with severe burns. The protest follows an earlier demonstration on

November 30. "We don't want any more tricks ... we will ask again and again for an apology from the president's government," said Sayardaw U Thawbita from Mahagandayone Monastery.

Monks at the protest also disparaged the state media's coverage of the attack on the monks on November 29, saying daily newspapers had been "dishonest".

"About 100 monks were injured and some nearly lost their lives in the raid but the government did not show the number in the state media. However, a monk named U Partaka, who wanted to leave the hospital, was displayed in the newspaper as though he had recovered from his injuries and was discharged. The police ceremony to apologise to the monks in Monywa was also a fake issue that was expressed officially in the newspaper. In my opinion that was totally dishonest and designed to trick the public," Sayardaw U Thawbita said at the protest.

Sayardaw U Visarra from Moekaung Monastery said



Sayardaw U Thawbita gives a speech to monks at a protest on December 6 at Eindawyar pagoda. Pic: Phyo Wai Kyaw

the information released by state newspapers was not in touch with reality.

"The government's media is just used to spread out their doctrine, not to give the truth and not for the

profit for the country. I read the newspaper for several years as I want to know how they have been cheating us," Sayardaw U Visarra said, adding that most private news journals had tried to

cover the event accurately. "I don't read local [state] newspapers," said Sayardaw U Oaktama from Maha Gandayone Monastery. - Additional reporting by Soe Than Lynn

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Travel association vote postponed until March

By Yu Yu Maw

THE Ministry of Hotels and Tourism has instructed the Union of Myanmar Travel Association to postpone an election scheduled for December 2 until March 2013, a ministry spokesperson said last week.

The December 2 election was called because an earlier vote at the association's annual general meeting on October 7 ended in controversial circumstances: the meeting ran five hours overtime, as many participants took the opportunity to express frustration over what they perceived was a lack of action from the UMTA leadership on soaring hotel room rates.

While 29 executive committee

members were sworn in, with Dr Aung Myat Kyaw taking over as chairman from U Mg Mg Swe, the results were later annulled because fewer than 50 percent of members voted. It was the

'The ministry will issue guidelines to ensure the election is legal and fair.'

first time that the UMTA has called a re-election since it was established in April 2002.

The association then announced on October 22 that 29 executive members would be selected at a vote on December 2.

The ministry spokesperson said the

election would instead be held in March after the ITB Berlin travel exhibition and the ministry will issue guidelines for the vote.

"Minister [U Htay Aung] urged the association to be united. The rules and regulations for the election will be amended after considering advice from the association to the ministry. The advice should be submitted no later than December 7. And the ministry will issue guidelines to ensure the election is legal and fair," the spokesperson said.

"As we all know, the October 7 meeting was not a good result. Two groups in the association are fighting each other. I don't want to make any comment about it but the minister wants them to unite."

A spokesperson from the association declined to comment.

New rain record after heavy falls in delta

A NEW rainfall record has been set in Pyapon township, Ayeyarwady Region, after a low pressure area in the Andaman Sea prompted unseasonably heavy rain in the delta.

The Department of Meteorology and Hydrology said Pyapon received 113 millimetres (4.45 inches) of rain in the 24 hours to 9:30am on November 30, the highest single-day total recorded for November in the town. The previous record was set in 2002.

A department official said Ayeyarwady and Yangon regions had four to six days of rain in November, while Tanintharyi Region had 10 days in the month.

Isolated heavy falls were recorded in some parts of the delta between November 28 and December 3 because of

a low pressure area in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.

"Pyapongot about 16.51mm (6.5 inches) from November 28 to 30, while Pathein in Ayeyarwady Region and Kayan and Yangon (Kabar Aye) in Yangon Region received from 38.1mm (1.5 inches) to 76.2mm (3 inches) of rain in the last week of November," he said.

He said more rain is expected this month, as two low pressure areas are forecast to form. Up to five wet days are expected in Sagaing, Mandalay and Magwe regions, while

Ayeyarwady, Bago, Yangon and Tanintharyi regions and Rakhine and Mon states are forecast to receive from nine to 11 days of rain in December.

-Aye Sapay Phyu

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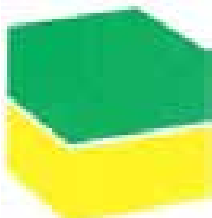
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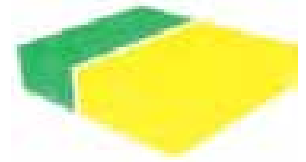


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Dated: 10th December, 2012

President cancels visit to Australia, NZ

By Tony Yoo

PRESIDENT U Thein Sein has cancelled a planned visit to Australia and New Zealand this week, reportedly because of domestic commitments.

The tour has been "postponed to a mutually convenient date which would be coordinated by the two sides", state media reported on December 6. The previous day, state media had said the visit would take place in the "near future".

Australia's Fairfax Media quoted a spokesperson for Prime Minister Julia Gillard as saying that the Australian government was advised late on December 5 that U Thein Sein "would be postponing his visit to Australia owing to domestic commitments".

U Thein Sein was due to arrive in Australia on December 10 for engagements in Canberra and Sydney. New Zealand was expecting to receive him on December 13 to reciprocate Prime Minister John Key's visit to Myanmar last month.

Fairfax Media reported that human rights activists had been planning a protest in Sydney to mark the former general's visit.

While no specific domestic commitments were cited, the president faces a number of concerning issues, including fallout from a heavy-handed crackdown on protesters near the Letpadaung copper mine project, an investigation into the controversial mine expansion, criticism of the treatment of Muslims in Rakhine State and conflict with the Kachin Independence Army in northern Myanmar.

"For the moment we can only guess at exactly what motivated him to keep the focus on the home-front," Professor Nicholas Farrelly of the Australian National University in Canberra wrote on the New Mandala website last week following the announcement.

"My quiet hope is that the president is pushing hard for a peaceful and sustainable resolution to the new Kachin war.

"In 2012 he may well end up sharing *TIME*'s 'Person of the Year' title. But if he really wants to earn the world's applause then I wonder whether some well-targeted and well-timed domestic travel shouldn't be on the immediate agenda."

The cancelled visit comes amid warming ties between Myanmar and both Australia and New Zealand. Both countries have lifted economic sanctions and increased aid to recognise progress made since the president came to office in March 2011.

Injured monks could head abroad for medical treatment

By Soe Than Lynn and Khin Su Wai

AS many as 10 monks injured in clashes between police and protesters near the Letpadaung copper mine project could be sent abroad for treatment, a senior monk in Mandalay said.

More than 60 monks were last week transferred to hospitals in Mandalay from Monywa following the November 29 raid on protest camps.

"There are 10 monks who are now in a serious condition and we are unsure whether they can be treated properly here. The rest, more than 50 monks, should be able to receive treatment at the hospital," Sayardaw U Oattama from Mandalay's Masoeyin Monastery told *The Myanmar Times* by phone on December 5.

"They need to take medical treatment abroad and they want to go," he said.

U Thu, also known as U Wi Ma La, the head of a team taking care of protesters

injured on November 29, said the most seriously injured monk is U Teika Nyana, who suffered burns to much of his body.

U Thu said donors were arranging for U Teika Nyana to be sent to Thailand for treatment. They are also trying to get a replacement identification card, as U Teika Nyana's was burned in the crackdown.

"U Teikka Nyana, who is 64 years old, is not good condition. We plan to send him to Thailand for treatment together with his family," he said.

"[Last week] I met the minister for health, he said that they will help to arrange treatment and we will try to get a passport as soon as possible. But first we are trying to get the monk identification card.

"The other protesters are still being treated [in Mandalay]... we are watching their condition. Another two monks have been transferred to Mandalay because Monywa hospital couldn't care enough for them and is not clean."



A monk at a hospital in Mandalay. Pic: Si Thu Lwin

But Sayardaw U Okktamathara from Maharganhtayone Monastery in Amarapura township, who also runs social organisation Bawa Alin, said the chief doctor at Mandalay hospital said the patients could be treated in Mandalay.

"But he also said that it depended on the desire of the patients," he said. "He told me the injuries are not like normal burns but he did not say exactly how they were different."

Social organisations such as

Seinyaungso, Amarathukha and Nalonehla Pinlae as well as the 88 Generation student group are arranging for Thai doctors to visit Mandalay.

"The monks need to be treated for their burns. And there should be tests done to find out whether the burns are caused by chemicals, as many people are alleging," said U Tin Thit, chairman of Seinyaungso. "We expect government should look into this issue in a transparent way and take responsibility."

- Translated by Zar Zar Soe

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A National League for Democracy member at the party's Zagwe ward office in Pyigyitagun township on December 3 holds a smart card and temporary member card issued before ward assemblies. Pic: Phyo Wai Kyaw.

NLD members complain of interference in assemblies

By Phyo Wai Kyaw

NATIONAL League for Democracy members in Mandalay's Pyigyitagun township say high-ranking party officials are interfering in ward assemblies, which began in the final week of November.

In Pyigyitagun township, assemblies in four of 16 wards were completed in the last week of November and of these three had some weaknesses, the members said.

"Ward assemblies started from November 25. This process should be overseen by ward-level officials but some from the township and district level commissions came and interfered in three of the ward assemblies. In one case, we found that the secretary of the district assembly commission asked

ward officials to sign the forms [showing the names of the winning delegates] even though the ward delegates had not been confirmed," said U Win Hlaing from Zagwe ward in Pyigyitagun township on December 3.

"That could allow them to just put the name of the delegates they want on the forms," he said.

The village and ward assemblies are being held to select delegates for township assemblies, from which participants in the party's first national assembly will be selected.

U Win Hlaing and U Kyaw Kyaw Naing, another member from Zagwe ward, said they had warned township-level officials they would not tolerate any interference when the Zagwe ward assembly is held.

Another issue is that some members are yet to receive

membership cards.

"There are still more than 40 members in our ward who haven't got party membership cards. We heard that those who don't have cards will not be able to participate in ward assemblies but our understanding is that the headquarters wants all members to participate," said U Kyaw Kyaw Naing.

Some members from township and district assembly commissions in the Mandalay area said they were worried at reports that the township level assembly would be convened even if only half the ward assemblies were finished.

"We want all wards to hold their assemblies before progressing to the township assembly," said one of the members.

Members Ko Win Nyein and U Aung Ngwe said on

December 3 that the problems had created a "lack of unity" among the party's rank and file in Pyigyitagun.

"Undemocratic actions of some members ... also harms the party's dignity. We want the headquarters not to neglect the party's grassroots and to listen to our voices. We don't want our township to have a bad name," said Ko Win Nyein.

In response to the complaints, NLD member Dr Win Thu from Myingyan township said by phone on December 4 that he would go to the party's headquarters in Yangon to meet senior party officials and discuss the issues related to the selection of delegates for the assembly.

He said he expected a press conference would be held after he arrives in Yangon on December 9 to discuss the issue.

Monks not satisfied with police apology

By Si Thu Lwin

MONKS receiving treatment at a Mandalay hospital for wounds sustained in a government assault on a protest camp near Monywa say they are not satisfied with last week's apology from the police force.

Sagaing Region police officials arranged a ceremony at Shwezigon Pagoda in Monywa on December 1 to apologise for injuries inflicted on monks during a police raid near the Letpadaung site two days earlier.

"We have no reason to be pleased with the apology. The monks who went to the event are monks who rarely go out [of their monastery]. The monks who were really tortured are receiving medical treatment in hospital. Even if they come and apologise in Mandalay, we won't be satisfied. All monasteries in Monywa were invited to the apologising event but only a few [monks] went there," U Kawthanla from Minkon Taungyo Monastery told *The Myanmar Times* in Mandalay.

The monks receiving medical treatment at Mandalay Central Hospital said that they would only be satisfied if the Letpadaung mine expansion project is abolished. They added that if the project continues, they

will continue to demonstrate at the mine site, which is about a 20-minute drive from Monywa.

Meanwhile, monks from Mandalay staged a sit-in protest at Eindawyar Pagoda on November 30 followed by a street march to demand to know who ordered the raid on the protest camps and what kind of weapons were used in the crackdown.

"It is not good that other countries hear about such a cruel raid on monks. Hurting Buddhist monks is equal to hurting Buddha's disciples. The names of the mastermind [of the raid] and chemicals must be revealed. The mastermind must be brought to justice," Glonni Sayadaw said in the Eindawyar Pagoda compound.

Those injured in the attack on the protest camp were initially treated at Monywa Township Hospital and 84 monks and 15 laypeople were later transferred to Mandalay Hospital, with most suffering from burns. Some have since been discharged, while others have been transferred to Kandaw Mingalar hospital in Chan Mya Tharsi township.

Donations for the monks in Mandalay hospital, including medicine, can be made at the Buddhist communal house in the hospital's compound. - *Translated by Thit Lwin*

Govt issues fresh apology

YANGON - The government has apologised to senior Buddhist clerics over injuries sustained in a violent police crackdown on a rally at a Chinese-backed copper mine, state media said on December 8.

Minister for Religious Affairs U Myint Maung said the incident at the mine in Monywa, in which at least 99 monks and 11 others suffered wounds including severe burns, was a "great grief" to the government.

At a ceremony with some of the country's top clerics, he "begged the pardon of wounded monks and novices", blaming the "incompetency" of the authorities, according to a report in the *New Light of Myanmar*. But he stopped short of apologising for the crackdown itself, saying the demonstration had a "political" element and that the government was treating the wounded with a "clear conscience".

Senior monk Bhaddanta Kumarabhivamsa called upon all parties to ensure such incidents do not happen again "and try their utmost to behave themselves", the paper said. - *AFP*

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Preparations begin for ward, village administrator vote

By Win Ko Ko Latt

WARD and village tract administrators will be selected through "democratic means" this month, an official from the General Administrative Department in Nay Pyi Taw said last week.

The administrators will be selected through two rounds of secret voting, as mandated under the Ward and Village-tract Administration Law, which was enacted earlier this year.

"We are going to select them according to the law and rules and regulations specified," U Aung Khin, secretary of Nay Pyi Taw Council, said on December 3.

Township level administrators will appoint a supervisory body of five respected residents to oversee the voting process in each ward and village tract. The body has to combine households into groups of 10, with each group holding a secret ballot to select a nominee. From the leaders of each group of 10 households, an administrator for each ward and village tract will be selected through secret ballot.

The President's Office had recommended removing the provision that leaders of each 10-household group be selected through secret ballot and instead chosen through negotiation. However, legislators narrowly voted down the proposal 278 to 236 at a Pyidaungsu Hluttaw session on February 22, arguing the change would make the selection process undemocratic.

Negotiated selection was included in the original draft submitted to the hluttaw by the Ministry of Home Affairs in August 2011 but later amended by lawmakers.

During the debate on February 22, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker U Khin Aung Myint floated the idea of allowing communities to choose which method they preferred to use but this was also rejected.

Some Nay Pyi Taw residents said last week they expect the ward and village tract selection process to be more free, fair and transparent than under the former military government.

"The elections will be more free and fair than in the past because some people, including members of the National League for Democracy and Union Solidarity and Development Party, will be closely watching the process," said U Hla Aung, who plans to compete in Yan Aung 1 ward in Pinyin township.

U Aung Khin said the council administrators from the eight townships in Nay Pyi Taw will suggest suitable dates for the appointment

process to take place.

One township administrator said the council has already directed administrators to make a preliminary study of the Ward and Village-tract Administration Law, as

'The elections will be more free and fair than in the past.'

well as its rules, regulations and procedures. However, incumbent ward and village administrators said they have not received any instructions.

On the administration of ward and village-tracts, the 2008 constitution states only that duties "shall be assigned in accord with the law to a

person whose integrity is respected by the community". Administrators must also be aged 18 or over and be residents of the ward or village tract.

The administrator's main responsibilities are ensuring the security of residents, to prevent crime and supervise ward and village social affairs.

Section 38(a) of the Ward and Village-tract Administration Law states that the new administrators will receive a monthly allowance from the General Administrative Department budget. The department is under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

"The ministry already has a budget. We will give allowance to [administrators] when the ministry issues a directive to do so," said U Aung Khin. - Translated by Zar Zar Soe



A runner crosses the finish line to win the 2006 Mandalay Mayor's Marathon. Pic: Phyo Wai Kyaw

Half marathon to be held in January

By Phyo Wai Kyaw

MANDALAY City Development Committee will hold a half marathon on January 7, an official said last week.

The committee began selling entry forms for the 20.9 kilometre (13 mile) Mandalay Mayor's Marathon on December 3. Priced at K300, they will be available until December 23 at Bahtoo Stadium and the

MCDC head office.

"We haven't set the amount of prize money for the winners yet. However, we will make sure they are suitably compensated," said U Latt Myint Thein, head of the committee's information department.

The half marathon will start in front of the MCDC office and end at Bahtoo Stadium. The event has not been held since 2006.

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Par Par Lay stands in front of an advertisement for his recent public performances in Mandalay. Pic: Phyo Wai Kyaw

Par Par Lay laughs in face of govt ban

Famed comedian takes part in three shows in Mandalay

By Phyo Wai Kyaw

MANDALAY comedian Par Par Lay has ignored a 16-year-old ban on performing in public, turning out for two shows in late November.

The 64-year-old member of the popular Moustache Brothers troupe has been banned since 1996, when he was arrested after an Independence Day performance at Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house in Yangon.

He said he couldn't wait any longer for the government to rescind the ban and decided to perform together with fellow comedians Thabyay Jar Aye and Myo Chit.

"I changed myself from blacklist to whitelist and am now on the stage again. I am performing in the traditional comedian costumes, the long garment

(*taung shay*) and turban (*gaung paung*). I could not wait any longer for [official] permission. I felt so happy when I performed again for the first time to the audience. I could not have been that happy even if I won the lottery," Par Par Lay told *The Myanmar Times* on December 4.

His first performance was at a Kahtain event in Pyigyitagun township's Zagwe ward, followed by a *kyarpyit pwe* (lotus throwing festival) at Mahamuni Pagoda in the last week of November. He performed with the rest of the troupe at a pagoda festival in Tamarkone ward in Maha Aung Myay township on December 5.

"I am performing and on the other hand I am preparing to be ready [if they arrest me]. I gathered some stuff like soup and a face towel so if [they] come to take me at midnight, I

will be ready to go along with them straight away," he said.

He said he had not tried to hide the news of his performance.

"I never perform silently. I made advertisements for my shows on the streets and at tea shops before I performed."

While Par Par Lay said there had been no problems as a result of the performances, his brother and fellow comedian Lu Maw said he was "worried" about the potential consequences.

"I am worried about him as I think the lower [administration] level has not changed, although the upper level [of the government] has changed. Par Par Lay was waiting so long for official permission to perform. It is his passion and he is not afraid to sacrifice himself for that," Lu Maw said.

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Education review 'well underway'

Deputy Minister for Education Dr Myo Myint on the education sector review and reform measures already underway

By Sandar Lwin

THE parliament urged the Ministry of Education to conduct a review of the sector and that process is underway. When is it likely to be completed?

We have called it a Comprehensive Education Sector Review. The launch ceremony was held [on October 23] in Nay Pyi Taw. Not only local experts but also experts from international organisations such as the United Nations and European Union are working on it collaboratively. The first four months have been allocated for a rapid assessment that will cover not only the Ministry of Education but all the related sectors, such as the Ministry of Science and Technology, vocational education, non-formal education and so on. Based on the findings of the rapid assessment we will come up with a plan of action for the next year. In that phase, we will look at [foreign] countries and take their experiences into consideration after which we will have a complete program ready to be implemented.

The review of research for the rapid assessment began in August and ... we expect to finish the [rapid assessment] in January 2013.

With which organisations are you working?

They include the UN, EU, World Bank, AusAID and JICA. AusAID is actively taking the initiative and leading the process. The ones I mentioned now are just those I remembered immediately and are like the main bodies. There are many others too ... after the launching ceremony [on October 23] we held a question and answer panel discussion. From the side of international organisations, they commented that they are encouraged and pleased at our measures and the effectiveness of the collaboration effort.

What is the ministry doing to address the complaint that students are not qualified enough when they finish their education?

We have identified 12 areas of the basic education system and 13 of the higher education system that need to be reformed. Improving the quality of and access to education are the two main criteria for basic education. For the university level, we will try improve the qualities of three components: the teachers, students and universities. We will need to be patient to see the results.

But, there are some immediate



Children at a school in the Ayeyarwady delta. Pic: Christopher Davy

significant benefits in the basic education system; for example, distributing the free text books and exercise books this year for primary students. The ministry will be able to distribute more free books in the coming year. On the other hand, the ministry has raised the salary and status of primary school teachers as much as it can based on their qualifications and experience.

To upgrade the administration, the ministry has added one more

appointed 1573 new teachers across all universities and colleges. Before, newly appointed teachers had to start work immediately but now we are giving all of them two-month pre-service training. In this training, we are polishing their skills and providing them with teaching methodologies with the aid of the University of Education. After the course, we will further English training batch by batch.

building and ICT facilities to form a Centre of Excellence and are doing this now.

For their part, they also need funding to send the experts to us. They are working on that funding. When these tasks have been accomplished, we will form the Centre of Excellence.

The president has emphasised the need for greater English-language proficiency. How does your ministry

'Students need to have the attitude that they will only learn if they actually put in the effort themselves.'

position, district officer, into the administrative line to focus more on basic education as well as salary increases for the officers. These measures are to improve both teaching and administration. And, the ministry is attempting to increase learning opportunities as well so we are focusing on three components.

At the university level, the ministry has a larger budget this year so it increased funding for all universities and colleges. You can see the university facilities are improving in line with the budget increase.

On the other hand, we have

President U Thein has said that universities plan to link up with foreign institutions.

We already have [entered] negotiations with Johns Hopkins University from America to join with Yangon University and for Montpellier University from France to join with Mandalay University. The other deputy minister, U Aye Kyu, and the rector of Mandalay University [went to Paris in October] for the final negotiations on this collaboration.

To join with Johns Hopkins University, both sides have accepted the concept proposal. We are responsible for improving the

propose improving English skills?

Of the 1573 new teachers, 140 are English teachers in. We are giving them an intensive English language course at the Centre of English at Marlar Hall ... another important measure is that we will introduce an international-standard [English] text book in December.

Does the ministry plan to appoint native speakers to improve the English skills of teachers?

The British Council has helped us with the training for teachers by providing a trainer to improve teaching methodology. And [Australia has agreed] to send

two English language trainers to Myanmar for two years.

What about increasing the emphasis on research at universities?

A principal task of universities is research. So, as I mentioned earlier, when we improve teachers' knowledge, language skills and teaching methodology, then we expect the research qualities will also be improved to an extent.

Furthermore, we are aiming to form Centres of Excellence at the main universities. This will also be helpful to upgrade education standards. A responsibility of these centres is to distribute knowledge and expertise in a specific field.

A major criticism of the education system is that students are trained to pass exams rather than think for themselves. Will this emphasis on exams continue in the future?

In my opinion, [this problem] depends on the type of question you are asking [in the exam]. If the questions simply ask for facts, then that will be the teaching methodology. But questions are not just about facts. If we prepare questions that seek to test the students' intelligence and understanding, it will give them a chance to show their ability, including things they have learned outside class. The teaching method we will use is known as the child-centred methodology. Furthermore, we do not only rely on exams; the system also requires students to complete term papers.

What about the problem of students buying term papers rather than doing them themselves?

While I have not inspected a number of universities and colleges, from what I have seen the students are discussing term paper research with their supervisors. So, on the whole, the term papers are written by the students after discussing them with supervisors; the students do not need outside help. If the students follow the directions of the teachers and make the effort, buying term papers will not be an issue. Students need to have the attitude that they will only learn if they actually put in the effort themselves. We do not ask students to do term paper research without providing any necessary basic knowledge. We provide them with the research methodology at every [tertiary] level, from undergraduate to doctorate levels.

Company refuses to leave privatised factory

By Noe Noe Aung

TWO companies are locked in a struggle over a plot of land auctioned off last year as part of the former government's privatisation campaign.

The successful buyer, Mega Marine director Daw May Aye Mon, says she paid a total of K3.3625 billion (about US\$4 million) for the 4.7-acre plot in Thaketa township. But the current tenant, who participated unsuccessfully in the auction and runs a food canning operation at the site, says his contract to operate his factory there is still in force.

"Though I won the auction, the company that is running a factory on the land wouldn't move out, and didn't give the land back to the [Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries]," Daw May Aye Mon said.

U Soe Moe Kyaw, a director of Myanmar Macro Industry, the current occupant of the plot, said that the company will not move out because it has a contract with Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) to run the factory and to occupy the land until 2017.

"We rented this land till 2017 with a contract with MIC. We've invested millions in the business. We can't move out before the contract

expires," U Soe Moe Kyaw told *The Myanmar Times* on December 7.

"I don't want to criticise the government plan to auction the land while a company was occupying it. But we have contracts to carry out, and we can't just move out," he said.

Daw May Aye Mon said she bought the plot in an auction organised by the Privatisation Commission that was announced in state-run media in January last year. The winners were revealed in March 2011.

"My winning bid was K3.290 billion, which I paid off in full by January 31 this year. In February, the

commission said I had to pay another K36 million more because I'd failed to meet the deadline. So I paid nearly K3.4 billion in total. But I still haven't got the land," said Daw May Aye Mon.

"I've reported this to all the departments involved. But a lot of time has passed, and there's no solution," she added.

Daw May Aye Mon says the Livestock Feedstuff and Milk Products Enterprise, part of the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, served notice to the present tenant, U Moe Myint Kyaw, the managing director of Myanmar Macro Industry, to give the land back to the

ministry on February 15 this year, but he failed to do so.

"Nothing has happened since. As far as I know, the [ministry] has taken no action," said Daw May Aye Mon.

"When we negotiated, U Moe Myint Kyaw said he couldn't move out until his contract expires in 2017."

She said U Moe Myint Kyaw should have objected to the auction when it was first announced. "He should have tried to take the land off the list of properties to be auctioned. But he took part in the auction. He lost and I won," she said.

"Now I want the Privatisation Commission

to solve the problem and give me the land."

Myanmar Investment Commission director U Than Sein Kyaing told *The Myanmar Times* that the commission is trying to reach a fair solution to the dispute in cooperation with the Privatisation Commission and Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries.

"Myanmar Macro Industry asked us to examine this case and we are trying to find the fair and best solution for them. That's all I can say at the moment," he said.

"We have to consider both companies. If we resolve it incorrectly, it can result cause losses for both sides."

Pyu seminar restarts Mon debate

By Cherry Thein

RESEARCHERS have called for more studies to be conducted on the history of early kingdoms in Myanmar at a controversial seminar on the Pyu civilisation.

The Pyu seminar featured about 20 presentations and was held at the Myanmar Banks Association in Yangon's Yankin township from November 30 to December 2.

One of the organisers of the seminar, U Myo Thant Tin, said it aimed to reveal the "real historical facts" in order to achieve reconciliation between ethnic groups.

"The real facts of history should be a means of bringing peace between different ethnic groups. We should find out what is real and reveal it to the public. We can't lie or change history," he said.

But the seminar was shrouded in controversy because of perceptions it would be used to propagate the view that the Pyu, rather than the Mon, dominated lower Myanmar before the rise of the Burmese kingdoms in central Myanmar.

The Pyu civilisation appeared around the

second century BC and was likely subsumed into the Bagan Empire by the 11th century.

The Pyu culture spread and influenced other parts of the country, including present-day Chin State and Tanintharyi Region, where historians have found Pyu-style items, such as terracotta with fingerprints and coloured beads.

U Naing Ye Zaw, a Mon presenter at the conference, said the past should not be used to create division between people from different ethnic groups.

"All Mon people were unhappy about the Pyu seminar. We feared that officials and historians would decide Mon state is a subordinate of the Pyu, which would mean we have no unique Mon civilisation, culture and custom. The thought of this makes people angry," he said.

He said that while the Pyu civilisation may have spread to lower Myanmar, including Mon State, there was reliable evidence that the Pyu did not rule Mon State.

He also emphasised that more research was needed to understand the relationship between the

An excavation at mound 37 at the ancient Pyu city of Sri Ksetra. Pic: Supplied



different groups.

U San Win, a retired director general of the department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library, agreed there was not enough evidence to conclude Mon State was ruled by a Pyu kingdom.

"We are sure there were some other ethnic groups during the Pyu period and before and we should not be too persistent in saying that all parts of the country are Pyu," he said.

"We are caring only for Pyu cities because the ministry is preparing the nomination of three ancient Pyu cities for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

We appreciate the existence of other ethnic kingdoms, such as Mon and Rakhine, and should not insist that they are Pyu territories."

Sri Ksetra in Bago Region's Pyay township, Hanlin in Sagaing Region's Shwebo township and Beikthano in Magwe Region's Taungdwingyi township have been selected for nomination on the World Heritage List and submissions will be sent in February 2013, according to the government.

Another presenter, U Zaw Thura from Dawei University, called for more research, excavations and preservation work to be

carried out at the ancient site of Thargaya in Dawei township.

"Historical records said Thargaya is under the influence of the Pyu but there has been no excavations so far," he said.

The seminar was sponsored by Tun Foundation and presentations considered contemporary documents about the Pyu from China and India, ancient manuscripts recording the Pyu civilisation, the views of colonial-era British writers on the Pyu and the "hidden history" of the civilisation, organisers said.

Company donates water purifiers

A MYANMAR company is providing mobile water purifiers for urban poor people as a corporate social responsibility activity.

Aekar, which distributes water purification equipment and technical services, donated K17 million worth of mobile water purifiers to the local non-government organisation Emerald Green for distribution to poor residents in North Okkapala township on December 3.

U Kyi Win, president of Emerald Green, said the purifiers would be useful not only for the residents of North Okkalapa, where clean water is difficult to access, but also for relief activities in disaster-hit parts of the country.

"It will save money and be more effective than transporting drinking water from one place to another," said U Kyi Win.

The equipment uses an ultrafiltration system that can purify 20,000 to 50,000 litres a day.

- Aye Sapay Phyu



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UN welcomes govt plan to ratify treaty against corruption

By Nan Tin Htwe

MYANMAR should ratify the United Nations Convention against Corruption to encourage foreign investment and transparency, a UN official said last week.

Mr Yury Fedotov, executive director of UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), told *The Myanmar Times* on December 4, the final day of his four-day visit to Myanmar, that he was "encouraged" by government reforms and President U Thein Sein's stated aim to accelerate the process of ratifying the convention.

Ratifying the convention is "important not only for Myanmar but also the outside world. It will help to get more foreign investment and more openness," he said.

So far 164 of the 193 UN member states have ratified the convention since it was introduced in 2003.

On December 1, Mr Fedotov met Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham in Nay Pyi Taw and the UNODC boss said he urged the government to adopt the convention.

He said he was told that the government had a "political commitment" to ratify the document, which Myanmar signed in December 2005.

The ratification process normally entails two steps: the first is the domestic process, whereby the formalities of ratifying or acceding to an international treaty or convention are completed, followed by the international process, where the government communicates its ratification to the UN secretary general.

But a major challenge for countries that have ratified the convention is the requirement that national laws are in conformity with the treaty.

"It's not easy. It's a legally binding document," he said. "Some countries make sure that their laws are in compliance with [the convention] before ratification, while many countries continue to reform their laws to ensure compliance after ratification. This is a policy choice by governments."

Mr Fedotov said that if the government follows through with its promise to

current issues but also what can we expect in the future".

"Her vision was very useful. We will take into account planning activities in Myanmar and arranging what we are doing in terms of drug issues, methods of rule of laws and reforming the judiciary."

He emphasised the importance of her position as the chair of the Pyithu Hluttaw Rule of Law, Peace and Stability Committee. "I'm pleased to see her as an important ally of our programs related to Myanmar and close partnership with UN agencies and programs."

Mr Fedotov also visited Shan State and met the chief minister, head of the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party and officials from the Pa-O National Organisation and Restoration Council of Shan State to discuss drug eradication programs.

"Thousands of hectares have been eradicated. It's a great achievement that must be commended and appreciated."

However, he stressed that there was a serious need to provide more support to farmers to encourage them to switch to alternative crops.

He said that while Myanmar faces "a lot of challenges" it could benefit from being "the focus of international attention" in terms of financial support and investment.

"[But] you cannot ensure sustainable development without addressing issues like the judicial system, good governance, anti-corruption, transitional organised crime and terrorism. All those issues must be linked together," he said.

‘It will help to get more foreign investment and more openness.’

Myanmar again near foot of global transparency rankings

By Tony Yoo

MYANMAR was last week ranked 172 out of 176 countries in an annual Corruption Perception Index compiled by international NGO Transparency International.

The report indicates the perceived level of public sector corruption in the countries surveyed, the group says.

Singapore's reputation for clean public service was confirmed with its fifth-placed position. However, some of Myanmar's direct neighbours did not fare so well, with Laos (equal 160th) and Bangladesh (equal 144th) lagging in the bottom quarter of the index.

Thailand claimed equal 88th position, while economic giants China (equal 80th) and India (equal 94th) were ranked in the mid-tier.

Denmark, Finland and New Zealand were rated equal first, earning 90 points out of a maximum of 100. At the other end of the table, Afghanistan, North Korea, and Somalia were perceived to have the highest levels of public sector corruption, all scoring just eight points. Myanmar received 15 points.

The low ranking for Myanmar comes despite some efforts to tackle corruption, including President U Thein Sein's "clean government and good governance" policy and investigations into graft at state-owned enterprises by the Auditor

General's Office.

However, Transparency International concedes that the index is not all encompassing. It does not take private sector corruption, societal attitudes or anti-corruption policies into account, for example.

The annual survey has been conducted for the past 17 years but the methodology was revised this year, making a direct comparison between the 2011 and 2012 rankings difficult. Myanmar was ranked 180th out of 182 countries last year.

Mr Derek Tonkin, a former British ambassador to Thailand, Vietnam and Laos, said the low ranking for Myanmar is based on Transparency International's perceptions, "which are unlikely to be the same as the perceptions of experts who are at the forefront of political and economic analysis".

"[Transparency International] have traditionally, and with justification, given considerable weight to the level of human rights violations in a country as a broad indicator of the level of corruption ... in the virtual absence of reliable data, [Transparency International] have been led to conclude that in their perception Myanmar must inevitably be close to the bottom of the list. The reality on the ground though is rather different," Mr Tonkin wrote on the website of non-profit group Network Myanmar, of which he is chairman.



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A screengrab of the hacked Eleven Media Group website on December 7.

Eleven Media website hacked

By Htoo Aung

ELEVEN Media Group's English-language website was hacked by a group calling itself the Kachin Cyber Army on December 7, a company announcement said last week.

Visitors to the site were greeted by a little text box saying "KCA hacked", before a screen showing the Kachin Independence Army's green and red flag and further text appeared.

"Do you Surprise? This's first warning for you f**king media, it's 1st lesson. Don't make nonsense and stupid media attacks to fool our nations. Today we announce

to all Burmese media lamers and stupid journalists, we'll attack all any nonsense stupid Burmese medias from now on. We'll definitely come back soon if you don't keep our warning," the text said.

The Eleven Media Group announcement said that the company regretted that viewers were temporarily unable to view the www.news-eleven.com site. The announcement further stated that the Kachin Cyber Army hackers were using IP addresses based in China. The company said its IT technicians are working to repair the website and investigating whether a Kachin group made the attack.

UN calls for better access to Kachin State relief camps

YANGON – The UN's humanitarian chief has called on the government to stop blocking aid to thousands of people displaced by conflict with the Kachin Independence Army, raising concerns over welfare as winter nears.

The United Nations has been prevented from reaching more than half of the 75,000 people forced from their homes by fighting between the army and KIA insurgents, Ms Valerie Amos said in a statement sent overnight after a visit to the area on December 6.

"The UN has not been allowed access to provide badly needed assistance to some 39,000 people in areas outside the government's control since July 2012," said the under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator.

She said local partners were supplying food and other relief, "but their stocks are depleted and with the winter months approaching,

getting more supplies in is critical".

Fierce fighting has raged in Kachin State since a 17-year ceasefire between the military and the KIA broke down in June 2011.

A spokeswoman for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said the government "cannot guarantee our security so it hasn't granted us permission to take a convoy to the rebel areas".

The UN envoy met President U Thein Sein and raised concerns over lack of access to both government and rebel controlled camps in Kachin State, the statement said.

Myanmar has signed tentative ceasefire deals with a number of major armed groups. But a deal with the KIA remains elusive, with deep distrust on both sides.

Continued fighting in the region, along with the eruption of communal violence between Buddhists and Muslims in western Rakhine state, is seen as a key stumbling block on Myanmar's reform path.

Ms Amos, who visited both regions during her four-day trip to Myanmar, has described the conditions in camps for Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State as "dire" and expressed concern for the 115,000 displaced in that state. - AFP

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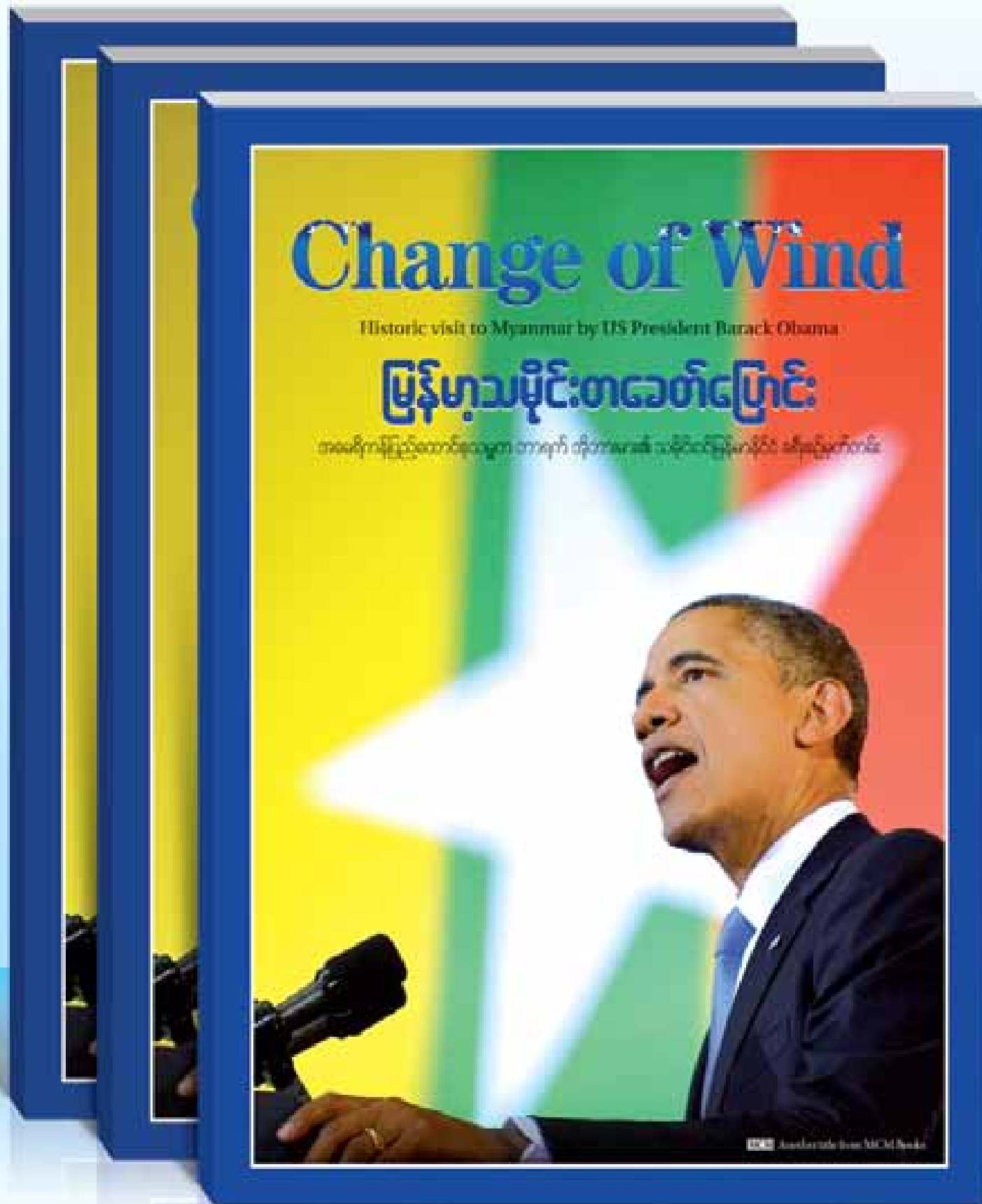
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The Mail Box



Dear editor,
Alex Bookbinder's article ("Anti-Muslim monks: Sri Lanka redux?", December 3) was a true eye opener and a word of caution to both Myanmar and Sri Lanka, two countries thinking and acting against the very teachings of Lord Buddha.

In Sri Lanka, the word of caution came in the form of Dr Colwyn R. de Silva, a leftist leader. In 1956, the two largest political parties of the Sinhalese ethnic majority, the SLFP and UNP, passed the Official Language Act called "Sinhala Only", which was enthusiastically supported by the Maha Sangha, prompting Dr de Silva to say: "Either we will have two languages and one nation, or we will have one language and one religion and become two nations."

Later, when Prime Minister SWRD Bandaranaike tried to resolve the issue of the reasonable use of Tamil in the north and east provinces, JR Jayawardene in the opposition claimed that the government was betraying the Sinhalese. He proposed a protest march to Kandy that would culminate at the Temple of the Tooth where he would pray with the Buddhist chapters for the Sinhalese. Both the SLFP and the UNP failed to realise that they had sown the wind with religious fanaticism and would have to reap the whirlwind later.

Since the war ended in 2009, Buddhist monks have been at the forefront of punitive or vulgar triumphalism, attacks on places of worship and protests against Western embassies and the UN. One of the Sri Lankan president's siblings has been accused of erecting Buddhist temples in the north and east provinces where Hindu temples have been destroyed. The accusation is that Buddhist monks have taken advantage of the post-war confusion to seize lands in predominantly Tamil speaking areas.

The ethnic and religious minorities in Sri Lanka are viewed as a liability by most Buddhist monks and the country's constitution has been re-drafted several times to give more prominence to Buddhism. Thus it reads today, "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and, accordingly, it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana."

Sandy Vadi
Toronto, Canada

Dear editor,
After reading your article ("Kids benefit from Canadian connection", October 15) I was amazed and impressed by Mr Rick Chase's activities. I can only hope that persons with financial means will see the importance of what Mr Chase and his family are hoping to accomplish in Myanmar and abroad in impoverished areas. Bringing in these soy machines can help people become more independent and less reliant on handouts and will help these communities to be able to support themselves.

This is certainly an outreach program that we should all stand behind and feel proud about. I hope and pray that Mr Chase's dreams for these children are realised. One by one we can help those less fortunate than ourselves. Thank you for sharing this story.

Kari Guloi
Delta, Canada

Got something to say? We want to hear from you. Address all correspondence to the Editor, *The Myanmar Times* (English). We endeavour to respond to all correspondence in a timely manner.

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New HIV infections fell by 74pc over past decade: UN

Myanmar one of 25 countries where new infections dropped by more than half

By Shwe Yee Saw Myint

MYANMAR is one of 25 countries where new HIV infections have fallen by more than 50 percent during the past decade, UNAIDS said at a ceremony to mark World AIDS Day last week.

Infection rates declined 74pc between 2001 and 2011, the agency said in its World AIDS Day Report for 2012.

"Myanmar should be congratulated as it is one of a few countries named in this year's World AIDS Report as reducing infections by more than 50 percent over the last decade. This is a success in increasing prevention and treatment services but Myanmar still has a long way to go to sufficiently scale up services to increase success and meet its global and national MDG commitments," UNAIDS country director Eamonn Murphy said at the December 2 event, which was held at People's Square in Yangon.

The UNAIDS report revealed significant progress in preventing and treating HIV/AIDS in the past two years. Globally, the number of people accessing life-saving treatment rose by 60 percent, and new infections have fallen by half in 25 countries, 13 of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

AIDS-related deaths have dropped by a quarter since 2005. Half the global reduction in new HIV infections in the last two years has been among new-born babies.

Many HIV/AIDS community support groups said their goal was to reduce the new infection rate to zero, while at the same time reduce stigma and discrimination.

'Myanmar still has a long way to go to sufficiently scale up services to increase success and meet its MDG commitments.'

"In our experience, the problem is lack of awareness about HIV/AIDS," Daw Naw Darel, vice president of Myanmar Positive Group, said at the World AIDS Day event.

Last year 18,000 people – about 40 a day – died of HIV-related diseases in Myanmar.

It was estimated in 2011 that the HIV prevalence in the adult population – those aged 15 and over

– was 0.53pc, with 216,000 people living with HIV. There were about 8300 new infections among adults in 2011.

"If we want to reduce this rate to zero, the government has to make its health policy more effective," Daw Naw Darel said.

Meanwhile, sex workers and injecting drug users used a World AIDS Day ceremony on December 1 to call for changes in public attitudes towards HIV/AIDS that they say are hindering prevention efforts.

Female and transgender sex workers say they suffer from sexual violence and exploitation, as well as harassment by the police, who confiscate their condoms. The sex workers said this was a threat to their profession, as well as posing a risk of increased HIV infection.

Drug users and men who have sex with men, or MSM, also complained they found it hard to access essential medical care and services because of the stigma towards HIV/AIDS sufferers.

"We are human. This is the way we live. I would like to see a reduction in the stigma and discrimination attached to MSM," said a representative of the King and Queen Group, which was formed by MSM volunteers.

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IP law draft to be sent to hluttaw soon

By Pyae Thet Phyto

AFTER widespread consultations that involved a number of concerned organisations, the country is edging closer to having an intellectual property law.

The bill, which has so far been redrafted 10 times, will be submitted to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw soon, said an official of the International Brand Association at a consultation on brands held at Oasis Hotel in Nay Pyi Taw on November 30.

The proposed bill, which includes laws for protecting brands, copyright, design and invention, was drawn up mainly by the Ministry of Science and Technology, in consultation with representatives of national and regional governments, the Attorney General's Office, the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, associations for creative industries and other groups, said U Thein Aung, country chairman of the Asian Regional Invention Rights Agency.

"The intellectual property rights law is expected to be enacted before July 1, 2013. It has now gone through 10 drafts," he said.

"The bill will be great because experienced professionals from the private sector have been involved in its drafting."

He said the new law would benefit both potential foreign investors and local people, who would be able to use copyrighted material at reasonable prices.

"We will submit the bill to the Pyithu Hluttaw Bill Committee once drafting is complete. We're also arranging to send a draft to the World Intellectual Property Organisation," an official from Ministry of Science and Technology told *The Myanmar Times*.

The bill has also been discussed three times by relevant ministries and non-government organisations this year.

"I expect the law to be tailored to the needs of our country," said U Khine Maung Yi, the Pyithu Hluttaw representative for Ahlone.

- Translated by Zar Zar Soe



The ballooning group at Myitkyina, Kachin State, on a previous visit to Myanmar. Pic: Supplied/Golden Express

Ballooning group returns to Myanmar

By Yu Yu Maw

THEY'RE back – those magnificent men (and women) in their flying machines. Led by Swiss businessman Mr Peter Blaser, the group will be touring the country in their own balloons, which will arrive with them on December 20.

Their 19-day tour will take them to Inle Lake, Loikaw, Heho, Mandalay, Bagan and Magwe before they depart on January 8.

"The 29 tourists will arrive in Yangon on December 20 and leave the next day for Inle Lake for two days' flying. Then they move on to Loikaw,

Bagan and Mandalay, spending two days at each location," said U Tint Naung, managing director of Golden Express Travels and Tour company, which is organising the trip.

"The plan is same as last year. We've already got the permit from Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. The group usually flies once a year in Myanmar. They will be sight-seeing Myanmar from their balloons," he added.

The tour company will arrange ground transport, including moving the seven balloons from region to region.

"It was not easy to arrange the ground transport. We need more

than 20 people with six cars to pick up the balloon. We can't be sure where the balloon will land because of the wind," said U Tint Naung.

This is the fifteenth time the group has flown over Myanmar. They usually time their visit for December or January to catch the best weather. The wind usually blows in one direction at a speed of 10 to 15 miles an hour (16 to 24 kilometres an hour), optimum ballooning conditions.

The group first toured Myanmar by balloon in March 1999 and has returned every year since, visiting Bagan, Inle, Mandalay, Monywa, Bago, Myitkyina, Taunggyi, Pindaya, Bagan and Mrauk Oo.

Training for journalists

With the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) International Programme for the Development of Communication, Myanmar Consolidated Media, publisher of *The Myanmar Times*, is seeking applications for capacity-building programs for both beginner and senior print media journalists in Myanmar.

Two two-week training programs will be conducted for journalists with at least 1.5 years experience, while one three-week training course will be conducted for journalists with minimal or no experience. Trainees in the three-week program will have the opportunity to undertake an internship at *The Myanmar Times* upon concluding the course.

The programs will be conducted in January and February 2013 with one expatriate and one Myanmar journalism instructor. English skills and a university degree are preferred but not essential. Successful applicants will need to provide a release form from their employer for the duration of the course. For further information please write to the following email address: administration@myanmartimes.com.mm



Call for applications for foreign and Myanmar journalism trainers

With the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) International Programme for the Development of Communication, Myanmar Consolidated Media, publisher of *The Myanmar Times*, is seeking applications from experienced journalists to implement capacity-building programs for both beginner and senior journalists in Myanmar.

Two two-week training programs will be conducted for journalists with at least 1.5 years experience, while one three-week training course will be conducted for journalists with minimal or no experience. The programs will be conducted in January and February 2013. We are seeking one foreign (Southeast Asia-based) journalism instructor with extensive print media experience, preferably in Asia, and one Myanmar journalism instructor with extensive print media experience. The employment period is expected to be for seven weeks consecutively.

Applicants should include a cover letter and CV outlining relevant experience. To submit an application or for further information please write to the following email address:

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Danish trade minister and delegation visit

By Tim McLaughlin

DANISH Minister for Trade and Investment Pia Dyhr led a delegation of business leaders to Yangon last week with the hopes of pairing companies from the Scandinavian country with Myanmar partners.

Ms Dyhr met the deputy minister for commerce, the chairman of the Foreign Committee of Parliament, members of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) and local businesspeople during her visit. She also toured Yangon's port district on December 4.

"It is interesting being in a country where you can actually support the democratic process by establishing good business connections," she said of her visit to Myanmar. "If companies are willing to invest you can create jobs in Myanmar and create more stability in the country."

While Danish investment remains minimal, the delegation is the latest attempt to increase engagement with Myanmar. Denmark established a diplomatic office with Norway in Yangon on November 4 and has

doubled its aid to Myanmar, raising funding to nearly US\$18 million a year, with expectations of further increases in 2013.

Mr Mikael Winther, the Danish ambassador to Thailand and Myanmar, said that while some Danish small and medium enterprises have a tendency not to stray too far from home when it comes to their investments, the country's larger firms are looking at Myanmar with interest.

"Some of them [Danish companies] are not very adventurous," said Mr Winther. "They go to Germany and Sweden and England and the US but we also have some that are remarkably adventurous and skilled."

"There are those who find it an adventure to go to Sweden and those who really go a long way," he said.

Eighteen of these adventurous companies joined the minister on the trip to Myanmar, including representatives from Danish Water Services, pharmaceutical supplier Novo Nordisk and dairy product manufacturer Arla Foods all made it to Myanmar.

Though Ms Dyhr was generally upbeat about



Carlsberg is one of several Danish companies eyeing Myanmar. Pic: Reuters

prospects for Danish companies, she voiced disappointment that Danish Water Services had not been able to sign a contract to upgrade Yangon's outdated water supply system.

"I wish that Danish Water Services would have delivered on an agreement with Yangon city," she said. During a visit to a local pumping station she learned

that Yangon loses between 50-60 percent of water due to its antiquated water pipe system. Strict regulations in Denmark ensure that only 3-7pc of water is lost, she said.

Despite the setback Ms Dyhr said she remains hopeful that the company will sign an agreement soon.

Missing from the

delegation was a representative from brewing giant Carlsberg. For months there has been speculation that the company, the world's fourth largest brewery, would reenter Myanmar. Carlsberg left the country 1997 under pressure from activists.

Carlsberg began posting job openings for Myanmar nationals in mid-summer

on its website.

Carlsberg officials have met a number of potential Myanmar partners, including Dr Sai Sam Htun, head of beverage manufacturer Loi Hein Group, in September. However, he told *The Myanmar Times* on December 3 that his company had not entered into an agreement with Carlsberg.

"They are very eager to do it," Ms Dyhr said of Carlsberg's ambitions to open a brewery in Myanmar. "It is not just something they are talking about, they will act on it."

She added that she had spoken to the company's chief executive officer, Jorgen Buhl Rasmussen, prior to traveling to Myanmar and said he "would have loved to open while I was here".

According to Mr Winther, the company is exercising caution as it takes the necessary steps to begin operations.

"They are very specific about obtaining the necessary licences," he said.

"It is an interesting market and we are considering various options," a spokesperson for Carlsberg said of their Myanmar intentions.

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Speculators could stall investment, says minister

IN DEPTH
with Sandar Lwin



LAND prices inflated by speculation may be deterring foreign companies from investing, the planning minister has warned.

Dr Kan Zaw, union minister for National Planning and Economic Development, blamed speculators for artificially forcing up the price of land in an attempt to profit from the entry of foreign investors.

"Though people say land prices are very high, these are not actual trading prices but mostly the result of speculation. People thought land prices would rise when foreign investors came, so they are holding onto the land and asking high prices," he said.

The minister was speaking at the ASEAN 100 Leadership Forum, held in Yangon on December 5-6.

At the same event, Vice-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham urged investors to take part in the country's liberalisation and

development, saying their support would help the country advance further.

"Conditions for all-round development are now very favourable. We are taking the opportunity to strengthen and encourage regional cooperation and integration," he said.

"We are determined to succeed in our political and economic reforms. We believe Myanmar will be a reliable partner and an effective contributor to peace and prosperity in the region. We believe our reforms will bring maximum benefit if they are complemented by the support of the international community. In this regard, we are seeking the encouragement and support of our regional and global partners," the vice-president said.

"Our opportunity to host the SEA Games next year and to assume the ASEAN chairmanship in 2014 provide a golden opportunity for Myanmar to demonstrate that we are determined to move forward and to be a responsible member of the international community,"

More page 24

Domestic banks not ready for joint ventures

By Aye Thidar Kyaw

DOMESTIC banks lack the capital to take part in international banking, despite receiving permission to do so last July from the Central Bank, sources say.

According to a draft law released in November, the Central Bank is likely to allow private banks to open representative offices overseas. But Co-operative Bank managing director U Pe Myint said private banks have yet to develop plans to do so.

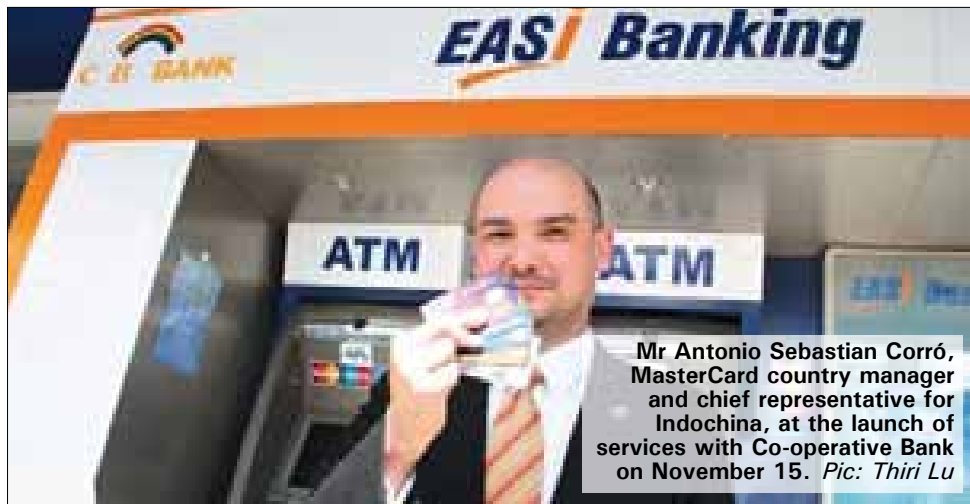
At the same time, despite the recent passage of the foreign investment law, foreign banks are not going to be opening functioning branches in Myanmar any time soon, as legal and technical restrictions remain.

Central Bank deputy director general U Win Thaw said the bank would develop specific rules and regulations for the entry of foreign banks after setting general targets this month.

"Some foreign banks want to open branches here straight away, but our regulations say they must first pass through three steps (representative office, subsidiary and joint-venture). There are also said to be software problems," he said.

U Win Thaw added that Myanmar's 19 private banks are enough for the country's banking sector, but they have too few branches.

Asia Green Development (AGD) Bank managing director U Ye Min Oo said domestic banks are too small to compete with international banks. A big Myanmar bank could have less capital and



Mr Antonio Sebastian Corró, MasterCard country manager and chief representative for Indochina, at the launch of services with Co-operative Bank on November 15. Pic: Thiri Lu

fewer branches than one of Thailand's smallest banks, he said.

"Foreign banks intend to cooperate with Myanmar banks in joint ventures permitted by the Central Bank. But they're waiting for the rules and regulations," he said.

"When we think about joint-venture banking, we have to think who contributes how much in terms of share ratio, how to select the board of directors, the CEO or managing director, and which services we can offer. Many of those things are still at the discussion stage," he said.

There are about 300

towns in Myanmar and the biggest Myanmar bank, Kanbawza, has fewer than 80 branches. Private banks still have a long way to develop in-country, let alone opening representative offices in other countries, U Ye Min Oo said.

"No-one will take a risk in overseas banking without profit," he said.

Dr Sein Maung, chairman of First Private Bank, said a Chinese bank had recently approached him about possible cooperation.

The Chinese bank had about US\$240 billion in capital, and his bank has about K30 billion (about \$36 million). He said the

Central Bank had to decide what the equity share ratio would be for each side.

"The foreign investment law does liberalise the contribution ratio for joint-venture projects, but we're still awaiting the decision from the Central Bank on that," he said.

He added that K30 billion is tiny compared to foreign banks' capitalisation, and domestic banks would need more in order to work

There are 23 representative banks in Myanmar from 11 countries, including Japan, South Korea, India, China and Thailand.



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Sesame, the ideal crop for upper Myanmar

By U Kyaw Myint

SESAME fills a number of roles in Myanmar's culinary world and is used as a garnish, a snack on its own, a flavouring in some foods and as an oil for cooking, some of which is sold for export. The byproduct from oil production, oil cake, is also used as feed for livestock and fish farms.

Sesame's main growing season is the monsoon months, although smaller crops are grown during the cool season and hot season. The country's sesame sown area in 2011-12 was estimated at 3.94 million acres by the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation. Of the sown area, 80 percent was within the central dry zone, which comprises parts of Mandalay, Sagaing and Magwe regions and makes up the major growing area for oilseed crops.

The central dry zone has an ideal climate for sesame cultivation, which requires water but not as much as is available in lower Myanmar, which sees much heavier rains.

The monsoon crop is planted in May and harvested in August, quickly unleashing new supplies into markets.

Sesame sown in September or October and harvested in December is the cool season harvest. For this crop, farmers rely on residual moisture in the soil. Sesame sown in March and April, the hot season, relies on irrigated water and is harvested in June.

Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation statistics for the 2011-12 year show that



A man sifts through white sesame seed at a market in Yangon in August 2007. Pic: Myanmar Times Archive/Aye Zaw Myo

yields per acre are highest in the hot season (14.80 baskets or 362 kilograms an acre), followed by cool season (12.48 baskets, 306kg an acre) and monsoon season (8.13 baskets, 199kg an acre). However, the increased yields per acre are offset by a heavily reduced sown area.

From a trading point of view, sesame is grouped into three colours: black (*theikpanhnan*), white, and mixed colour sesame, including red, brown, yellow and more.

Black sesame sells for about 16 percent more than white, which is more expensive than mixed sesame. The average spot price of black sesame, white sesame and other colour sesame in the second week of November was K2044-2471 a viss (1 viss is 1.6 kilograms or 3.6 pounds), K1774-2107 and K1690-1905 respectively.

Before 2011, Myanmar's trade policy prohibited the export of mixed sesame but allowed white and black sesame to be sold abroad by private companies.

The result of that policy was that mixed colour sesame was mostly sold to

mills and made into cooking oil.

However, traders illegally exported large amounts of red and brown sesame to China, sometimes creating shortages of sesame for mills.

The price of white sesame is rising owing to demand from

Chinese traders at Shweli, which has had a flow-on effect - farmers are sowing more white sesame to cater to the increased demand.

In 2011, the national trade policy was reversed by the Ministry of Commerce and all colours of sesame were made available for export.

White sesame is purchased by local traders to make roasted sesame powder, which is then exported to South Korea, with technological assistance provided by Korean companies.

According to *Commerce Journal*, published by the Ministry of Commerce, more than 63,800 tonnes of sesame were exported in the 2012-13 financial year. Of this, 45,000 tonnes - or 77pc - was sold to China via the border trading zone of Muse in Shan State at the border. The remaining 23pc was exported by ship to South Korea (8000 tonnes), Singapore (3800 tonnes) and Japan (2600 tonnes).

White sesame grown in Monywa, Pakokku and Magwe is shipped to Mandalay, and then forwarded to Muse. Exporters in Yangon also bought white and black sesame in Magwe and Pakokku at Aunglan in Magwe Region. It is then shipped to and warehoused in Yangon before being cleaned and prepared for export.

United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation statistics for 2010 show the leading sesame exporters are Ethiopia and India, which shipped 228,039 tonnes and 321,771 tonnes respectively.

The biggest importer was China, with 420,635 tonnes, followed by Japan, which imported 161,433 tonnes and South Korea, with 77,747 tonnes.

Myanmar trade data collected by the Directorate of Trade under the Ministry of Commerce shows that the largest volume of sesame exported in a financial year was 117,330 tonnes, which occurred during the 2007-08 fiscal year, when the average export price was US\$1156 a tonne.

The total value of exports that year was nearly \$136 million. However the peak average export price occurred the following year, when 100,710 tonnes of sesame were exported, earning more than \$160 million.

U Kyaw Myint is a former civil servant, and consultant with the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation's Market Information Service Project, the Agriculture Market Information Service (AMIS) and E-Trade Myanmar.

Year	Export volumes (000 tonnes)	Export value (million US\$)	Average export price (US\$ a tonne)
2001-02	13.21	5.97	452
2002-03	8.59	5.53	644
2003-04	51.22	31.07	607
2004-05	10.50	8.90	848
2005-06	44.72	34.04	761
2006-07	103.13	82.07	796
2007-08	117.33	135.67	1156
2008-09	100.71	160.36	1592
2009-10	88.90	121.62	1368
2010-11	79.70	114.35	1435
2011-12	95.663	135.853	1420

Source: Directorate of trade, Ministry of Commerce

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From page 23

he said. The vice-president said the new foreign investment law offered a range of privileges and full protection to investors.

"The new law takes into account the interests and concerns of all stakeholders to ensure that it is beneficial to all parties. Potential investors not only have privileges related to income, commercial tax and duties, but also guaranteed protection for their property and profits.

They are warmly welcomed to invest in the Thilawa, Dawei and Kyauk Phyu deep-sea port projects and also in our special economic zones," he said.

Planning minister Dr Kan Zaw said more reform measures would come into force next year.

"Laws on the Central Bank, telecommunications and many other reforms are being addressed now. You will see more significant reforms starting April 1," he told participants in the meeting.

The influx of international interest the government had generated in its 20 months

of existence had not yet translated into significant practical investment, said leading businessman Mr Serge Pun, founder of Serge Pun and Associates. He agreed that land price speculation was one of the barriers to foreign investors. Some, he said, were "sniffing around", others had decided to invest but were awaiting specific changes in the law, and others still were ready to spend money.

"Myanmar urgently needs its reform process to succeed in order to create a million jobs for our people. That's a thousand factories each employing a thousand people. High land prices are holding things up," he said.

Both local and foreign companies were pleased with the foreign investment law, said Mr Pun, adding: "Now everybody is waiting for the by-laws."

Other would-be overseas investors were seeking local partners, while some of those already established here wanted to expand, and were preparing to issue detailed plans, participants heard.

CBM invites private money changers

By Aye Thidar Kyaw

BLACK market money changers might soon be a thing of the past following an announcement last week in the state-run press inviting companies and individuals to set up private money changing counters.

The notice, printed in the Myanmar version of the *New Light of Myanmar* on December 5, said the Central Bank of Myanmar had invited interested parties to apply for licences, although it set strict requirements.

Private money changers interested in applying for an official licence must arrange for external audits of their accounts, provide background information on their history of dealing with foreign exchange, proof of well-managed accounting practices, as well as links with banking associations.

U Win Myint, a money changer in Kyauktada township, said he had read the Central Bank notice but worried that there were too many rules and regulations to follow.

He said interested parties also needed to set up a company, a process that can cost up to K1 million, deposit K30 million in a bank, and show proof of a further K10 million for each branch, he said, adding that branches were required to undergo weekly audits.

"I'm interested in applying for a licence but I need to talk to the Central Bank because there are a lot of requirements to meet," he said.

Central Bank deputy director general U Win Thaw said the foreign currency exchange market is growing daily and the decision to allow new private changers to take part would result in

better rates for consumers.

"We've heard that the previous arrangement was like a monopoly and that the Central Bank's daily exchange rate was basically being managed by the private banks [that take part in daily exchange auctions]. But if it's opened to new competitors up then people will not be able to make that criticism," he said.

He added that the Central Bank hoped that inviting black marketeers to apply for official licences it would be able to finally destroy the black market.

Co-operative Bank managing director U Pe Myint said money changing counters are distractions for private banks that should be focussing on other business, and it would be good to see private changers enter the market.

Banks and official money changers are allowed by the Central Bank to set an exchange rate within 0.8 percent of the daily auction rate, he said, adding that banks usually offer the highest rate.

The daily rate on December 7, as shown on the Central Bank's website, was K853 to the dollar, while money changers were offering K843-852 and the black market rate was K845-850.

The bank allowed six private banks to open money changing booths on Theinbyu Road in October last year but the network has expanded to include booths at airports, hotels, shopping centres and banks operated by 18 banks.

The Central Bank also started a managed float of Myanmar national currency on April 1, while legislation was passed in August allowing citizens to legally hold US dollars.

Factory employees stitch garments at a site in Yangon. Pic: Myanmar Times Archive



'Thousands' of new factories coming: MGMA

By Myat May Zin

MYANMAR'S garment sector is set for a major boost following the enactment of the amended Foreign Investment Law and further easing of US sanctions, an industry association spokesperson said last week.

U Aung Winn, vice chairman of the Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association (MGMA), made the comments after announcing in late November that a garments and textile fair will be held in Yangon in mid-December.

"More than 300 garment factories operate in Myanmar," he said. "It is quite a small number compared with neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, India and Cambodia. The garment industry can create

thousands of jobs.

"In the near future, thousand of garment factories will appear in Myanmar," he said, adding that many Western companies were in discussions with local partners to set up in Myanmar, while Japanese and Thai firms were also lining up.

"The December textile and garment fair is intended to showcase the different tools and machinery in use internationally," he added.

The International Textile and Garment Industries Fair 2012 will be held at Tatmadaw Hall from December 14 to 17, and is a collaboration between Myanmar Industrial Enterprises (MIEs), the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industries (UMFCCI) and Yorkers Trade and Marketing Service Company. The event will feature

100 booths from 17 international companies.

Myanmar's garment sector earned about US\$770 million in the 2011 calendar year, with Japan contributing \$348 million and South Korea a further \$183 million, a press release provided at the November event said.

U Myo Thant, a co-organiser of the exhibition, said it was time for Myanmar to expand its capacity beyond simple cutting, manufacturing and packaging (CMP) operations.

"The garment sector needs to do more than CMP work," he said.

"The skills of our designers are improving fast and we have enough workers but we need to export products with our own brands and designs too, which will require us to have more and better machinery."



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Zawtika gas pipeline to flow by 2014: officials

By Myat May Zin

MYANMAR'S third natural gas pipeline, which will carry gas from the offshore Zawtika gas project across a 68.9-kilometre stretch of Tanintharyi Region to Thailand, should begin flowing by the end of 2013, a spokesperson for the company behind the project said last week.

U Khun Naw Kham, a project engineer for Thailand's PTTEP company, said the pipeline would cross through Maw Gyi village in Dawei township (Tanintharyi Region) before crossing the border with Thailand and continuing through Kancharaburi Province.

"More than 52 percent of the Zawtika gas pipeline construction is finished, which is a little bit less than our target of 56.77pc," he said.

He added that the Yadana and Yetagun pipelines already export natural gas to Thailand.

The Zawtika natural gas pipeline project is a joint venture between Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) and PTTEP, with the former holding a 20 percent share and the latter an 80pc stake. When completed, it will be capable of exporting 300 million cubic feet of natural gas (MMCFD) a day but 60MMCFD will be provided to MOGE for domestic electricity generation.

"A couple of weeks ago, we signed an agreement to provide US\$150,000 annually for social economic development and environmental programs," said Mr Siriphong Fuenglikhit, PTTEP's external relations manager. "These three gas pipelines will provide \$450,000 annually," he added.

U Khun Naw Kham said: "We have already settled the land compensation agreements for this pipeline."

He added that 394 landowners in the area covered by the pipeline have been paid a total \$6.8 million in compensation.

Sunkist makes a splash with MDG agreement

By Myat Nyein Aye

MYANMAR Distribution Group (MDG) has begun selling and distributing Sunkist softdrink from a new factory in Myanmar, the company's managing director said during a launch ceremony last week.

U Aung Maw Thein, MDG's managing director, said the company had signed an agreement on September 21 with the Sunkist's owners - Sunkist Growers Inc - to produce and sell the product in Myanmar.

"I really feel wonderful to have to be able to distribute this well-known brand in Myanmar at a reasonable price to consumers," he said during the December 3 launch at Parkroyal Hotel.

U Aung Maw Thein said Sunkist has been available in the market for many years but at an inflated price of about K700-800 a can because it was imported from Malaysia. He added that MDG would sell it for

about K300-400 a can.

MDG was established in 1996 and its major products include Gold Roast Coffee Mix and Royal Myanmar Tea Mix. The company moved into the softdrink market in 2005 by importing and selling Sunkist and 7up from Malaysia. The company started building its own softdrink factory in 2010 and was finished in April this year, he said.

"Although Sunkist is firstly produced locally, the production and technology sections use international systems," said U Ronald Htun Zaw Myint, creative manager at MDG.

"We also have a foreign team working in the production system, meaning we can provide our product cheaply to customers," he said.

He added that the company adds more orange flavour to each can than is used in Malaysia. The company imports cans from Malaysia because it is unable to produce them in Myanmar yet, although it plans to in future.

ANZ to open Yangon representative office in early 2014

AUSTRALIA and New Zealand Banking Group will open a representative office in Yangon early next year, after the Central Bank of Myanmar approved its request for a licence, a company press release said last week.

The company insisted that it would comply with all existing sanctions, and the approval came after talks between ANZ and the Myanmar, Australian and the United States governments.

"Myanmar has significant economic growth potential over the medium term," said ANZ chief executive officer of International and Institutional Banking Alex Thursby in a statement released December 7.

"The nation is rich in natural resources such as arable land, minerals, energy and fresh water," he added.

When asked if there were any operating restrictions

or if it expected any reaction from human rights groups, ANZ replied that it is "still early days" and could not comment further.

The bank, the fourth largest by assets in Australia and the largest in New Zealand, will initially have a representative presence only, to provide services for business and investment clients.

ANZ becomes the first bank from an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country other than Japan to be granted a licence for operations in Myanmar.

Seventeen other foreign banks have licences from the Central Bank, its website says.

ANZ announced a yearly profit of A\$6 billion (about US\$6.28 billion) in September. It has a publicly stated strategy of expanding its presence in the Asia Pacific.

- Tony Yoo

EXIM Bank plots representative office

By Soe Sandar Oo

EXPORT-IMPORT Bank of India plans to open a representative office in Myanmar in coming months, the bank's chairman told the *Economic Times of India* newspaper last week.

"[The] opening of trade

links with Myanmar and transit facilities with Bangladesh will open new opportunities for the organic agriculture produce of Northeast India," said the bank's chairman and managing director, T C A Ranganathan. "EXIM Bank has extended lines of credit to Bangladesh and Myanmar."

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Livestock, fisheries fair catches foreign eye

By Soe Sandar Oo and Myat Nyein Aye

AN exhibition held in Yangon last week that attracted more than 100 potential investors put the spotlight on the crucial livestock and fisheries industry.

Minister for Commerce U Win Myint opened the event, which was held on December 7 and 8 at the Myanmar Fisheries Federation, asking international businesspeople to cooperate with Myanmar to develop the sector.

"I believe that the holding of such exhibitions will provide us with the chance to open new markets and uncover new products," the minister said. "We will get good results when we cooperate with other countries in future."

"I hope that businessmen

can share their experience and opinions in this exhibition," he added.

U Win Myint said the ministry has significantly reduced red tape to expedite imports and exports, such as by introducing automatic licensing for some products.

He added that growing demand in Asia, especially in the giants of China and India, for meat and dairy products, would benefit producers in Myanmar.

The exhibition featured 41 booths from 35 companies, including some from ASEAN members and the European Union, and showcased machinery, feed, veterinary medicine and plenty more.

U Win Aung, president of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said: "I believe that this event would be an opportunity to attract



A woman sorts fish at a factory in Yangon in 2007. Pic: Myanmar Times Archive

responsible foreign investment in these sectors as international companies meet and interact with local partners."

He added that the exposure and access to technology, medicine and other related products would contribute to the

development of the livestock and fisheries sector, which in turn would generate increased income for companies and create jobs.

Fisheries exports earned about \$653.35 million in the 2011-12 financial year, making the sector the fourth-highest export earner, he said. By December 2012, exports of fisheries products had earned \$432.75 million - a year-on-year increase of about \$72 million.

"This is a good chance for us to meet with our customers face-to-face. Myanmar's population is large enough to invest many things but especially the food-production business," said Dr Wiwat Thothanucamin, senior

product development director of Thai firm Octa Memorial Co.

"That will be good in the future even though the consumption is relatively low now," he added.

He said Myanmar has few commercial farms but predicted that would change quickly. "Starting with exhibitions like this I think Thailand, Vietnam, China and other countries will think hard about investing in Myanmar's livestock and fisheries sector to guarantee food supplies," he said.

"Our company would like to work with private companies and contribute efforts to increase livestock production here," he added.

National development plan for 2013 release

By Sandar Lwin

A PLAN setting out national development goals over the next 20 years will be unveiled early next year, Dr Kan Zaw, Union Minister for National Planning and Economic Development, has told *The Myanmar Times*.

Speaking on the sidelines of the ninth ASEAN 100 Leadership Forum, held on December 5-6 in Yangon, he said: "The main theme of the new plan is people-centred development."

"We are drawing up the Comprehensive National Development Plan for Myanmar 2011-2031 and we estimate it will be delivered

in early 2013," he said

According to the minister, the 20-year plan will comprise four five-year programs setting targets for each program.

International organisations such as Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia have provided consultancy help to government planning staff in the formation of the plan.

The minister said the plan would be linked to the eight-year road map for poverty reduction set in 2011.

"We [the government] are already implementing the poverty reduction road map and the new plan will also be mainly linked to it."



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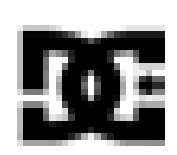
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Motorcyclists ride past a residential towers construction site in the suburbs of Ho Chi Minh City on August 8, 2011. Pic: AFP

Empty towers show VN dream gone wrong

HANOI, Vietnam – From afar, the gleaming metal and glass edifices of Hanoi's EVN Tower illustrate Vietnam's rapid economic development. Up close, the rubble-strewn entrance and missing windows tell another story: one of loose lending and property speculation that now hangs over the country's banks.

State-run monopoly Vietnam Electricity began construction of the 33- and 29-storey dual-tower development in 2007, a year when 54 percent credit growth helped fuel the fastest economic expansion since 1996. Now, the economy has slowed, banks are struggling with an increase in bad debts, and unfinished property projects, empty offices and lower rents risk adding to the pile of non-performing loans.

"Banks were far too eager to lend and a lot of the projects that have been built haven't been well thought through," said Stephen Wyatt, managing director for real estate broker Knight Frank Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh City. "A number of developments are on hold, purely because they have run out of funding. Banks are no longer willing to fund these massive developments."

Vietnam's economy, which the communist government opened up in 1986, expanded at a 4.7pc annual rate in the third quarter, after exceeding 7pc from 2002 through to the first quarter of 2008. After a lending binge fueled the

fastest inflation in Asia, policymakers raised interest rates in 2010 and 2011, and restricted lending. Among the casualties are many of the nation's inefficient state-owned enterprises, which had diverted cash to property developments.

"When the developer is a state-owned enterprise and is using the money it should be using for say, power generation, airlines, shipping or banking, that's where the oversupply has come," said Marc Townsend, the Ho Chi Minh City-based managing director of CBRE Group Inc's Vietnam unit. "They all felt they could

The Hanoi market added more office and retail space since the start of 2011 than in the previous four years combined, said property broker CBRE.

The average asking rent for top-grade central business district office space in Hanoi was about US\$47 a square metre a month in 2009, more than double the levels for the same grade space in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur at that time, data from the Vietnam unit of Los Angeles-based CBRE shows. The rate was 11pc lower at \$42.01 a square metre in the third quarter.

Average asking rents

that we will see developers walk away from projects and banks' bad assets will increase very rapidly."

Real estate loans totalled 203 trillion dong (\$9.7 billion) as of August 31, of which 6.6pc were classified as bad debt, Minister of Construction Trinh Dinh Dung told the National Assembly on October 31, citing a State Bank of Vietnam report. A broader category of real estate-related loans, including property-backed debt, account for 57pc of total outstanding borrowing, or about 1000 trillion dong, he said.

Average office occupancy in

buildings lowering their rates, Savills said.

Almost 16pc of available Hanoi retail space was vacant at the end of the third quarter, according to CBRE, with most free space to be found in the capital's shopping centres, which had an occupancy rate of 82pc.

"Newer projects, especially those in fringe areas, are expected to experience a rather difficult time in the first two or three years, due to fiercer competition and limited consumer spending that might linger on," CBRE said in its third-quarter review of the Hanoi market. Almost 650,000 square

reportedly face losses because of their recent forays into property, said Alfred Chan, director of financial institutions at Fitch Ratings in Singapore.

"It is not obvious, if you were just to look at the disclosure, what the potential risks to the banking sector are if you just look at the real estate sector," Chan said. "Some of this exposure could well come from non-real estate companies that have ventured into that sector."

The central bank chief, Nguyen Van Binh, said in April the level of bad debt at some lenders may be "much higher" than reported. Bad debts in Vietnam's banking system may have accounted for 8.82pc of outstanding loans at the end of September, Nguyen Van Giau, head of the National Assembly's economic committee, told legislators in Hanoi November 13.

Office rents may decline by as much as another 15pc in the next three years, said CBRE's Townsend, particularly if economic growth remains subdued and direct foreign investment fails to recover. Pledged foreign-direct investment fell 25pc from a year earlier in the first 10 months of 2012, the Foreign Investment Agency said on its website Oct. 25.

"A lot of these developments were conceived and built in an incredibly good market," said Knight Frank's Wyatt. "That market is all but gone."

– Bloomberg News

'A number of developments are on hold, purely because they have run out of funding. Banks are no longer willing to fund these massive developments.'

make easy money by being a property developer."

State firms' so-called non-core investments, such as property and stocks, account for as much as 12pc of their registered capital, Deputy State Auditor Le Minh Khai said in July. The Communist Party's Central Committee on October 15 called on state-owned enterprises to end non-core investments.

Office and retail rents in Vietnam's two largest cities have slumped as a wave of supply entered the market at a time when slowing economic and retail-sales growth curbs demand for commercial real estate.

for Grade B office space in the capital's western district, where some of the nation's largest state-owned enterprises have their headquarters, have fallen 39pc since the first quarter of 2009, and slid 22pc in the city's central business district, the data shows.

"I have never seen rents decline this fast in the market," said Son Nam Nguyen, managing partner at Vietnam Capital Partners, an investment bank in Ho Chi Minh City. "If real estate rents and values continue to decrease as we've seen in the past three months and six months, the biggest risk is

Hanoi fell 2 percentage points to 79pc in the third quarter from the previous three-month period, according to data from property broker Savills, while average rents dropped 4pc. The number of new leases signed in the period slid to the lowest this year.

Office occupancy rates in Ho Chi Minh City, the country's commercial hub, rose 1 percentage point to 87pc in the third quarter from three months earlier, while average monthly rents fell 2pc to about 540,000 dong (\$25.92) a square metre from the April-June period, with almost a quarter of

metres (7 million square feet) of retail space is expected to enter Hanoi from the end of the third quarter until the end of 2013, adding pressure on existing projects, it said.

Retail-sales growth slowed to 17.1pc year-on-year in October compared with the same period in 2011, the lowest level of expansion since at least January 2005.

The economic slowdown has weighed on the country's stock market, with the benchmark VN Index, Asia's worst performer in 2011, down 23pc since its peak this year on May 8.

Many of Vietnam's 1300 state-owned enterprises

SCG to boost cement exports

By Htar Htar Khin

THAILAND'S Siam Cement Group last week announced plans to boost exports of its Elephant brand cement to Myanmar, company official said recently.

Mr Soontornpol Veerapravati, managing director of SCG Trading (the company's Myanmar subsidiary), said the firm would export 2 million tonnes of cement to Myanmar in 2013. However, the expected increase is only an increase of about percent over the 1.9 million tonnes likely to be exported in 2012, he said during an event at the Myanmar Convention Centre in Yangon.

He added that the company would work to expand its distribution network to include more of Myanmar's towns and cities. He said there are 10 SCG wholesalers in Myanmar.

Mr Soontornpol said SCG had been active in Myanmar for almost 20 years and was the market leader.

"Our Elephant brand cement has long been the market leader in Myanmar because of its quality - and consumers across ASEAN trust it," he said.

Dubai returns to its old habits

By Ali Khalil

DUBAI - Dubai is back in the business of unveiling mega projects, three years after a severe financial crisis crippled its booming property sector, but doubts still linger over finance and feasibility.

Just as the economy in the glitzy city-state begins to look promising, despite a large debt burden dating back to the years when growth appeared endless, Dubai has once again set its sights on building superlatives.

"We do not anticipate the future. We build it," Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, architect of its meteoric rise into a regional tourism and services hub, boasted in late November as he unveiled plans to build a "city" carrying his name.

Among the attractions of the new mega plan is a mall touted to be the largest in the world, not far from what is already the world's largest shopping and entertainment destination, the Dubai Mall.

Mohammed bin Rashid City will sprawl over a large swathe of the emirate's desert and have gardens 30 percent larger than London's Hyde Park, in addition to 100 hotels, and a Universal Studios theme park.

No price tag was attached to the project which is to be developed by the ruler's Dubai Holding conglomerate and Emaar, which built Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest tower.

Last week, Dubai also



Dubai has started unveiling new megaprojects just three years after the country was crippled by a financial crisis. Pic: AFP

announced a 10-billion-dirham (US\$2.7 billion) leisure centre and theme park.

Dubai appears keen to capitalise on its growing tourism sector which it said is expanding 13pc a year, with hotel occupancy rate hitting 82pc last year.

Sheikh Mohammed said the emirate must stay ahead of expanding demand and match its ambitions.

"The current facilities available in Dubai need to be scaled up in line with the future ambitions for the city," he said, highlighting a constant rise in tourism and the business of hosting forums and exhibitions.

"A large part of these projects are linked to expanding Dubai's capacity in core sectors with comparative advantage, such as tourism, which is positive," said Monica Malik, chief economist at EFG-Hermes investment bank in Dubai.

But the source of funding for such grandiose projects remains vague.

"We do have our own resources and way to finance ... We are sure that these projects will be achieved," the *Arabian Business* online magazine quoted Hani al-Hamli, Dubai Economic Council secretary general, as saying.

Beyond general assurances, Dubai continues to deal with the burden of maturing debt, after it racked \$113 billion in borrowings during years of extensive investments, with \$9.8 billion reportedly coming due next year and \$3 billion in 2014.

"Banks remain wary about lending to real estate developments at a time when they still have to make major provisions against non-performing real estate loans from the last development boom," said real estate consultancy firm Jones Lang LaSalle in a statement on December 6. However, "the fact

that these projects have long-term time lines is positive as they can be developed alongside demand, both domestically and internationally, so as not to build overcapacity", Malik said.

"The funding of these plans is important and should be matched with revenue growth potential," she added.

Dubai's economy contracted 2.4pc in 2009 when it rattled global markets over its debt crisis before receiving a \$10-billion bailout from Abu Dhabi, its oil-rich partner in the Emirates, and reaching restructuring deals with lenders.

The economy has since made a comeback, growing 2.8pc in 2010, 3.4pc in 2011, and 4.1pc on an annual basis in the first half of this year, as tourism, trade and transport keep expanding.

But real estate - a main engine of rapid growth before the crisis - lags behind other sectors, with growth of just 1.5pc in the first six months of 2012.

The sector crashed in 2009 as the global crisis dried up finance and investors walked away from planned projects, many of which were eventually put on hold or cancelled.

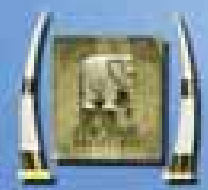
"Encouragingly, there are indications that some of the lessons of the last real estate crisis have been learned," said Jones Lang LaSalle.

"The most important of these is the need to adopt a long-term and coordinated approach, rather than developing too much real estate too quickly." - AFP

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'Open your eyes' to climate warming, Doha talks told

DOHA – The Philippines urged bickering UN climate negotiators in Doha last week to take heed of the deadly typhoon that struck the archipelago and wake up to the realities of global warming.

Philippine climate envoy Naderev Sano made an emotive appeal for action as the annual United Nations gathering hit deadlock on the issue of money for poorer countries' efforts to adapt to a warming world in the next few years.

"I appeal to the whole world, I appeal to leaders from all over the world, to open our eyes to the stark reality that we face," he said to applause from delegates on December 6.

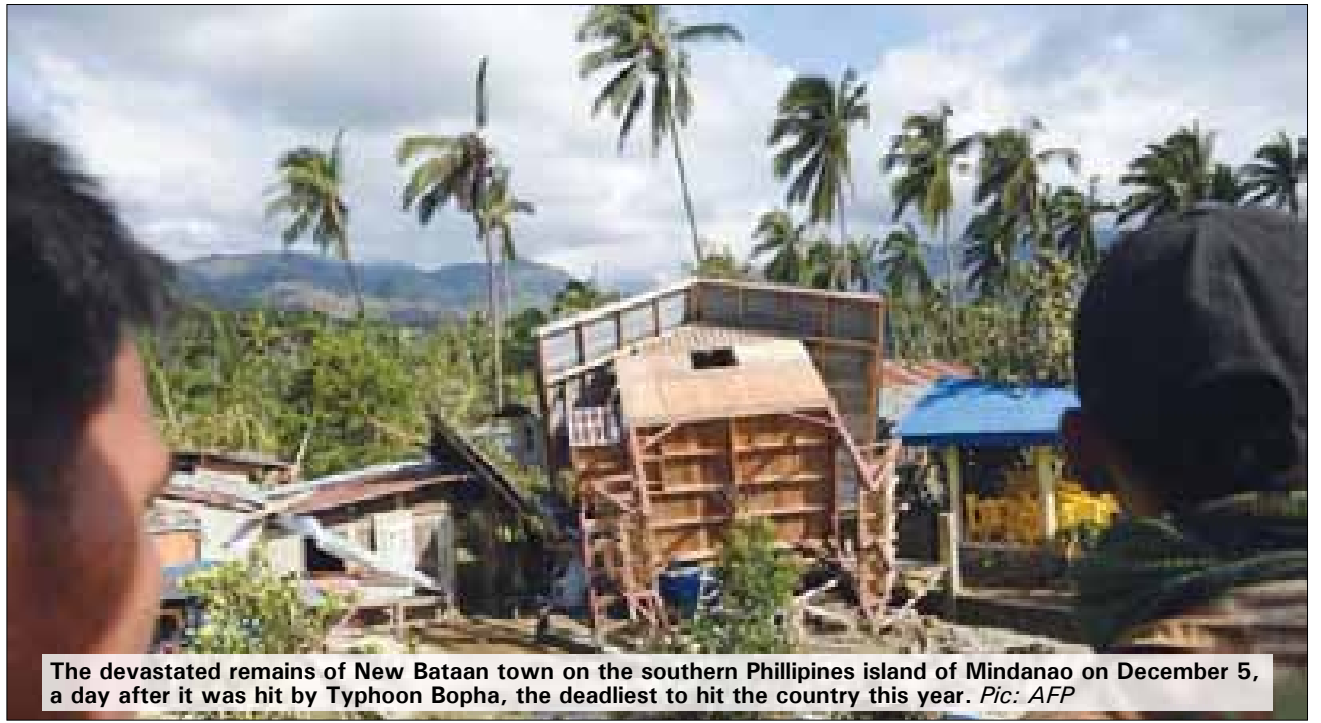
"An important backdrop for my delegation is the profound impacts of climate change that we are already confronting. As we sit here, every single

hour, even as we vacillate and procrastinate here, the death toll is rising."

Officials say nearly 500 people were killed and a quarter of a million people made homeless by the Philippines' worst typhoon this year – the kind of extreme weather event scientists believe will become more frequent as global temperatures rise.

Yet the penultimate day of the Doha talks was marked by deep divisions between negotiators from nearly 200 countries on financial assistance to the developing world.

The issue is key to the adoption of a package of plans for limiting greenhouse gas emissions in a bid to halt the march of climate change, which United Nations chief Ban Ki-moon called a "crisis" in addressing delegates on December 4. – AFP



The devastated remains of New Bataan town on the southern Philippines island of Mindanao on December 5, a day after it was hit by Typhoon Bopha, the deadliest to hit the country this year. Pic: AFP

Briefly

WASHINGTON – The United States has intelligence which raises "serious concerns" that Syria is considering employing chemical weapons in its war with rebel forces, US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said on December 6.

• Related report, P. 32.

LONDON – Prince William's pregnant wife Catherine said she was feeling much better as she was discharged from a London hospital on December 6 after four days of treatment for acute morning sickness.

• Related report, P. 42.

WASHINGTON – Republican Mitt Romney raised US\$85.9 million in the final weeks of the White House race, his campaign said on December 6, bringing the total spent on the presidential election to a record \$2 billion.

WASHINGTON – Afghan President Hamid Karzai said on December 6 that NATO and the United States were partially to blame for insecurity in his country and threatened to suspend negotiations on a future role for US forces.

WASHINGTON – Advocates and opponents of gay marriage on December 8 hailed a decision by the US Supreme Court to take up the sensitive issue, saying a ruling by the justices could help settle one of the thorniest social disputes in modern America. – AFP

Egypt's Morsi defies protesters

CAIRO – Egypt's Islamist President Mohamed Morsi last week defied calls to curb his sweeping powers or suspend proposed changes to the constitution, infuriating thousands of protesters who have clashed violently with his supporters.

In an address broadcast live on December 6, Morsi vowed to push on with a December 15 referendum on the controversial new constitution, saying "afterwards, there should be no obstacle and everyone must follow its will".

Seven people died in clashes on December 5 between Morsi's Islamist supporters and his mainly secular opponents in Egypt's worst political crisis since Morsi took office in June. Another 644 people were injured, medical officials said.

The army on December 6 ordered the square in front of the presidential palace cleared of protesters from both sides, deploying tanks and setting up barbed wire.

In his speech, Morsi said more than 80 people had been arrested.

He railed against the "aggression", implying the opposition protesters were to blame.

judging by his speech on December 6.

Hussein Abdel Ghani, spokesman for the opposition group the National Rescue Front, dismissed Morsi's gesture, saying "the president lost a historic chance to act like a president for all Egypt". He added: "We will continue to escalate (protests), using peaceful means."

US President Barack

path that will move Egypt forward," the White House said in a statement.

The anti-Morsi camp is furious with Morsi for assuming sweeping powers on November 22 and by what it feels was the railroading through by an Islamist-dominated panel of the draft constitution.

The violence in Cairo recalls scenes seen in the

roughshod over civil, political and human rights and the rights of women.

"It's the beginning of a religious state," said Sahar Ali, 39, a tour guide and Morsi opponent. "They're trying to turn it into Iran, but we won't let this happen. We got rid of the military – the Brotherhood is next."

Four of Morsi's advisers have quit over the crisis, the official MENA news agency reported, and the head of state television has also resigned, the independent newspaper *Al-Masry al-Youm* reported on its website.

The opposition says it will not stand down until Morsi surrenders his new powers – which put his decisions beyond judicial review – and until he cancels the referendum on the draft charter opposed by liberals and Christians. – AFP

'They're trying to turn it into Iran, but we won't let this happen.'

"We respect peaceful freedom of speech but I will never allow anyone to resort to killing and sabotage," he said.

Morsi offered to hold talks with the opposition and to meet its representatives on December 8 in his offices, but there was no immediate indication of compromise

Obama expressed "deep concern" on December 6 over the events in Egypt, in a call to his counterpart Morsi, the White House said.

Obama also told Morsi that it was "essential for Egyptian leaders across the political spectrum to put aside their differences and come together to agree on a

February 2011 uprising that toppled veteran strongman Hosni Mubarak.

Egypt's top Islamic body, Al-Azhar, has called on Morsi to suspend his November 22 decree giving him powers critics say are as sweeping as Mubarak's.

The opposition fears the Islamists are riding

Feast on books, says Peres

JERUSALEM – Feeding your brain rather than your belly is the best way to avoid putting on weight, Israeli President Shimon Peres said on December 6 in an interview with AFP.

"Everybody eats three times a day. You eat three times a day and you become fat," said the 89-year-old leader, who said he sleeps just four or five hours a night and gets up well before dawn.

"If you will read three times a day, you will become

wise. Better to be wise than fat," he said.

His current diet includes a helping of *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman, a portion of *On China* by Henry Kissinger, wrapped up with a slice of Bernard Lewis's *Notes on a Century*.

His latest reading pleasure is a book of poetry called *Land of the Sad Passionfruit* by Arab-Israeli poet Marwan Makhoul.

– AFP



HAPPY BIRTHDAY



Dear Dad,
U Than Aung Naing (Journalist - USA)

Wishing you a very HAPPY BIRTHDAY on 7th December.

Your fatherly concern compassion and advice are things we've come to rely on you are a father figure in our life and we truly appreciate having you close to our heart.

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Lovely Son: Min Huan Go Aung (Graphic Designer - The True News & The Unity Journal) + Ma Phin Mar Lwin (General Manager - Light Advertising)

Lovely Daughters:

- Mya Thida Aung (Accountant - The Princess Jewellery) + Ko Kaung Hike (Service Engineer - STI, Co., Ltd)
- Mya Marlar Aung (Ex. Demonstrator YTU & MTU / Principal of AHAN Learning Center)
- Mya Nilar Aung (MD- Lin Dagon Garment Co., Ltd.) + Ko Naing Linn Aung (Niang Car Rental)
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Peace process warning as settlement plan advances

RAMALLAH, Palestinian Territories - The Palestinians on December 5 reacted furiously after a controversial Israeli settlement plan passed a first hurdle, warning that the project would end all hopes for peace.

Israel's plan for construction in a strip of West Bank land outside Jerusalem called E1 has sparked a major diplomatic backlash, with experts saying it could wipe out hopes for the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.

As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Prague ahead of a trip to Berlin the diplomatic pressure intensified with the European Union summoning Israel's ambassador over the plan.

Since December 3, Britain, France, Spain, Australia, Sweden, Denmark, Egypt, Italy, Ireland and Finland have all taken similar steps in an unprecedented expression of concern over the E1 project, which experts say would isolate Arab east Jerusalem and cut the West Bank in two.

"If Israel decides to start building in E1 and approves all the settlements in it, we consider it to be an Israeli decision to end the peace process and the two-state solution, which ends any chance of talking about peace in the future," Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat told AFP.

His remarks came soon after Israel's two main

Israel's plans to build at 'E1' provoke outcry

Part of the proposed site, which covers about 12 sq kms, is privately-owned by Palestinians. Part was declared by Israel to be "state land" during the 1980s.



Sources: Israeli government, Peace Now

radio stations said a defence ministry planning committee had given its green light for the E1 plan to be deposited for public approval, pushing it forward in the planning process.

Observers say Israeli plans

to build in E1 and connect the Maaleh Adumim settlement with east Jerusalem would effectively prevent the future establishment of a contiguous Palestinian state, dooming the two-state solution.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said the plan was "a red line that cannot be tolerated" and warned he would take all the legal means available to prevent such a "dangerous" decision.

"We went to all international parties to prevent this settlement decision, and if it goes ahead we will resort to all legitimate and legal methods," he said.

News of Israel's intention to push ahead with the E1 plan emerged on November 30, a day after the Palestinians won UN non-member state observer status, in what was a major diplomatic blow to the Jewish state as it tried to block the move.

With their newly-acquired UN status, the Palestinians now have access to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, sparking fears they could accuse Israel of crimes under the Geneva Convention over its settlement building.

But Netanyahu, who is in the middle of an election campaign, has held firm on the project.

"The root of the conflict is not the settlements; it is the very existence of the state of Israel and the desire to wipe it off the face of the earth," he said on December 4.

The E1 settlement plan has been on hold since 2005 following heavy US pressure.

An Israeli official said the approvals process could take a few years to complete.

- AFP

NATO backs Turkish request for missiles

BRUSSELS - NATO on December 4 approved member state Turkey's request for Patriot missiles to defend its border against Syria following a series of blunt warnings to Damascus not to use chemical weapons.

As the conflict approached the 21-month mark with more than 41,000 people killed, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, NATO head Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the alliance's decision reflected a "steadfast commitment" to preserving the security of its 28 member states.

"We say to anyone who would want to attack Turkey - don't even think about it," he said, announcing the decision after the first day of a two-day meeting in Brussels.

NATO said in a statement that it had "agreed to augment Turkey's air defence capabilities in order to defend the population and territory of Turkey and to contribute to the de-escalation of the crisis along the alliance's border."

Germany, the Netherlands and the United States have agreed to provide the Patriot missile batteries, which would come under the command of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, the statement said.

The NATO discussions came amid reports that Syria is moving chemical weapons as President Bashar al-Assad fights rebels seeking to oust him.

"NATO members expressed grave concerns about reports that the Syrian regime is considering the use of chemical weapons. Any such action would be completely unacceptable and a clear breach of international law," Rasmussen said.

Turkey welcomed NATO's decision and reiterated that the missiles would be used solely for defensive purposes.

Turkey's request for the missiles has worried Russia, a longtime ally of Syria that is deeply suspicious of NATO's motives.

After NATO talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov earlier on December 4, Rasmussen had said deploying Patriots would be "an effective deterrent and in that way de-escalate the situation" along the border.

Lavrov dismissed that point, saying the chemical weapons issue was overblown while the Patriot deployment created "the risk that these arms will be used".

It was not the first time there were such "rumours and leaks" about chemical weapons and they should "not be overstated", he said, while reaffirming Moscow's position that any use of chemical arms would be a violation of international treaties.

The Syrian government, fighting to prevent the capital Damascus from falling to rebel forces, has said it will never resort to chemical weapons.

- AFP

'Any such action would be completely unacceptable...'

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov earlier on December 4, Rasmussen

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Tree deaths 'disturbing': researchers

SYDNEY – Scientists warned last week of an alarming increase in the death rates of the largest living organisms on the planet, the giant, old trees that harbour and sustain countless birds and wildlife.

Research by universities in Australia and the United States, published in *Science* on December 7, said ecosystems worldwide were in danger of losing forever their largest and oldest trees unless there were policy changes to better protect them.

"It is a very, very disturbing trend," said Bill Laurance of James Cook University, one of three institutions involved in a study of the problem, along with the Australian National University and Washington University in the US.

The study showed that trees were not only dying en masse in forest fires, but were also perishing at 10 times the normal rate in non-fire years, due to a combination of rapid climate change causing drought and high temperatures, as well as logging and land clearing for farms.

"It's a worldwide problem," said David Lindenmayer from the ANU and the lead author of the study. – AFP

UK papers back plan for press regulator

LONDON – Britain's newspapers on agreed on December 5 to create an independent press regulator as recommended by the Leveson report, but refused to commit to its controversial proposal for statutory backing.

Tabloid and broadsheet editors met in London and agreed to 40 of judge Brian Leveson's 47 proposals, clearing the path for the creation of a regulator able to issue fines of up to £1 million (US\$1.6 million).

But the editors refused to sign up to seven of the report's proposals, which called for a statutory body to audit the regulator, said those present at the meeting.

Chris Blackhurst, the editor of the *Independent*, called the spirit of cooperation "really quite remarkable".

"I've never seen anything like it in my time as a journalist," he told *BBC Radio 4's The Media Show*. "We are all used to the sort of annual fisticuffs at press awards, and all the shouting matches, and we all hate each other."

Prime Minister David Cameron had the previous day met editors and executives at his 10 Downing Street office to push them to adopt recommendations in Leveson's report, released on November 29.

The prime minister had previously said that he

opposes Leveson's call for the regulator to be backed by legislation but he told the newspaper bosses to act soon or face the consequences.

"I've told them that they have to produce a tough, independent regulatory system rapidly and they've got to do it in a way that it absolutely meets the requirement of Lord Justice Leveson's report," Cameron said after the meeting.

Cameron commissioned the Leveson inquiry in July 2011, after the phone-hacking scandal that led to the closure of Rupert Murdoch's *News of the World* tabloid and has since prompted dozens of arrests. – AFP

Dogs can detect lung cancer: study

VIENNA – Dogs are surprisingly adept at sniffing out lung cancer, results from a pilot project in Austria published on December 5 suggested, potentially offering hope for earlier, life-saving diagnosis.

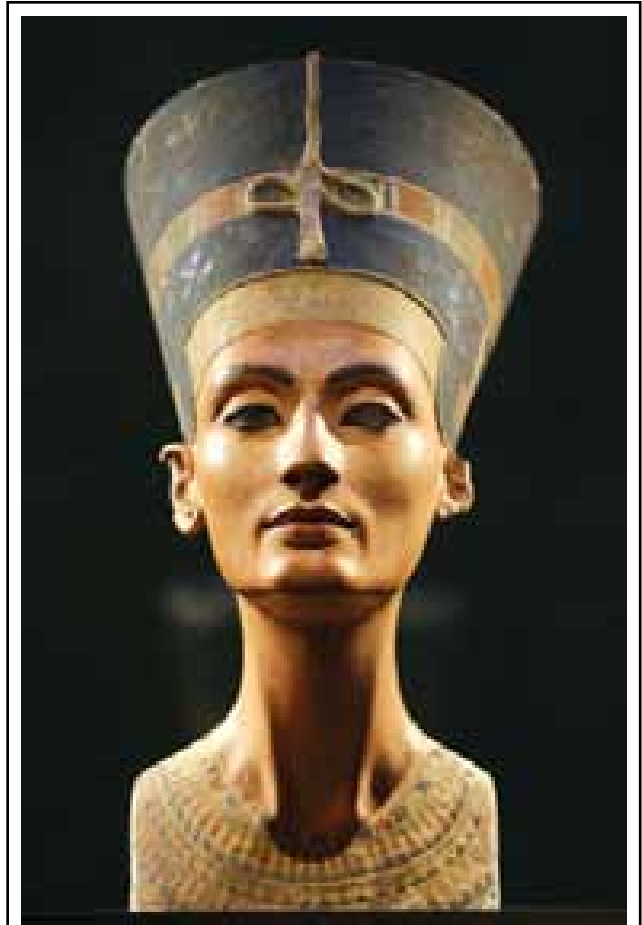
"Dogs have no problem identifying tumour patients," said Peter Errhalt, head of the pulmonology department

at Krems hospital in northern Austria, an author of the study. The test saw dogs achieve a 70-percent success rate identifying cancer from 120 breath samples, a result so "encouraging" that a two-year study 10 times larger is planned, Errhalt said.

The results echo anecdotal evidence of odd canine behaviour in the presence of

cancer sufferers.

The ultimate aim is for scientists to identify what scents the dogs are detecting, which could lead to the development of an "electronic nose" that could detect lung cancer in its early stages, said Michael Mueller from the Otto Wagner Hospital in Vienna, who collaborated on the pilot project. – AFP



The Nefertiti bust pictured during a press preview of an exhibition at the Neues Museum (New Museum) in Berlin on December 2. The exhibition opened on December 6 – the 100th anniversary of the discovery by German archeologists of the 3400-year-old bust of Egypt's Queen Nefertiti – and will end on April 13 next year. The Nefertiti bust, the museum's most famous treasure, is regarded as one of the most priceless depictions of the female face after the Mona Lisa. The bust is the subject of a lingering dispute between Germany and Egypt over its ownership. Pic: AFP



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Network urged Petraeus to challenge Obama: paper

WASHINGTON — Fox News chief Roger Ailes sent an envoy to Afghanistan early last year to encourage General David Petraeus to run against Barack Obama for the US presidency, the *Washington Post* reported on December 4.

A report by investigative journalist Bob Woodward, of Watergate fame, cited a digital recording of the meeting between Petraeus and Kathleen McFarland, a Fox News pundit and former Pentagon spokeswoman.

The message from Ailes, a longtime Republican media guru who advised former presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, was delivered in a 90-minute interview by McFarland in Petraeus's office in Kabul, the report said.

Petraeus, then the top US general in Afghanistan, was urged by Ailes to refuse Obama's offer to head the CIA and suggested that unless the president asked him to become chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

then he should quit. "He says that if you're offered (JCS) chairman take it. If you're offered anything else, don't take it; resign in six months and run for president," Ailes advised Petraeus, via McFarland, said Woodward's article.

Ailes also spoke of the possibility that Fox owner Rupert Murdoch would "bankroll" a Petraeus campaign.

However, Petraeus rebuffed the proposal and he accepted Obama's offer, being sworn

in as director of the CIA in September 2011, a post from which he resigned last month after the disclosure of an extra-marital affair with his biographer.

Ailes, the president of Fox News Channel and chairman of the Fox Television Stations Group, admitted that he did ask McFarland to tell Petraeus he should consider running against Obama, but he played down the gesture's significance.

"It was more of a joke," Ailes told the Post. — AFP



David Petraeus. Pic: AFP

Briefs

Extradition ruling faces challenge

LONDON — Britain's interior ministry has won permission to appeal against a decision by judges to block the extradition of terror suspect Abu Qatada to Jordan, a spokesman said on December 5.

A judge accepted the Home Office's challenge against last month's ruling by Britain's Special Immigration Appeals Commission, which blocked the extradition over fears that evidence obtained through torture could be used against Abu Qatada.

The radical Islamist cleric was released on bail following the SIAC ruling, in a severe blow to the British government.

Uganda hosts peace talks

KAMPALA — Rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo were to start talks with Kinshasa's government in Kampala on December 7, to "resolve the conflict" in the volatile and mineral-rich east, a Ugandan official said.

"Delegations from the DRC government and M23 (rebels) shall begin preliminary meetings tomorrow," Ugandan government spokesman Fred Opolot told reporters on December 6.

Benghazi suspect held in Egypt

WASHINGTON — Egyptian authorities have detained a suspected terror network ringleader whose operatives are believed to have carried out a deadly attack on a US mission in Libya, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on December 7, citing unnamed American officials.

The report named the suspect as Muhammad Jamal Abu Ahmad, a former member of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, who was freed from prison in March 2011 after the ouster of Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak.

The US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, and three other Americans were killed in the September 11 assault on the US mission in Benghazi.

Campaign targets Burmese pythons

WASHINGTON — The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is enlisting the public in a campaign to eradicate the giant Burmese python.

Cash prizes of up to US\$1500 will be offered when the month-long "harvesting" campaign starts on January 12, the commission said.

"Increasing public awareness about Burmese pythons and how this invasive species is a threat to the Everglades ecosystem, including native wildlife, is the goal of the 2013 Python Challenge," it said in a statement. — AFP

Battle lines harden in US showdown

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama warned Republicans on December 5 not to hold the US economy hostage in a new feud over raising government borrowing, as battle lines hardened in the "fiscal cliff" showdown.

Obama and Republican foes accused each other of intransigence as vital hours passed without serious negotiations on averting a year-end tax and spending crunch that could trigger a new recession in the world's biggest economy.

The president courted CEOs in Washington and pledged to reject any deal that would let Republicans wield new leverage next year over lifting the US debt ceiling — the amount the government can borrow to operate

and pay its debts.

The New York Times had earlier reported that Republicans may bow to his demand to increase taxes on the rich this month, but then renew their austerity crusade when Obama asks for the debt ceiling to be raised in early 2013.

"We are not going to play that game next year," Obama told the Business Roundtable. "That is a bad strategy for America, it is a bad strategy for your businesses and it is not a game I will play."

Republicans want to make raising the debt ceiling conditional on Obama agreeing to massive cuts in social programs. A similar showdown last year spooked global markets when America came close to defaulting on

its debt.

The Treasury says the United States will hit its statutory borrowing limit of US\$16.39 trillion near the end of the year, but can take emergency measures to keep funds flowing for a few months.

Obama has proposed a new system whereby the president can raise the debt ceiling without asking Congress first — an idea Republicans have rejected.

The White House insisted there would be no deal on averting the fiscal cliff without a rise in the top income tax rate for the richest Americans, a promise that was the foundation of Obama's re-election campaign.

Republicans have said they are ready to raise revenues — but only

through closing tax loopholes and capping deductions — a solution Obama says will not raise sufficient funds to significantly reduce the deficit.

Taxes will rise on all Americans on January 1, when rate cuts from the George W. Bush era expire.

Obama wants to extend the tax cuts for the middle class and to raise \$1 trillion to pay down the deficit by letting the top rate rise from 35 percent to 39.6pc for families earning more than \$250,000 a year.

House Speaker John Boehner wants to extend all the tax cuts.

"We can't sit here and negotiate with ourselves," Boehner told reporters, just 27 days before the US economy could plunge over the cliff. — AFP

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Architect Niemeyer dies, 104

RIODEJANEIRO — Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, who designed much of the country's futuristic capital Brasilia, died on December 5, his doctors said. He was 104.

A pioneer in the use of reinforced concrete to produce soaring, curvaceous forms, Niemeyer has designed 600 works around the world and has some 20 other projects under way.

The Brazilian icon, who won architecture's top award, the Pritzker Prize, in 1988, started his career in the 1930s and worked well into the 21st century, after turning 100.

"I am not attracted by the angles or the hard and inflexible straight lines created by man," Niemeyer once told the Spanish newspaper *ABC*.

"What attracts me is the free and sensual curve, the curve which I find in the mountains of my country, in the flow of its rivers, in the waves of the ocean, in the body of a woman."

In 1956, Niemeyer was appointed chief architect on the project to provide Brazil with a modern new capital city in the heart of the Amazon basin jungle — an achievement that was to make him one of the world's best-known architects.

Niemeyer, a lifetime communist, created some 400 buildings in all, including the Serpentine Gallery in Hyde Park, London, the Penang State Mosque in Malaysia, and the headquarters of the French Communist Party in Paris. — AFP

An enigmatic leader's life of paradoxes

Profile by Deborah Cole

BERLIN – The political life of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Europe's most influential leader and the oft-proclaimed world's most powerful woman, is a tale of paradoxes, driven by her own enigmatic nature.

While angry protesters marching the streets of Athens, Lisbon and Madrid brandish caricatures of Merkel in Nazi garb, the 58-year-old enjoys a level of domestic popularity unseen by any post-war leader before her.

The eurozone's crisis-ravaged nations blame her for imposing budgetary discipline they say is choking off desperately needed growth, yet few deny that any long-term solution is possible without her.

And in Germany, Europe's biggest economy, Merkel rose through the ranks of her conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) despite being a "misfit" in a party of mainly Roman Catholic family men from the wealthy southwest.

Merkel, a twice-married childless Protestant raised in communist East Germany, has become the unchallenged conservative leader of her generation and looks set to handily win a third term at next year's election.

The party re-elected her as chairwoman on December 4 with a resounding 98 percent – a score which would have pleased even the

Stalinist leaders of East Germany.

Political scientist and Merkel biographer Gerd Langguth said her outsized work ethic and no-frills style are a comfort to Germans uneasy about the euro drama.

"She has said she's sailing the ship through fog," Langguth said, referring to the debt turmoil. "She's no ideologue, she's a pragmatic problem-solver and that is what people want."

The girl born Angela Kasner left Hamburg, West Germany a few weeks after her birth in 1954 when her Protestant preacher father decided to tend to the flock in the East.

Locals remember her fierce intellect and discretion as a Christian in a totalitarian state.

She earned a physics doctorate, married and divorced fellow student Ulrich Merkel and stayed out of politics until the Berlin Wall fell in 1989.

In 1990 she joined the CDU and won her first parliamentary seat.

She became minister women's issues and later environmental affairs but in 2000, rose to the head of the CDU when she alone had the courage to tell Chancellor Helmut



Chancellor Angela Merkel acknowledges applause after a speech at a congress of Germany's ruling Christian Democratic Union in Hanover on December 4 at which she was overwhelmingly re-elected as the party's leader.
Pic: AFP

in power, becoming Germany's first female chancellor.

During her first term, Merkel by her own admission reaped the rewards of Schroeder's economic reforms that were so contested in his party. The loveless "grand coalition"

SPD in favour of the smaller, pro-business Free Democrats, in theory giving her more scope to set her own course.

However their alliance has been fractious, undermining its popularity even as Merkel has

that hers is the "most successful government since reunification" in 1990.

A lover of German opera, French red wine and walking holidays in the Italian mountains, Merkel has repeatedly pointed to the iconic Swabian housewife – a paragon of thrift and self-control – as her model.

Merkel-watchers often link her focus on belt-tightening to her austere Lutheran upbringing.

Indeed she shuns the trappings of power, wearing boxy trouser suits, spending precious free weekends in her spartan dacha north of Berlin, and doing her own shopping at a discount supermarket.

Her husband since 1998, chemistry professor Joachim Sauer, is so publicity-shy he opted not to attend Merkel's inauguration in 2005.

Critics say her own science background leads her to scrutinise the minutiae and at times dither, which in the crisis has sometimes left ailing European partners to twist in the wind. Rivals also find her chameleon-like qualities exasperating.

Merkel was a staunch defender of nuclear power until Japan's Fukushima disaster last year, prompting a dizzying about-face that has seen her pledge to phase out all of Germany's nuclear reactors within the next decade.

Her policy on aiding debt-wracked countries has also seen her erase several previously fixed lines in the sand. – AFP

'She's no ideologue, she's a pragmatic problem-solver and that is what people want.'

Kohl to quit as party chairman over a slush fund scandal.

In 2005 she unseated Social Democratic (SPD) chancellor Gerhard Schroeder after seven years

between the conservatives and their traditional rivals, the SPD, lasted four years.

Her decisive victory in the 2009 vote allowed her to dump the

consolidated her own standing.

Forbes magazine has named her the world's most powerful woman for six out of the last seven years and she insists despite the friction

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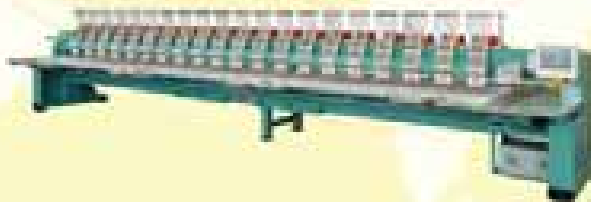
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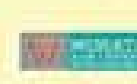
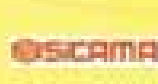


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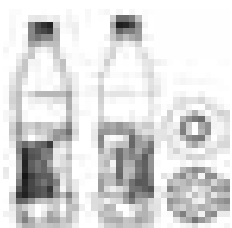
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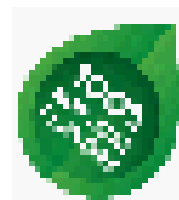
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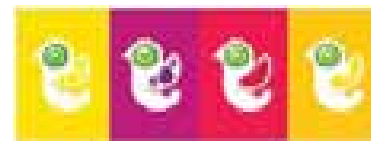
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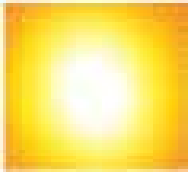
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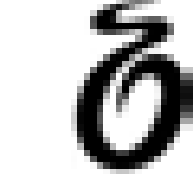
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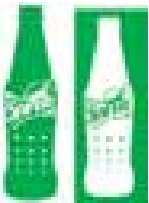
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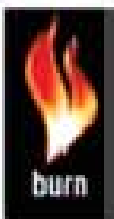
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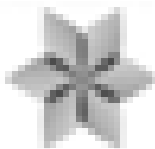
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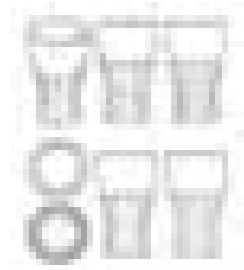
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The tale of an abducted princeling

By John Garnout

BEIJING – Two years ago, on June 4 – the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre and the most sensitive date in the Chinese political calendar – Ji Pomin received a text message from a high-placed friend: It said that former president Jiang Zemin had been taken to a military hospital in a critical condition.

Ji sent a coded message to hundreds of people in his address book to seek confirmation, asking: "The Supreme Old Master ascended to heaven?" Many of Ji's politically connected friends forwarded the text to their friends, who misinterpreted the cryptic question as a statement. By June 6, overseas Chinese websites were reporting that former president Jiang Zemin was dead.

In established democracies, a false rumour about the health of an ageing Ronald Reagan or a Margaret Thatcher would be promptly debunked and have little bearing on the workings of government.

In China's powerful but brittle dictatorship, built on almost invisible lines of patronage, the false reports of Jiang's death immediately became a major matter of national security. Chinese officialdom is extremely paranoid about anyone releasing unauthorised information about the leaders.

Ji, 67, a princeling – a term that refers to the sons and daughters of high ranking leaders – had long disliked Jiang for clinging to power after his retirement, which he felt hurt China's ability to institute a system of laws. And when security agents kidnapped him three days later, his fears were vindicated. But that Ji was able to survive the kidnapping unscathed, and even criticise Jiang with near impunity, shows how the party state still protects its own.

At that point in 2010, high-profile extra-judicial abductions, such as the very publicised disappearance of artist Ai Weiwei in mid-2011 had not yet become common. (Ai has survived as a critic for so long in part because his father, Ai Qing, was a leading poet for the party.) Since Mao Zedong's death in 1976, children of top leaders have been mostly immune from not only the law but also the teeth of the secret security apparatus, a freedom of which Ji is well aware. Over a series of several meetings over the next two years, Ji recounted the events that followed his fateful text message, on the condition it would not be reported until after China's leadership transition – the twice-a-decade Party Congress, which ended on November 14. Ji had told his captors he would not publicise his ordeal and he told me he wanted to delay the release of his story until a less politically sensitive time.

Ji Pomin grew up in a family well aware of the mercurial nature of power and those who wield it. We talked in Ji's living room – the old bedroom of his mother, now deceased – surrounded by Qing Dynasty wooden panels, decorated

with dragons, left over from a time when Empress Dowager Cixi's most powerful eunuch used the home as his headquarters. Ji's father, a former member of the elite decision-making Politburo known for his honesty, had been moved there from a more prestigious home in 1980 after being purged. Because his father fell from power, Ji Pomin did not get the same advantages as other princelings; he studied aeronautical engineering and worked as a scholar at a state think tank, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, before retiring in 2006. He is one of China's dozens of

forgotten princelings who continues to enjoy status but not power. A few days after Ji's text message, he received a phone call from someone claiming to be from a parcel delivery service. They said the package was too big to fit down the lane in which he lived, so he walked to nearby Dongdan, one of Beijing's busiest shopping areas, to collect it. Standing there, he said, in the blind spot between two security cameras outside an upmarket wedding photography store, were two burly men. They pulled a cloth hood over Ji's head and bundled him into a car.

Ji told me that his first thought was that a triad had abducted him for ransom, but his captors assured him that was not the case. His second thought was that the black cloth hood had been used many times before and never washed. "That hood really stunk," he said. After a long drive, they arrived at an isolated luxury villa, where the hood was removed, and his eyes adjusted to a room filled with plain-clothed officers who he presumed to be from the Ministry of State Security – an agency that Ji's father used to oversee.



Former Chinese president Jiang Zemin at the closing session of the Communist Party Congress in the Great Hall of the People, Beijing, on November 14. In 2010, Ji Pomin, the son of a high ranking party member, was abducted and interrogated over a rumour that Jiang had died. Pic: AFP

promoted dozens of generals while he was in power and those people are either morons or his henchmen. What a sad situation and how ridiculous."

The daylight abduction of a princeling like Ji, in downtown Beijing, shows just how delicate the subject of elite politics has become.

That Ji wasn't tortured, that he felt emboldened to speak his mind and that his captors politely drove him back to where they found him two days later, shows the privileges afforded by his status. The secret police had originally lured him out on to the street, says Ji, so they would not disturb his mother, then 86, who had joined the revolutionary struggle with his father at the age of 14 in 1938. By contrast, Ji says they ransacked the homes of several people who received his message. And a historian whose work had influenced Ji's negative views on Jiang was reportedly arrested and convicted of subversion in May 2011.

In July 2011, media again falsely reported Jiang's death; it is unknown whether security services investigated Ji or his associates that time.

On November 8, Jiang, who had appeared in public several times in the last year, showed his immense political influence by walking on stage for the opening of the Party Congress right behind his successor Hu, which does not make Ji feel any better about the ex-leader. In a conversation in March he recalled what he told his interrogators: "Even if you kill me, my last words will be 'the central government should investigate Jiang Zemin.'" – *Foreign Policy*

(John Garnout is China correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, in which a version of this article has appeared. He is the author of the just published e-book *The Rise and Fall of the House of Bo*.)

'What a sad situation and how ridiculous.'

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It was there that Ji realised how the rumour he had inadvertently spread was potentially destabilising to Jiang and the thousands of officials who depend directly and indirectly on the former president's protection and patronage. Ji's captors seemed to know about his strong feelings toward Jiang, which Ji publicised in 2003 by posting a scathing letter on the internet opposing Jiang's decision to keep control of the military.

During the half-day interrogation, the security officials wanted to know the origins of Ji's animosity towards Jiang, and Ji told them, he

recounted. In his view, Jiang had made China virtually ungovernable by refusing to cede full authority to his successor, Hu Jintao, in 2002. Jiang held onto his position as chairman of the Central Military Commission, the body that oversees the military, for two full years after stepping down as chairman of the party in 2002. By contrast, Hu yielded control of his military chairmanship in mid-November when he stepped down as party chairman. Ji told me – perhaps with some bravado – that he spent three hours lecturing his captors on how Jiang had derailed China's efforts to institutionalise its leadership successions and had paralysed China's political process, while they dutifully took notes.

"It's as if George W. Bush had to work for a decade with a Cabinet left over from Clinton," said Ji, recalling what he told his interrogators. "Or if Obama's State of the Union address was written by Bush. Jiang Zemin

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Hoax call DJs taken off air after nurse found dead

SYDNEY – Two Australian radio presenters who duped a nurse at a London hospital which treated Prince William's pregnant wife Catherine have been taken off air following public fury after the woman was found dead.

Media reports on December 7 said nurse Jacintha Saldanha, who had worked at the King Edward VII hospital in London for four years, had committed suicide while police said they were treating the death as unexplained.

Saldanha had accepted the hoax call from two radio presenters from Sydney's *2Day FM* pretending to be Queen Elizabeth II and William's father Prince Charles, before passing it onto a colleague who divulged details of Kate's condition.

The radio station said on December 8 the presenters, Mel Greig and Michael Christian, "are both deeply shocked" over news of the nurse's death.

"SCA and the hosts have decided

that they will not return to their radio show until further notice out of respect for what can only be described as a tragedy," *2Day FM* and its owners Southern Cross Austereo said in a statement on the station's Facebook page.

"Southern Cross Austereo and *2Day FM* are deeply saddened by the tragic news of the death of nurse Jacintha Saldanha from King Edward VII's Hospital and we extend our deepest sympathies to her family and all that have been

affected by this situation around the world," it said.

Soon after news of the nurse's death broke, the radio station's Facebook page was bombarded with thousands of comments, many attacking the presenters and calling for them to be sacked.

More than 8300 comments had hit the *2Day FM* page by early on December 8, some saying Greig and Christian had blood on their hands and calling angrily for them to be dismissed. – AFP

Briefs

Judge insulted at hearing: lawyers

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka's top judge Shirani Bandaranayake stormed out of her impeachment hearing after government lawmakers called her a "mad woman" and displayed open hostility, her lawyers said on December 7.

The move to impeach Bandaranayake came after she scuttled several bills, including one that gave more powers to President Mahinda Rajapakse's youngest brother Basil, the economic development minister.

In a statement a day after the hearing, her lawyers also said repeated requests for documents supporting allegations against Bandaranayake were not provided by her accusers.

Surveys forecast big win for LDP

TOKYO – Japan's main opposition party will comfortably win the general election this month, opinion polls showed on December 6, the first time surveys have indicated anything other than a fragile coalition.

A telephone poll by *Kyodo* news agency showed that the Liberal Democratic Party would win up to 306 of the 480 seats in lower house of parliament on December 16.

Surveys by the mass-circulation *Asahi* and *Yomiuri* dailies also showed the LDP – which has 118 seats in the lower house – was on course to win a single-party majority.

Police, rioters clash in China

BEIJING – Police in a southern China city bordering Vietnam clashed on December 7 with thousands of rioters who were protesting against excessive brutality meted out to a suspected smuggler, the government and a rights group said.

The incident occurred in Dongxing city in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, local police said in microblog postings.

The Hong Kong-based Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy said up to 10,000 people joined in the rioting and over 20 police and customs vehicles were smashed or burned.

MPs to be trained to avoid corruption

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysia's government will offer training to lawmakers to teach them how to avoid corruption, a key issue ahead of national elections that must be held by the middle of next year.

The country's 222 lawmakers will learn to identify and deal with "grey areas" in a one-off training session next year, said D. Ravindran, an official with Pemandu, a government unit tasked with addressing voter concerns such as graft and crime, said on December 6. – AFP

China challenges VN over oil exploration

BEIJING – China demanded on December 6 that Vietnam end oil exploration and stop its navy harassing Chinese boats in disputed waters near the Gulf of Tonkin, in the latest tit-for-tat between the neighbours.

Beijing's demands came after Hanoi complained on December 4 that Chinese fishing boats had sabotaged a vessel owned by the Vietnamese energy giant PetroVietnam in the area the previous week.

"Vietnam's allegations are inconsistent with facts," said Beijing's foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei, adding that the incident occurred outside the Gulf of Tonkin and near China's Hainan island.

"The Chinese boats

were carrying out fishing production activities in that part of the sea, which is completely justified, and they were unreasonably dispelled by the Vietnamese naval ships.

"Vietnam should immediately stop unilateral oil and gas activities in that part of the sea and stop the interruptions of Chinese fishing boats."

Hanoi and Beijing have a long-standing territorial dispute over the Spratly and Paracel Islands, which both countries claim, and often trade diplomatic barbs over oil exploration and fishing rights in the South China Sea.

Hong said lengthy negotiations were continuing over the demarcation and joint

development of the disputed waters where the latest incident took place, in the northwestern part of the sea.

State-run *Vietnam News* said PetroVietnam's geological survey vessel, the *Binh Minh 2*, was operating in Vietnamese territorial waters on November 30 when it was approached by a number of Chinese fishing vessels which cut its exploration cables.

Beijing must "immediately end this wrongdoing and not allow similar acts to re-occur", Hanoi's ministry of foreign affairs spokesman Luong Thanh Nghi said in a statement on December 4, adding that the incident "violated Vietnam's sovereignty". – AFP



North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un acknowledges the audience after an orchestral performance marking the 60th anniversary of Kim Il-Sung Military University in Pyongyang on October 29 this year. North Korea spent US\$41.5 million this year promoting the personality cult of the ruling Kim dynasty, South Korea's Unification Ministry said on December 6. It said \$9.5 million was spent on new statues of Kim Il-Sung and his late son, Kim Jong-Il at six locations, and \$32 million was spent on giant frescoes of the two leaders in 400 halls throughout the country. The ministry report also estimated that the North's long-range missile program had cost it \$1.34 billion dollars in 2012. Pyongyang plans to launch a long-range rocket later this month, in defiance of widespread international condemnation. Pic: AFP/KCNA via KNS

Singapore arrests high-rise protesters

SINGAPORE – Two mainland Chinese workers who staged a high-rise protest atop construction cranes in Singapore over unpaid wages have been arrested and could face imprisonment, police said on December 7.

In the second industrial incident in Singapore involving mainland Chinese workers in less than two weeks, the pair clambered up two 10-storey high cranes to highlight their demand for payment

of back wages before their return home.

Rescuers coaxed the two men down after more than four hours of negotiations and they were arrested soon after, police said.

"The two men were arrested for unlawfully remaining at the place and intentionally causing alarm. They can expect to face imprisonment, fine or both upon conviction," a police statement said.

The crane protest came 10 days after Chinese

bus drivers staged a wildcat strike at state-linked transport firm SMRT – tightly-controlled Singapore's first strike since 1986.

Twenty-nine of the drivers have been summarily deported to China and four others are on trial for staging an illegal strike, an offence punishable by up to a year in prison and fines.

A fifth driver has been jailed for six weeks after pleading guilty. – AFP

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Abhisit faces murder charge over Bangkok protest death

BANGKOK – Former Thai premier Abhisit Vejjajiva is to be charged with murder over the death of a civilian during the 2010 “Red Shirt” rallies, officials said on December 6.

Abhisit, who was prime minister during the mass anti-government rallies and oversaw a military crackdown on the protests, will be questioned next week and charged over the fatal shooting of a taxi driver by soldiers during the unrest.

The Department of Special Investigation, police and Thai prosecutors jointly decided to charge the former leader and his deputy Suthep Thaugsuban under article 288, the section of the Thai criminal code that deals with murder, said DSI chief Tarit Pengdith.

“Their actions – repeatedly sending the armed forces against civilians – show an intention to endanger life,” he said.

He said the group based its decision on further witness testimony as well as a court’s decision in September that taxi driver Phan Kamkong was shot by troops – the first completed inquest into about 90 deaths during the



Former Thai prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. Pic: AFP

country’s worst political violence in decades.

Abhisit and Suthep will be summoned by letter to hear the charges and to be questioned on December 12, Tarit said, adding that authorities would not seek court permission to detain the men, who are both now opposition lawmakers.

They will be given an opportunity to defend themselves before considering whether to refer the case to the prosecutor, who would then be responsible for deciding if the case should go to court.

Two months of rallies

by the Red Shirts – mostly supporters of ousted Thai premier Thaksin Shinawatra – brought parts of central Bangkok to a standstill.

Street clashes between Red Shirt demonstrators and security forces left nearly 1900 wounded and culminated in a bloody military crackdown in May 2010. Two foreign journalists were among those killed.

Until now no government or military officials had faced charges over the deaths.

Abhisit has insisted the protest leaders should accept responsibility and said his government had no choice

but to take tough action.

Red Shirts have raised accusations of double standards over terrorism prosecutions against 24 of their leaders, including five current lawmakers, who could in theory face the death penalty in a case that is set to begin on December 13. They pleaded not guilty in August 2010.

Rights campaigners have said both the protesters and the authorities of the time should be held accountable.

Thailand has been riven by bitter political divisions since Thaksin was toppled by royalist generals in a 2006 coup that unleashed years of street protests by the Reds and the rival royalist Yellow Shirts.

Elections in 2011 brought Thaksin’s Red Shirt-backed Puea Thai party to power with his sister Yingluck as prime minister, sweeping Abhisit into opposition.

Tarit insisted the investigation into the unrest had not been subject to political interference and was decided on the basis of “facts and laws”.

He said soldiers acting under orders would not face prosecution. – AFP

Thai king urges unity in birthday address

BANGKOK – Thailand’s revered king called for unity and stability in the divided nation on December 5 as huge crowds of adoring, flag-waving citizens packed Bangkok for a rare speech to mark his 85th birthday.

At least 200,000 people flooded the capital’s historic district, with aerial television images showing a sea of yellow as supporters of King Bhumibol Adulyadej dressed up in the colour associated with his reign.

The king, who is regarded as a demi-god by many in the politically-turbulent nation, told the crowd that the “goodwill” Thais had shown by attending the ceremony together “gives me the confidence that your kindness is key to bringing unity to the people and the nation”.

“If Thai people are virtuous, there is hope that no matter what situation the country finds itself in, it will be safe and retain its stability,” said the monarch in his short public address from the balcony at the Anantasamakom Throne Hall in front of the Royal Plaza.

Chants of “long live the king!” followed the royal motorcade as it made its way to and from the hospital where the king has lived for

three years since suffering a respiratory illness in 2009.

Bhumibol, whose 66 years of service makes him the world’s longest reigning monarch, suffered a minor brain bleed in July, but has since made several official appearances including meeting Barack Obama during the US president’s visit to the country last month.

The monarch has no official political role but is seen as a unifying figure in a country that is frequently riven by political unrest, and his birthday is marked by country-wide celebrations, a public holiday and Thai Father’s Day.

Thailand is in the grip of a long-running political crisis pitting royalists against supporters of ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra and the current government led by his sister Yingluck.

She was among the dignitaries at the ceremony, as well as most key members of the royal family with the exception of Queen Sirikit, 80.

Doctors treating the queen, who was diagnosed with a slight loss of blood flow to the brain after being taken ill in July, said she was still too weak to attend the event, said a statement from the palace. – AFP

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Australian novelist plants educational seed

By Myo Lwin

AUSTRALIAN author Di Morrissey was in Yangon last month, promoting her new novel which is set partly in Myanmar, and discussing her support for a school near Sagaing that opened on August 31.

During her stay Ms Morrissey participated in several events around the city to mark the launch of her book titled *The Golden Land*, and the establishment of the Golden Land Education Foundation, which is aimed at raising funds to support the school.

At one such event, held at Padonmar Restaurant on November 22, the author told *The Myanmar Times* that the seeds for establishing the school were sown when she was introduced to a Buddhist monk, Venerable Sayadaw Vijji Nanda, while he was visiting Australia.

"I was introduced to Venerable Sayadaw Vijji Nanda when he came to Sydney on a conference, and my friend who is a member of Australian parliament heard about the monk's dream to help his poor village children, so she put us in contact," Ms Morrissey said.

"Venerable Vijji Nanda is an energetic and enterprising monk. He wanted to build a school in his village, so I offered to help him. Australian people were very interested and, as they are very generous and practical people, many offered to make donations."

The author said she needed a "proper way" to funnel donations into the school, so she registered her foundation as a legal charity.

"From that small seed a tree is now starting to grow," Ms Morrissey said.

She said that she and the Venerable Vijji Nanda spent six months emailing plans,



Australian author Di Morrissey poses with a copy of her book 'The Golden Land' in Yangon on November 22. Pic: Douglas Long

photographs and ideas back and forth, and got the land cleared and a small building erected with help from the parents of the children who are now attending the school.

"Venerable Vijji Nanda has worked very hard, doing a lot with little, and also teaching and training young nuns to become teachers," she said. "The most wonderful thing was to travel to the village outside Sagaing to see 'our' school."

"There is much work to be done, we are taking small steps, but have big dreams," Ms Morrissey added. "I planted a tree where we hope to build a bigger school building, and I hope to come back each year to watch my tree and this school become part of a bigger project."

Venerable Vijji Nanda told *The Myanmar Times* at the November 22 event that he wanted to reform

the education systems in Myanmar, starting with the children around his village.

"Previously, the children had to walk two or three miles to reach a school in the area. With the building of this school, they will have access to an educational opportunity that is different from the formal education in this country," he said.

He explained that by "formal education" he meant the dominant system in Myanmar at the moment, in which children learn by heart without being exposed to critical thinking or analysis.

"It's like parrots," he said. "We have parrot teachers, parrot students, parrot government officials and parrot monks. I would like to transform this system. Students need to learn to think more like people than like parrots," he said.

More page 46

Artist puts colour balance on display

By Nyein Ei Ei Htwe

ARTIST Tin Maung Win (Pyay) will hold his second solo exhibition in Yangon from December 18 to 22, displaying 60 paintings that mix modern techniques and traditional Myanmar realism.

Tin Maung Win said the paintings in the show, none of which have been previously exhibited, would be "different from those in other art shows in Myanmar".

"I tried to mix portraits and traditional Myanmar themes with modern methods, because to show our Myanmar artwork to the world, I don't want to cling to the simple and old ways," the artist told *The Myanmar Times*. "I want everyone to know that we can make new creations from our traditions."

He said that for him, "colour balance" was the most important aspect of each painting.

"There is weight, volume, reflection and mutual understanding in colours, so I try to highlight this colour balance," he said, adding that he originally intended to call the show "Colour Balance" but

thought it might be too confusing for viewers, so instead went with the non-sense title "Second Solo Show".

Tin Maung Win said his ideas were influenced by a German artist he studied under in Myanmar from 1981 to 1984, who introduced him to European theories for the use of colour.

"The teacher showed us some techniques, but also told us not to copy him but to create new styles that would be different from others, and these would become unique Myanmar artworks," he said.

He said the paintings in the show will be those he has worked on since his first solo show last year.

"I used thick paints, which I applied to the canvas using a knife. These are the only works I've made in the past year, but it took me many years to develop this technique," he said.

Tin Maung Win's "Second Solo Show" will be held at the Myanmar Traditional Artists and Artisans Organisation (Central), at 187 & 192, East Wing, Bogyoke Market. The paintings will be sold at prices ranging from US\$100 to \$1500.

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Street art ban will only increase graffiti: artists

By Pinky

A BAN on graffiti and street art in Yangon, announced in state media late last month, will do little to curb the practice and might even increase the activity, artists said last week.

Yangon municipal authorities announced last month in state newspapers that a ban had been imposed on drawing or painting on public buildings, roads, bridges, parks and schools.

The punishment for being caught was left unspecified, but the warning was repeated on state television early last week.

One Yangon-based graffiti artist, who wished to remain anonymous, told *The Myanmar Times* that after a long time ignoring street art, authorities suddenly seem "very strict" about the practice.

"But as long as there is no announcement about the punishment for being caught, we will continue drawing. We just need to be more careful. If they catch us on the spot, who knows what they'll do to us," he said.

"Actually, every country has this regulation, so we can't complain about the ban. This is their responsibility. They are doing their duty, and we're trying to create our artwork. I don't



Street art in Yangon. Pic: Nyein Maung

think they can stop graffiti artists because we'll always seek any place to express our feelings and surprise the public."

Grffiti artist Arker Kyaw, 19, said the ban could give "good benefits for the cleanliness of the city" but added that authorities had gone about imposing the prohibition in the wrong way.

"They shouldn't just impose a ban and do nothing for the graffiti artists. They should have provided some places for graffiti and street artists to work, and put a registration system

in place so those who want to draw graffiti can do it legally," he said.

He added that he had heard the punishment for being caught would be three months in jail, but he said this would not deter anyone.

"If authorities just impose a ban without giving or doing anything in return for us, I think the graffiti arts will only increase in the city," he said.

"Student, graffiti artists, street artists will never stop creating. Young people always enjoy doing things that are not allowed."

Beyond Pressure art fest comes to close

By Nuam Bawi

THE Fifth Beyond Pressure Performance Art and Contemporary Art Festival is running through December 10, bringing performance, graffiti, video and installation art to Yangon's Karaweik Garden and Sein Lan Soe Pyay Garden.

"We believe our country is heading towards development, so the contemporary arts should also be on the public stage," said performance artist Moe Satt, who also organised the festival.

"We don't want to let our country be left behind in the contemporary arts compared to other countries, so we have organised this festival for the past four years."

He said performance art has an advantage as far as finding venues because it does not require a big stage like drama, nor does it need gallery space like painting or sculpture.

"For performance art we don't require a big space because this art should be close to the audience," Moe Satt said.

"We can perform in a public area, which also provides the opportunity for the public, who might not have time to visit an art gallery, to see and experience

the work of the artists."

He said last year's festival, held in December, was the biggest so far, and was held successfully despite a multitude of difficulties with organisation.

"It was the biggest so far because it took place in two major cities: Yangon, which is the festival's home, and Mandalay, the cultural centre in the middle of Myanmar. This year's festival was scheduled for Yangon from December 6 to 10, and Pyay on December 11," Moe Satt said.

He said the "weightiest problem" with organising the event in the past was getting official permission to use public places for the performances.

"We are always in the dark when it comes to event authorisation. It's full of uncertainties, like solving a puzzle. But this year we got permission easily for places to perform," he said.

He added that last year there were more participants from Western countries, while this year more young artists from Asian countries are taking part.

"We especially invited young and new artists from around Asia this year to exchange ideas and also discuss their experiences and the difficulties they have faced in their own countries," he said,

Library takes boredom out of commute

By Zon Pann Pwint

THE Myanmar Libraries Foundation last month opened a book stand on Platform 1 of Yangon's central railway station, for the benefit of regular commuters who enjoy reading while waiting for the train.

"Almost every town in Myanmar has a self-help library founded by our foundation. However, there are many ordinary people earning a bare living, and they don't have time to join a library or even to visit a library," U Maung Maung, chairman of the Myanmar Libraries Foundation, said at the opening ceremony in Yangon on November 30.

He said the aim of opening

the book-lending stand at the busy railway station was to supply knowledge for commuters who don't have time to spend at a library, but who want to enjoy reading while waiting for the train.

"The book stand is filled with magazines, journals and novels. More books will be added at a cost of K60,000 every month," he said.

U Maung Maung said Yangon Railway Station was a busy place that thousands of common people pass through every day.

"They include office workers, labourers, nightshift workers, factory and construction workers, and vendors. They can't spend much time reading books at the library, so the book stand will supply a little



Myanmar Libraries Foundation chairman U Maung Maung speaks at the launch of a book stand at Yangon Railway Station on November 30. Pic: Boothee

knowledge for them. They can enjoy reading to fill their time while waiting for the train," he said.

The foundation's book stand joins another that had already been installed on the same platform by the state-run Information and Public Relations Department. A third stand will soon be added by the Myittar Thingaha group led by actor Khant Si Thu.

Regular commuter Ma Moe Sandar said that in the past she just sat idle while waiting for her train.

"Now, when I see the book stand on the platform, it attracts me to browse a copy of a magazine to enjoy before the train arrives. It's really helpful and advantageous for commuters," she said.

From page 46

Australian writer

Venerable Vijji Nanda said the new school currently accommodates 20 students, but the capacity will be expanded once donations allow for the construction of a bigger school building.

"My plan is to recruit teachers and give them proper training for about six months. Only after that will they be allowed to teach the students," he said.

Regarding the publication of her book, Ms Morrissey said the timing of *The Golden Land* was "very lucky".

"There is now so much interest about this nation in Australia, which is the second biggest aid donor," she said.

"But I have always had an interest in Myanmar from reading books by Somerset Maugham and Rudyard Kipling, and from history. My husband was a US diplomat specialising in Southeast Asian studies, so we lived in Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia," she said.

She added that government crackdowns on protestors in 1988 and 2007 prompted her to become an "activist calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest".

Ms Morrissey said her son Nick Morrissey, who teaches Asian art at the University of Georgia in the United States, visited Myanmar three years ago and urged her to travel to the country.

"I also became aware of how little the average person in Australia knew about what had happened here and the terrible suffering of the Burmese people. So gradually I started to think of a way I could write a book about this, but not a history or political book, not preaching or being polemical, but to tell this story in a very human way," she said.

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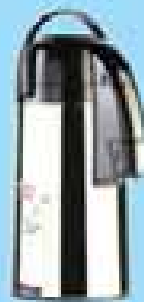
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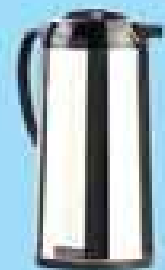
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Book Review

The virtues of constructive insubordination

By David Scott Mathieson

IT wasn't too long ago in Myanmar that public figures like Zaganar, Min Ko Naing and Kyaw Thu were derided as "destructionists" by the government, and as inconvenient spoilers by many domestic and international observers. They, and many others, now grace newspaper covers, sit on government commissions and are widely seen as key national figures in the political transition. They did so not by being compliant, but humorous, principled and inventive in how they participated in public affairs in the past 20 years.

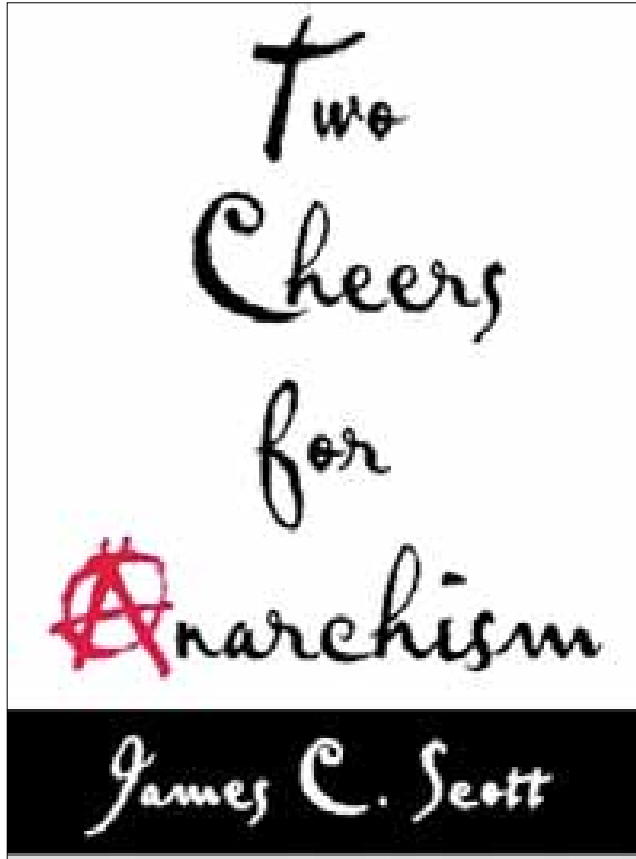
The esteemed anthropologist James C Scott has produced a new book that not only celebrates such behaviour, but also exhorts us all to do the same. *Two Cheers for Anarchism* is deeply thoughtful and mischievous in equal measure. If you have a sliver of contrarianism in your soul, reading it will reward you. If you're an uptight square, or a humourless bureaucrat, it won't.

Scott, whose numerous books on everyday resistance are the high watermark of Western erudition, recently published the magisterial *The Art of Not Being Governed*, about highland peoples in Myanmar and across Southeast Asia.

Scott's endorsement of everyday insubordination, what he calls adopting an "anarchist squint" to the world, is not fully loaded anarchism in the ideological sense, what one exhaustive history of the idea called "demanding the impossible".

The sweep of this slim volume's topics — it is certainly no weighty academic tome at just 160 pages — is considerable. From the joys of jay-walking in Germany, multiple cropping techniques in West Africa, and the folly of standardised testing in US schools, to Danish schoolyard design, the cadence of a Martin Luther King Jr speech, a deliciously drawn dystopian vision of an über-rational Yale University in 2020, smuggling Jews out of Vichy France, and red-light traffic innovation in the Netherlands, these disparate strands weave not just a coherent argument but also an inspiring mix of human inventiveness.

These fragments, or series



James C Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play*, Princeton University Press, 2012.

of aperçus as Scott calls them, are like fascinating, eclectic, yet interlocking vignettes sorted into six small chapters. They add up to tell a story of the necessity of common truculence and nonviolent resistance in the shape of "foot-dragging, poaching, pilfering, dissimulation, sabotage, desertion, absenteeism, squatting and flight", or what he terms "infrapolitics", or more colourfully as "Irish democracy".

It is not a grand theory of the absence of authority, but of how individuals and small communities react to government, corporations, authoritarianism, and the commercialisation and commodification of innovation and difference.

Chapter Two, analysing the contest between vernacular and official order (or in other words, local knowledge and state imposition of control), takes cases such as "scientific forestry", or the illusion that one species of tree can be planted in symmetrical lines for long-term profit regardless of soil suitability, and the dismal failure of urban planning and constructed communities over the organic "disorderly

city" still in evidence in some parts of Europe. Think in terms of the sustainable chaos of downtown Yangon with its markets, community and spontaneity (not to be overly romanticised by an outsider with its evident poverty), as opposed to the chimera of homogenised mall culture and gated suburbs. European urban design has already eschewed such grand experiments in planned high density living.

The book's critique of quantitative and cost-benefit analysis is particularly sharply drawn. Castigating the modernist impulse to measure performance and utility not in class or wealth, but in scientifically arrived-at standards of efficiency and merit, Scott laments the exclusion of such human qualities as "compassion, wisdom, courage, or breadth of experience".

He uses not just SAT testing, Fordist production techniques and McDonald's, but also "body counts" in conflict and asks an interesting question: If systematic quantification is so formidable, why has there never been a study or count of the "fragging" phenomenon during the Vietnam War, when

recalcitrant American soldiers murdered their officers? The answer, like many other issues raised in this book, is because many elements of the human condition are resistant to easy answers and counting. Sometimes, people simply won't tell you, or they'll make something up, or the bean-counter will just twist the results to arrive at a pre-determined answer anyway.

Both the state, or government, as much as trade unions, are called out in this book as stifling subordinate voices intent on making deals to control or incorporate social movements. In this, Scott is egalitarian in his critical arc.

Scott's objective is to inject common experience into grand events and acknowledge the often marginalised central role they play. His conclusion is that "great emancipatory gains for human freedom have not been the result of orderly, institutional procedures but of disorderly, unpredictable, spontaneous action cracking open the social order from below".

Although clearly not intended, *Two Cheers* could act as a coda of caution to the past year's rampant enthusiasm for change in Myanmar, especially as protests over land and other issues are raised by average citizens, and as concerns grow over unintended side-effects of dramatically increasing international assistance and investment.

Scott argues against the grand planning and meta-theory of development enthusiasts, and for the agency, ingenuity and bloody-mindedness of communities and individuals over systems. For people coming out of decades of authoritarian rule, such a message will resonate.

In homage to Scott's irreverence and subversion, one can only hope the book merchants of Pansodan Street will produce their unique Yangon edition forthwith. The people of this city will quite likely enjoy this book immensely, not least because they'll recognise different shades of their own experiences, and hopefully be inspired by more ideas.

David Scott Mathieson is a Senior Researcher in the Asia Division of Human Rights Watch

Once subversive, book piracy now plagues publishers

By Zon Pann Pwint

DURING the bad old days of heavy-handed censorship in Myanmar, discriminating readers who wanted access to books banned by the government were forced to rely on pirated copies.

But with official versions of previously taboo books now in wide circulation, and with more such materials being imported into the country on a daily basis, the pirates are now having to compete with legitimate publishers.

One example is U Nu's 1975 book *Tartay Sanay Tha* (Saturday Son), which for years was banned by the government but was available as an illegal photocopy. In September, publishers were finally able to release an official version of the book in Myanmar.

"*Tartay Sanay Tha* was first published in India in 1975," said the book's official publisher, Myat Hmone Lwin. "But because it was banned in Myanmar, readers had to rely on pirated copies that were printed in the country."

The new official version has sold well in the two months since its release, and is now in its third print run of 1000 copies each.

Myat Hmone Lwin said that his re-launch of the book raised public demand for the volume, resulting in the reappearance in some bookstores of pirated versions of the 1975 edition when copies of his second print run became hard to find.

Other books have been widely copied as well. After Juu's 1986 novel *AHmat Taya* (Remembrance) was banned by the government in 1989, the pirated book market allowed for it to be read within the country.

U Myo Myint Nyein, an editor at *Shwe Amutay* literary magazine, said Juu's novel was into its fourth print run before strict censorship of the press was imposed in the 1980s.

"Books that were in high demand and out of stock were pirated, including books that were not allowed to be published due to censorship,

especially biographies of famous people. People wanted to be able to read biographies about people they deeply respected, but these were unavailable without the pirated versions," he said.

Myat Hmone Lwin said that while piracy played an important cultural role in the past, it could now pose a problem for Myanmar's publishing industry.

"It was alright to copy books that were banned in the past if readers were eager to read them, but it has now become a habit to copy books that are already in stock at bookshops today," he said.

He said he has been tracking who is selling pirate versions of *Tartay Sanay Tha* by sending friends from shop to shop, and he has also placed ads in newspapers to warn against printing unauthorised copies of the 1975 edition.

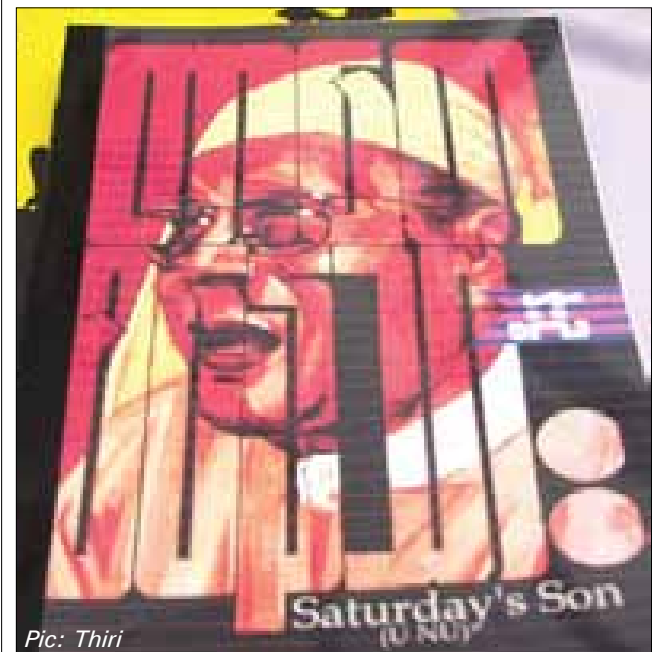
"I know who has been reproducing these bestselling books. There are about three people who are doing it," he said.

He added that while he is not officially able to take legal action against those who copy the book without permission, U Nu's daughter plans to pursue the matter in court because she holds the copyright.

"The pirates make at least 100 copies of each book for sale, but in the past few years I haven't heard of anyone starting legal proceedings to stop book piracy," he said.

Myat Hmone Lwin's publishing house was ordered to close temporarily in June for releasing his book *Kyaut Sar Ko Khae Pyat Pyit Pyat Ywe Maya* (Can't Use Rubber to Erase a Stone Inscription), which had been banned by the previous censorship board.

"Long-awaited books that were banned in the past are gradually beginning to be released, so we need to start dealing with the process of pirated books, otherwise the industry will grow," he said. "There are many other pirated books in the market, and it affects the entitlements of the author and publisher."



Pic: Thiri

Asian literary award reveals longlist

HONG KONG — Three debut novelists and a Nobel laureate were among the 15 writers longlisted for Asia's most prestigious literary prize last week, with entries spread across the region from Turkey to Japan.

The longlist for the US\$30,000 Man Asian Literary Prize was drawn from 108 published works from nine different Asian countries, submitted to a panel of judges led by literary critic and journalist Maya Jaggi.

"The far-ranging stories on our longlist draw the reader into some beautiful and some gruelling landscapes," said Jaggi in a statement. "From the glaciers of northern Pakistan to the unforgiving Saudi desert;

from an affluent Istanbul seaside resort to a Bombay opium den — and further afield to Montreal and Mexico."

Silent House, an early work from Turkish writer and 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature winner Orhan Pamuk, made the list after appearing in English for the first time.

A total of seven books appear in translation, including *Northern Girls* by Chinese author Sheng Keyi, about a 16-year-old who abandons her Hunan village and heads for the bright lights of Shenzhen.

The Garden of Evening Mists by Malaysia's Tan Twan Eng follows a young law graduate who discovers the only Japanese garden in Malaya and its

secretive owner and creator. Jeet Thayil's *Narcopolis*, a three-decade exploration of opium addiction, was also shortlisted for the 2012 Man Booker Prize for Fiction and he is one of three Indian authors on the Asian Prize longlist.

"This list testifies to the strength and variety of new writing coming out of a culturally emergent Asia," said professor David Parker, executive director of the Asian Literary Prize.

"It is full of stories the world hasn't heard before and which the world needs to hear."

A shortlist of up to six titles will be unveiled in early January before a winner is announced in March. — AFP

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Phyo's Cooking Adventure

Phyo cuts through culture to reveal life's true taste

Japanese BBQ for the holiday season

THIS week I am presenting a recipe for homemade yakitori sauce for BBQ events, to help celebrate the festive season.

Yakitori chicken, grilled on skewers, is a popular dish from Japan. I love the complexity of the sauce's taste, and it's a good food for entertaining: When I lived in Australia, I used this sauce on grilled meat, seafood and vegetables.

You can serve yakitori chicken with rice, but here I am including a recipe for coleslaw using Japanese ingredients. It's different from mayonnaise-based coleslaw, and is very fresh and crunchy.

This is a no-pressure recipe, meaning that you can enjoy conversation with family and friends while you are grilling. Once the sauce is done, you can use it to create many varieties of yakitori.

Yakitori chicken INGREDIENTS

(8 servings)
4 chicken breasts (skinless)
A couple bunches of asparagus

Yakitori sauce

500g chicken wings
1½ cup of Japanese soy sauce
1½ cup of mirin
1 cup of sake or rice wine
¼ cup of caster sugar
2 tablespoons of corn starch

PREPARATION

For the sauce, break the chicken wings at the joints and straight them out. Grill them until they turn golden, taking care not to burn the skin.



Pic: Htein Linn

In a pot, add mirin, sake, sugar and the chicken wings (break them up if necessary) and let them boil.

Add corn starch onto a small dish and pour a little bit of the soy sauce onto it. Stir slowly to dissolve.

Add the corn starch mixture and the remaining soy sauce into the pot. When it starts boiling, turn the heat down and simmer for 30 minutes.

Drain the sauce and set the chicken wings aside. You can use them as snacks for later. Let the sauce cool down for another 30 minutes.

Cut the chicken into strips and thread them onto the skewers.

Wash and drain the asparagus.

Pour a bit of sauce onto the shallow dish, and brush the sauce onto the skewered chicken. Grill the skewers on high heat, turning them frequently.

Keep brushing the sauce onto the skewers and don't let them dry. Before you turn the skewers, brush the side that will face down to the fire as well. When the chicken cooks through, serve immediately.

Brush the yakitori sauce on the asparagus and grill them as well.

Japanese-style coleslaw INGREDIENTS

(6-8 servings)
200g of Chinese cabbage
1 carrot (peeled and coarsely grated)
250g of daikon (peeled and coarsely grated)
2 Fuji apples (grated with skin)
1 tablespoon of roasted black sesame seeds
2 spring onions (sliced)

Dressing

2 tablespoon of Japanese rice vinegar
1½ tablespoon of sake or rice wine
½ teaspoon of Dijon mustard or Japanese mustard
1 tablespoon of Japanese soy sauce
1½ teaspoons of caster sugar
½ teaspoon of finely grated ginger and its juice

Preparation

Wash all the vegetables and let them dry well before chopping them.

Finely shred the cabbage and place it in a big bowl.

Cut the daikon and carrots into two pieces and grated them coarsely.

Sprinkle ¼ teaspoon of salt on the grated daikon and leave for 15 minutes. Then squeeze it gently and pat dry. Make sure no liquids are left.

Prepare the dressing in a jar, combining all the ingredients. Then add the carrots, daikon and sesame seeds into a large bowl. Grate the apple into the bowl and pour the dressing on top. Toss well and chill for at least one hour.

Main Tips

Don't grill the chicken for too long, or the meat will dry out.

Use the sauce to brush onto whatever you feel like grilling.

You can refrigerate the unused sauce for 3-4 days (as long as it has not come in contact with meat or vegetables).

QUAFFING QUOTE

"The way you make an omelet reveals your character." — Anthony Bourdain (American chef, author and television personality)

NEXT WEEK

Greek salad, meatballs and tortillas

Red Wine

Kressman Red Table Wine (no vintage)

If it says "Red Table Wine" on the label, no vintage is listed, and it comes from Kressmann in France, you know you're in for a rare treat.

Score BOX **6** /10
Ks 10,800

White Wine

Tommasi Le Rosse Pinot Grigio 2011

From a family-run Italian winery, this juicy white offers clean citrus aromas and enjoyably crisp and fruity flavours. Harmonises admirably with fish and cheese.

Score BOX **9** /10
Ks 18,900

FOOD REVIEW

FORGET peanut butter and jelly, fish and chips, Itchy and Scratchy, and Rupert Murdoch and sleazy journalism. Nothing in this world goes together better than barbecue and cold beer.

An Austrian-accented Conan the Barbarian once opined that what was best in life was "to crush your enemies, see dem driven before you, and to hear da lamentation of their vimmin", but he had obviously never visited Yangon and indulged in the pleasures of chomping down on skewered chicken, mutton, pig guts, potatoes and piquant tofu, then washing it down with a frosty mug of Tiger draught.

Nor had he enjoyed grilled fish, zesty crab or *marlar hinn*, the latter consisting of a delicious train-wreck of spicy vegetables and noodles — all chased with another mug or three of beer.

Barbecue also lends itself to dining with a group of friends, for several reasons, some of which I shall enumerate as follows: A variety of foods can be ordered to suit everyone's taste, it's easy to continue requesting more grub for delivery to the table over

Cue the barbecue



Pic: Douglas Long

Kaung Kaung Restaurant

102B Dhammazedi Road, Bahan township, Yangon
Tel 09-500-9888, 09-4310-3416, 01-375-771

Food:	7
Drink:	7
Atmosphere:	5
Service:	8
X Factor:	8
Value for Money:	8

Score BOX

7 /10

the course of several hours, and the aforementioned consumption of beer, with which barbecue is so compatible, is more fun with more people.

Kaung Kaung's central location on Dhammazedi Road makes it a convenient destination for the BBQ-ically inclined, although this setting can also be seen as a liability, with hordes of Yangon's most obnoxious bus drivers passing just a few feet away, madly blaring their horns at every shadow that flits across the moon.

The dim fluorescent lighting in the dining area also doesn't help the atmosphere. But if you're keen to gain merit by feeding stray cats, you'll want to order some feline-friendly chunks that you can surreptitiously drop onto the floor under your table while your animal-hating friends aren't looking.

Another huge bonus for me was the block of ice in the urinal, particularly my feelings of accomplishment as I contributed to its slow, steady dissolution with every beer-fuelled visit to the toilet. Yep, that Conan fellow sure missed out on some of the things that really are best in life. — DL

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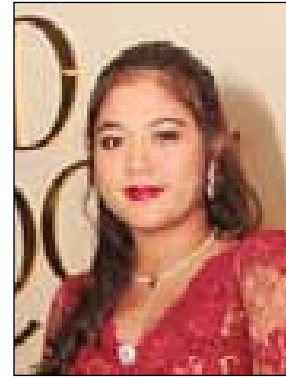
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Ko Kyaw Lin and Actress Chaw Yadana's Wedding



Ko Thet Naing Aung Zay Ya and Thazin @ Ko Kyaw Lin and Actress Chaw Yadana's Wedding



Soe Myat Nanda @ Ko Kyaw Lin and Actress Chaw Yadana's Wedding



M Seng Lu and Awn Seng @ Ko Kyaw Lin and Actress Chaw Yadana's Wedding



Ya Wai Aung @ Ko Kyaw Lin and Actress Chaw Yadana's Wedding



Pyi Soe Aung @ Ko Kyaw Lin and Actress Chaw Yadana's Wedding



Nine Nine @ Ko Kyaw Lin and Actress Chaw Yadana's Wedding



Ei Chaw Po @ Ko Kyaw Lin and Actress Chaw Yadana's Wedding



Thandar Bo @ Ko Kyaw Lin and Actress Chaw Yadana's Wedding



SCG staff members @ SCG Build with Pride 2012 Event



Guests @ SCG Build with Pride 2012 Event



Ko Joshua Doi Aung and Ms Charlotte Tan @ SCG Build with Pride 2012 Event



SCG staff from Thailand @ SCG Build with Pride 2012 Event



Daw Khin Me Me Kyi @ Premier Coffee Lucky Draw Program



Ma Moh Moh Lwin @ Premier Coffee Lucky Draw Program



Mr Seren, Ma Kanari Myint and Ma Khin Khin Pine @ United Living Mall 3rd Anniversary



Ma Khine Su Htoo Aung and Ma Khine Thin Thin Myint @ United Living Mall 3rd Anniversary



Guests @ Kanebo New Product Launch



Mg Mg Aye @ Tea Pot Tea Mix Lucky Draw



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TOKI

တိုက်စသောက်ရေသန့်



Myanmar Times Lucky Draw Winners @ Myanmar Times Lucky Draw Award Event



First prize winner Mg Hein Htet Win and Ma Sandar from Ikon Mart @ Myanmar Times Lucky Draw Award Event



Lucky Draw winners @ Myanmar Times Lucky Draw Award Event



Zayyar @ MK & ICC 20th Anniversary



U Tun Tun and Ma Su Hwe Pe @ MK & ICC 20th Anniversary



Models @ MK & ICC 20th Anniversary



Wut Hmone Shwe Yee @ MK & ICC 20th Anniversary



Hnin Su Khine Oo @ MK & ICC 20th Anniversary

IT was another exciting week full of lucky draw events, but as usual Socialite found herself clapping for other winners instead of taking any of the prizes herself. She started on November 26 by attending the awards ceremony for The Myanmar Times lucky draw winners at Chatrium Hotel, followed by the Si Daw Gyi laphet Lucky draw at Sedona Hotel and the grand opening of KPMG Office Myanmar at Park Royal Hotel. The next day the excitement continued at the Tea Pot Lucky draw at Junction Square. On November 30 Socialite found herself at yet another lucky draw event, this one at Royal Garden restaurant for Premier Coffee. On December 1, she attended the wedding reception for Ko Kyaw Lin and actress Chaw Yadana at Sedona Hotel, and then went to the Myanmar Convention Centre for the SCG Build with Pride 2012 event. She ended the week the following day at the Kanebo product launch at Sein Gay Har on Pyay Road.



Prize winner U Wan Maung and MAI staff @ Myanmar Times Lucky Draw Award Event



Ma Sandar and Ma Amy Aye Thet @ Myanmar Times Lucky Draw Award Event



Daw Shin Ei (second right) and OSIM staff @ Myanmar Times Lucky Draw Award Event



Ma Nita, Daw Han Maysi Kyaw and Ma Thet Su Aye @ Myanmar Times Lucky Draw Award Event



MT's marketing group @ Myanmar Times Lucky Draw Award Event

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Chinese tourists disembark from a bus at the Ginza shopping district in Tokyo on December 2. Pic: AFP

Island row takes bite out of Japan tourism

By Kyoko Hasegawa

TOKYO – The sound of Mandarin-speaking tourists and the cash tills they set ringing have become rare in Tokyo’s upmarket Ginza district, retailers say, since a flare-up in an island row between China and Japan.

“Until September, we had many Chinese customers and you could hear Chinese spoken in our shop,” said Mika Nakatsugawa, who trains clerks at cosmetic firm Shiseido’s flagship outlet in Ginza, the Japanese capital’s equivalent of Fifth Avenue in New York.

“Then they suddenly stopped coming. This month, some customers are coming back, but it’s very slow and nothing like before.”

The number of Chinese tourists – one of Japan’s biggest visitor groups behind South Koreans and Taiwanese – plunged 33 percent in October from a year ago to 71,000 visitors, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization.

And the figure from last year was already weak with tourism still reeling from the March quake-tsunami disaster and subsequent atomic crisis, which sparked a dive in overall visitor numbers.

As airlines cancelled thousands of flights between Japan and China when the long-standing diplomatic row flared in September, Ginza’s upscale retailers soon found that once-jammed Chinese tour buses were nowhere to be seen.

To make matters worse, Chinese tourists, on average, spend more than US\$2100 during their visits to Japan, on top of their airfare, among the highest of any nationality, according to Japan Tourism Agency data.

The flare-up in the decades-long row over an East China Sea island chain sparked a consumer boycott of Japanese products in China and huge demonstrations, prompting Japanese firms operating there to temporarily close stores and factories

fearing mob violence. Tokyo’s nationalisation in September of the disputed islands – located in rich fishing grounds and believed to sit atop vast mineral reserves – came at a particularly bad time. Ginza retailers were hoping for hordes of shoppers during a week-long Chinese holiday in October but the spat kept them away.

“Shops in Ginza have been hugely damaged by the diplomatic fight, as everyone had been preparing for shopping sprees,” said Nakatsugawa at Shiseido. “I want the politicians to know the economic impact of this has been big.”

The damage has rippled across Japan’s economy and damaged a more than \$340 billion annual trade relationship with Beijing.

Japan’s automakers and electronics firms have seen their China sales take a huge hit, with the country’s two biggest airlines – Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways – reporting a steep dive in ticket sales.

And Japan’s goal to boost tourist numbers to a record nine million this year has suddenly become a “very hard” target, said Norifumi Ide, head of the Japan Tourism Agency.

Not far from the Shiseido outlet, luggage store manager Koichi Miwa echoed the grim statistics, saying a big part of his customer base just “disappeared”.

“The number of Chinese customers literally turned to zero at one point,” Miwa said.

Chinese shoppers often splurge on a large number of products to dole out to family, friends and colleagues, retailers said.

Yamada Denki, one of Japan’s biggest consumer electronics chains, said some of its outlets in Tokyo’s Akihabara district saw a decline in such deep-pocketed customers.

“But our rivals, who pay a commission to tourism agencies to bring in Chinese tourists, may have had a bigger negative impact than us,” a company spokesman said. – AFP

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT SCHEDULES

DAYS	Flight	Dep	Arr	DAYS	Flight	Dep	Arr	DAYS	Flight	Dep	Arr	DAYS	Flight	Dep	Arr	
YANGON TO BANGKOK				YANGON TO BEIJING				YANGON TO FRANKFURT				FRANKFURT TO YANGON				
MON	PG 706	07:15	09:30	TUE	CA 906	14:15	21:55	TUE	FD 3772	16:50	17:35	Tue	DE 2368	12:40	04:25	
	8M 335	08:40	10:25	WED	CA 906	14:15	21:55		PG 703	17:05	17:55	KAUALA LUMPUR TO YANGON				
	TG 304	09:50	11:45	THUR	CA 906	14:15	21:55		TG 305	17:50	18:45	MON	AK 1424	06:55	08:00	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40	SAT	CA 906	14:15	21:55		8M 332	19:20	20:05		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40	SUN	CA 906	14:15	21:55	TUE	PG 705	20:15	21:30		3K 585	09:10	10:40	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15	YANGON TO GAUNGZHOU					8M 336	06:40	07:25		8M 232	14:10	15:40	
	PG 704	18:45	20:40	MON	CZ 3056	17:40	22:15		FD 3770	07:15	08:00		MI 518	14:20	15:45	
	TG 306	19:40	21:35	TUE	8M 711	08:40	13:15		TG 303	07:55	08:50		8M 234	19:15	20:45	
TUE	PG 706	07:15	09:30	WED	THUR	8M 711	08:40	13:15		PG 701	09:05	09:55		MI 520	22:10	23:35
	8M 335	08:40	10:25	THUR	CA 3056	17:40	22:15		8M 336	10:40	11:25	YANGON TO YANGON				
	TG 304	09:50	11:45	SAT	CZ 3056	17:40	22:15		TG 301	13:00	13:55	MON	AK 1424	06:55	08:00	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40	SUN	8M 711	08:40	13:15		FD 3772	16:50	17:35		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40	YANGON TO TAIPEI					PG 703	17:05	17:55		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15	MON	CI 7916	11:10	16:35		TG 305	17:50	18:45		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	PG 704	18:45	20:40	TUE	CI 7916	11:10	16:35		8M 332	19:20	20:05		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	TG 306	19:40	21:35	WED	BR 288	11:35	17:20		PG 705	20:15	21:30		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
TUE	PG 706	07:15	09:30	THUR	CI 7916	11:10	16:35		8M 336	06:40	07:25		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	8M 335	08:40	10:25	FRI	CI 7916	11:10	16:35		FD 3770	07:15	08:00		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	TG 304	09:50	11:45	SAT	BR 288	11:35	17:20		TG 303	07:55	08:50		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40	SUN	CI 7916	11:10	16:35		PG 701	09:05	09:55		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40	YANGON TO KUNMING					8M 336	10:40	11:25		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15	MON	MU 2032	14:40	17:55		TG 301	13:00	13:55		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	PG 704	18:45	20:40	TUE	CA 906	14:15	17:35		FD 3772	16:50	17:35		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 306	19:40	21:35	WED	MU 2032	14:40	17:55		PG 703	17:05	17:55		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
TUE	PG 706	07:15	09:30	THUR	CA 906	14:15	17:35		TG 305	17:50	18:45		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	8M 335	08:40	10:25	FRI	MU 2032	14:40	17:55		8M 332	19:20	20:05		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 304	09:50	11:45	SAT	CA 906	14:15	17:35		PG 705	20:15	21:30		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40	SUN	MU 2032	14:40	17:55		8M 336	06:40	07:25		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40	YANGON TO KOLKATA					FD 3770	07:15	08:00		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15	MON	AI 234	14:05	17:10		TG 303	07:55	08:50		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	PG 704	18:45	20:40	TUE	AI 234	14:05	17:10		PG 701	09:05	09:55		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	TG 306	19:40	21:35	WED	AI 228	18:45	19:45		8M 336	10:40	11:25		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
TUE	PG 706	07:15	09:30	THUR	W9 7607	14:50	16:20		TG 301	13:00	13:55		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	8M 335	08:40	10:25	SUN	W9 9607	14:50	16:20		FD 3772	16:50	17:35		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	TG 304	09:50	11:45	YANGON TO CHIANG MAI					PG 703	17:05	17:55		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40	MON	VN 956	19:10	21:30		TG 305	17:50	18:45		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40	TUE	VN 956	19:10	21:30		8M 332	19:20	20:05		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15	WED	VN 956	19:10	21:30		PG 705	20:15	21:30		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	PG 704	18:45	20:40	THUR	VN 956	19:10	21:30		8M 336	10:40	11:25		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	TG 306	19:40	21:35	FRI	VN 956	19:10	21:30		TG 301	13:00	13:55		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
TUE	PG 706	07:15	09:30	SUN	VN 956	19:10	21:30		FD 3770	07:15	08:00		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	8M 335	08:40	10:25	YANGON TO HO CHI MINH					TG 303	07:55	08:50		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	TG 304	09:50	11:45	MON	VN 942	14:25	17:10		PG 703	17:05	17:55		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40	TUE	VN 942	14:25	17:10		TG 305	17:50	18:45		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40	THUR	VN 942	14:25	17:10		8M 332	19:20	20:05		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15	SAT	VN 942	14:25	17:10		PG 705	20:15	21:30		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	PG 704	18:45	20:40	SUN	VN 942	14:25	17:10		8M 336	10:40	11:25		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 306	19:40	21:35	YANGON TO GAYA					TG 301	13:00	13:55		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
TUE	PG 706	07:15	09:30	MON	BM 601	09:00	10:20		FD 3772	16:50	17:35		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	8M 335	08:40	10:25	TUE	AI 234	14:05	15:25		PG 703	17:05	17:55		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 304	09:50	11:45	WED	BM 601	09:00	10:20		8M 332	19:20	20:05		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40	FRI	BM 601	09:00	10:20		PG 705	20:15	21:30		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40	SAT	AI 234	14:05	15:25		8M 336	10:40	11:25		MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15	SUN	BM 601	09:00	10:20		TG 301	13:00	13:55		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	PG 704	18:45	20:40	YANGON TO DHHA					FD 3770	07:15	08:00		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
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	8M 335	08:40	10:25	WED	QR 619	08:00	11:45		TG 305	17:50	18:45		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
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	PG 702	10:45	12:40	FRI	QR 619	08:00	11:45		PG 705	20:15	21:30		8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40	SAT	AI 234	14:05	15:25		8M 336	10:40	11:25		AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
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Dave Brubeck's passion for rhythm

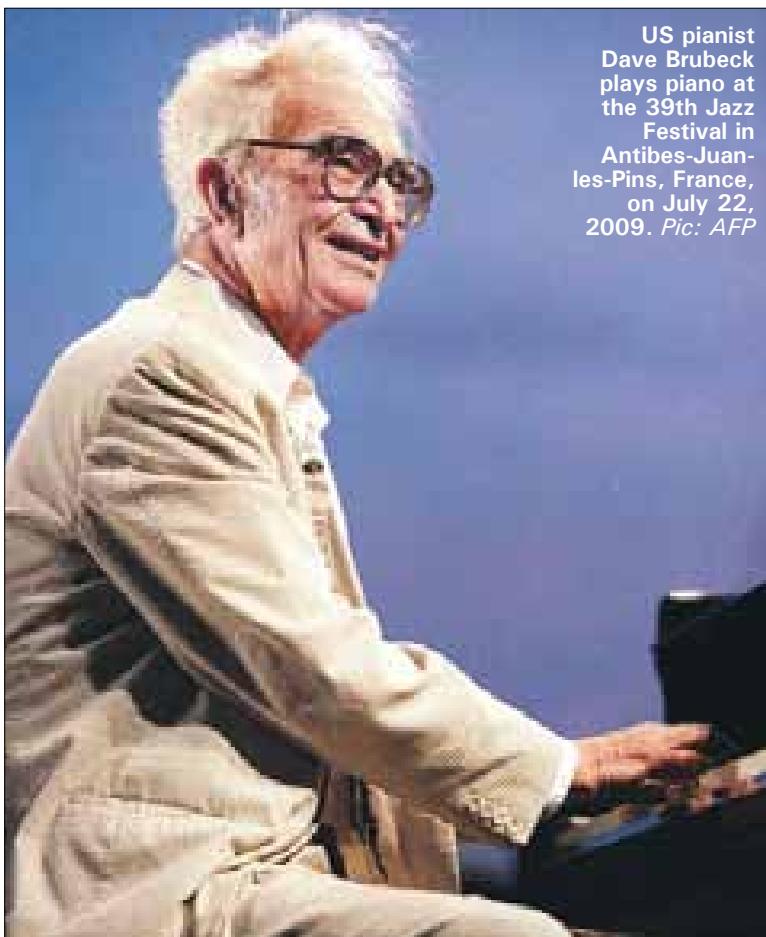
US pianist and composer Dave Brubeck has died at 91. Martin Gayford interviewed Brubeck exactly two years ago in a report republished here:

Nonagenarians just aren't what they used to be.

The start of one's 10th decade used to be a moment for seriously slowing down. The great pianist, composer and bandleader Dave Brubeck, who celebrates his 90th birthday on December 6, has marked the occasion by playing a short season at the Blue Note club in New York and winning the poll in Downbeat magazine for "Jazz Group of the Year".

"Isn't that something?" he exclaimed when I talked to him. This must be a record: It's 60 years since Brubeck and his band first won a Downbeat Poll. What's his secret? He obviously just loves playing music. That's clear from the BBC Arena documentary, *In His Own Sweet Way*, coproduced by Clint Eastwood.

"The worst thing about the life of a jazz musician on the road is getting to the gig," Brubeck says in the phone interview. "Once you're there and playing, it's marvellous. I played two concerts last weekend, and they both went wonderfully. I hadn't played for three months with my group. It was the greatest feeling to be back."



US pianist Dave Brubeck plays piano at the 39th Jazz Festival in Antibes-Juan-les-Pins, France, on July 22, 2009. Pic: AFP

A doctor once advised Brubeck not to retire from performance on the grounds that he plainly looked in better shape after performing than before. He agrees. "I have more energy at the end than I do at the beginning. You can be so beat up that you can scarcely walk on stage but when you get to the piano the excitement kicks in, you forget about being tired."

Energy, intellectual and physical, is one of the identifying marks of Brubeck's music. He has the rhythmic drive of jazz and blues, yet also was at one point, in the 1940s, a pupil of the French composer Darius Milhaud (who, to further complicate this intriguing case of cultural cross-fertilisation, was earlier inspired by jazz). "I learned by osmosis, just from being around him," Brubeck says. "He'd say, 'Dave, you're going to be a composer!' We were good friends."

Another of Brubeck's associations – with the alto saxophone player Paul Desmond (1924-1977) – was one of the most memorable musical partnerships in jazz. Brubeck provided the propulsive power and adventurous complexity; Desmond an airy, melodic grace. "He just wanted to play with me," Brubeck remembers, "and I thought he was the greatest."

The Brubeck Quartet with Desmond wasn't formed until after

Brubeck had a swimming accident at Waikiki Beach in 1950 that almost left him paralysed. Previously, he had been successful with a piano trio, but after the injury Brubeck felt he needed another soloist to share the load.

"It took me months to be able to play again," he says. "I wrote to Paul from the army hospital in Honolulu that if I could get well I would start a quartet, and he carried that note with him in his wallet for the rest of his life."

The combination of Brubeck, Desmond, bass player Eugene Wright and the brilliant drummer Joe Morello formed the classic Brubeck group, which in 1959 made *Time Out*, one of the most famed of jazz recordings. An exploration of such unusual and potentially ungainly time signatures as 9/8 and 5/4, it should have been esoteric, yet was a success (indeed, a platinum disc).

Rhythm, Brubeck has speculated, is the universal human language. The inspiration for some of his most memorable music has been rhythmic. Brubeck's beautiful piece, "The Duke" came to him in 1954 while he was driving his car through the rain. "The beat just fits the rhythm of a windshield wiper going backward and forward," he says.

Then he sings it – and I can hear the pleasure in his voice.

– Bloomberg News

Events Flash

Miniature exhibition group art show

A group art exhibition entitled "Lilliput (2)" is being shown at Culture Bridge Gallery (31 Upper Pazundaung Street, Second Floor) through December 11. Among the 26 artists represented are late realist painters such as Wathone and Bagyi Aung Soe, as well as contemporary artists including CNK (Chan Nyein Kyaw).

Tin Maung Win show

Painter Tin Maung Win will hold his second solo art exhibition at the headquarters of the Myanmar Traditional Arts and Artisans Organisation (187 & 192 East Wing, Bogyoke Market, Yangon), from December 18 to 22. Open daily from 9am to 5pm.

Win Zaw exhibition

Artist Win Zaw is holding his fourth solo show at Art Plus Gallery (161 Bo Son Pat Street, Middle Block, Pabedan township, Yangon) from December 14 to 16. Gallery hours are 9am to 5pm daily.

Landscapes of the Heart paintings

Paintings by Hla Toe are on display in the Reading Room at the French Institute (340 Pyay Road) from December 3 to 22.

French film

The French animated movie *A Monster in Paris* will be shown at the French Institute (340 Pyay Road) on December 21 at 6:30pm. Admission is free, and refreshments and snacks will be served.

Lokanat anniversary art exhibition

Lokanat Art Gallery (62 Pansodan Street, First Floor Kyauktada township) will hold its 42nd Anniversary Art Exhibition from December 5 to 31. The show will feature the work of more than 25 eminent member artists of the gallery. The paintings are in oil, watercolour and acrylic on canvas, and are mostly realist in style.

Golden Valley anniversary show

The Golden Valley Art Centre (54D Golden Valley Road, Bahan township) will celebrate its 25th anniversary by holding an art exhibition from December 6 to 16. The centre is open daily from 9am to 6pm.

Beyond Pressure Art Festival

The Beyond Pressure Art Festival – featuring performance, installation, graffiti and video art – will be held at Karaweik Garden and Sein Lan Soe Pyay Garden in Yangon from December 6 to 10.

Photography workshops

Two free photography workshops will be held at the French Institute (340 Pyay Road) in December. The Introductory Photo Workshop from December 3-8 will be taught in the Myanmar language, and the English-language Advanced Photo Workshop (Dec 12-19) will focus on the creation of narrative photo-essays. The best works produced during the workshops will be shown to the public during the Yangon Photo Festival, scheduled for January 28-February 16, 2013. Register with Didi or Yves-Noël at the French Institute (Tel 01-536-900).

Ongoing

Calle de la Salsa

Tuesday is salsa night at 50th Street Bar, featuring free dance classes (salsa, bachata, mambo, meringue and more), plus dance shows and drink specials. With music by DJ Mani and special guests.

Wednesday wine

The Wednesday Wine Club meets every (you guessed it) Wednesday at the QP Inya Shop (30 Inya Road). Taste four or five wines for K10,000 a person. Contact chad.quarto@gmail.com or 09-7321-8711.

Live music

Friendship Band belts out classic rock tunes at 50th Street Restaurant every Wednesday and Friday night.



YOUR STARS

By Astrologer
Aung Myin Kyaw

Aquarius

(Jan 20 - Feb 18)

It's a good idea to spend a little less time pursuing your own pleasures and more time observing the behaviour of others. Never give up questing after knowledge in your own quiet way, and always continue to develop and research the practice of concentration according to your own rules and discipline.

Pisces

(Feb 19 - Mar 20)

A better balance in your social life is needed to negotiate with old potential partners suffering from depression. Your mind should feel fresh and clear, and the path ahead might seem more discernible than usual. Don't listen to hearsay. Don't act foolishly when it comes to emotional matters. Simple language is required to boost your love life.

Aries

(March 21 - April 19)

Nothing can be done to smooth relations with your siblings, so it's better to just let them live according to their own beliefs. Develop your own rules and social theories for the future and avoid taking on the burdens of others, except those of your beloved. Remain aware that immorality is often preached in the name of morality.

Taurus

(April 20 - May 20)

Eliminate negative thought processes from your mind as soon as possible and avoid using harsh language with your partners. Opportunity requires courage and an optimistic outlook. Social complexity will cause problems with communication. Humility is the way of the wise.

Gemini

(May 21 - June 20)

Words can cut deeper than a sword. You should avoid inhumane behaviour at all costs. Know the value of old friends. Make an effort to clearly understand the needs of your own heart, as well as the desires of those around you. Complex minds never find the simplicity of the truth. Both partners should be responsible for bearing the burden.

Cancer

(June 22 - July 22)

Intelligence must be under the management of wisdom. Determine to perform your duties with self-confidence and in a straightforward manner. Look down at nobody, but instead look up to everyone. A great opportunity will soon be at hand. Love requires courage and responsibility.

Leo

(July 23 - Aug 22)

Taking responsibility is a requirement of leadership. Your optimistic outlook is beautiful enough to encourage and purify the souls of others. Never remain indifferent to your close friends who live far from you. Don't forget the value of time management. Drive yourself by the forces of enthusiasm, even in matters of love.

Virgo

(Aug 23 - Sept 22)

Use a careful, step-by-step strategy rather than a radical all-or-nothing approach. Do not hesitate to pursue higher education, which will form the foundation for future success. Use social communication to become part of the larger world. Human beings have the birthright to love each other without limitation.

Libra

(Sept 23 - Oct 22)

Your logical thinking and harmonious organisation can be used to seed a new garden for spiritual development. With careful planning, you can be a leader of the community. Everything will change for the better according to your right effort and management skills. Waste no time on emotion.

Scorpio

(Oct 23 - Nov 21)

Deprogram yourself from negative thinking. Short, quick and active plans for professional risk are recommended; authorised people are sure to help push you in the right direction. Foreigners might influence your decisions. Change your outlook about your love life.

Sagittarius

(Nov 22 - Dec 21)

Keep in mind that the desires to innovate, improve, create and find a better way are all the characteristics of a leader. Being at the top has its own set of problems and challenges. The amount of responsibility on your shoulders will outweigh the amount of authority you have.

Capricorn

(Dec 22 - Jan 19)

Work to ensure high morale and team spirit among those around you. Cultivate endurance as a quality of your mind, and increase your mental powers and stability by keeping your knowledge flexible and staying courageous. Changeable emotions are not suitable to be called love.

For a personal reading contact Aung Myin Kyaw, 4th Floor, 113, Thamaing Bayan Road, Tamwe Township, Yangon. Tel: 0973135632, Email: williamaste@gmail.com

If you would like your event listed in Event Flash, please email editors@myanmartimes.com.mm.

Indonesia's sports minister resigns amid graft probe

JAKARTA – Indonesia's sports minister stepped down December 7 after being named a suspect in a multi-million-dollar corruption case, in the latest scandal to hit the president's ruling party ahead of 2014 elections.



Sports Minister Andi Mallarangeng announces his resignation at a news conference in Jakarta on December 7. Pic: AFP

Andi Mallarangeng is the first minister to resign on graft allegations since the country's powerful Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) began operating in 2003 with a mandate to crack down on rampant graft.

The case is an embarrassment for President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who won a landslide victory for a second term in 2009 on a corruption-fighting platform.

While the country has shown an improvement in tackling corruption over the past decade, that battle has dwindled in recent years.

This week it slid to 118th of 176 countries ranked by Transparency International's annual index, which rates the least to the most corrupt states.

The Corruption Eradication Commission announced late Thursday that Mallarangeng was a suspect in connection with the construction of a sports centre worth 2.5 trillion

rupiah (\$261 million).

"In relation to the KPK's announcement... I met with the president and handed him my resignation letter as sports minister, effective today," Mallarangeng told reporters, while maintaining his innocence.

Yudhoyono had accepted his resignation, he added.

Mallarangeng also stepped down as secretary of the Democratic Party, the party's third-highest position.

"I don't want to become a burden for the president and the cabinet. The wheels of the government must keep

turning, and my personal legal matters are my responsibility," he said.

The KPK asked authorities to ban Mallarangeng from travelling pending an investigation.

The Hambalang sports centre was built on the outskirts of the capital, Jakarta, in a tender process that has been publicly questioned.

"Suspicions about me and the things levelled at me in the media are not true. Since becoming minister, in my whole professional career, I've always tried to do things as well and straight as possible," Mallarangeng said.

The KPK has named several members of Yudhoyono's Democratic Party as suspects in various cases in the recent years, threatening the ruling party's position ahead of mid-year elections in 2014.

The KPK this year prosecuted the party's former treasurer Muhammad Nazaruddin over a separate sports graft case.

Suspicions around the Hambalang case grew in July 2011, when Nazaruddin, then a fugitive, told local media by phone that the construction contracts for the project had been decided before the tender process.

-AFP

NHL talks stall again as league rejects offer



Hockey fans protest the National Hockey League (NHL) lockout outside the NHL offices in New York City on December 1. The NHL and the NHL Players' Association have been at a stalemate in brokering a new collective bargaining agreement leaving teams locked out for over 75 days. Pic: AFP

NEW YORK – Talks between owners and players to end the National Hockey League (NHL) lockout stalled again on December 6, quashing optimism that had built during the week that a shortened season could yet be saved.

After marathon meetings on December 4 and December 5 had offered a glimmer of hope to NHL fans, the league rejected a proposal by players and talks between the battling sides were suspended indefinitely.

"Regrettably, we have been unable to close the divide on some critical issues that we feel are essential to the immediate and long-term health of our game," Winnipeg Jets chairman Mark Chipman said in a statement.

"While I sense there are some members of the players association that understand our perspective on these issues, clearly there are many that don't. I am deeply disappointed that we were unable to bring this extremely unfortunate situation to a successful conclusion and I wish to apologize to our fans and sponsors for letting them down."

Both sides have been deadlocked on how to divide US\$3.3 billion in revenue since their collective bargaining agreement expired on September 15.

The work stoppage has already forced the cancellation of regular-season games through December 14. That's 422 regular-season games, 34.3 percent of a season that was to have started on October 11.

Also cancelled are two marquee events: the annual outdoor Winter Classic and the All-Star Game.

The longer the stalemate continues, the greater the prospect that it will cost the

entire season -- as when the 2004-05 season was wiped out in a labor dispute.

Last week, a federal mediator met with both sides for two days before concluding that they were too far apart for mediation to succeed.

But after groups of players and owners had met for a total of almost 20 hours over the past two days, reportedly exchanging new proposals, it appeared they might have finally found some common ground.

Pittsburgh Penguins co-owner Ron Burkle said it was a good idea to put players and owners together to talk -- without their lead negotiators -- but in the end he said the latest players' counter-offer didn't go far enough to address owners' concerns.

"We made substantial movement on our end quickly, but unfortunately that was not met with the same level of movement from the other side," Burkle said, adding that at one point there was optimism "that we were down to very few issues."

"I believe a deal was within reach," he added.

NHL Players Association executive director Don Fehr told reporters the sides could be close to an agreement.

But union special counsel Steve Fehr, his brother, then received a voicemail from NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly, rejecting the union's proposal, causing Don Fehr to backtrack and tell reporters: "It looks like this is not going to be resolved in the immediate future."

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said no further meetings were scheduled.

"I am disappointed beyond belief that we are where we are tonight and we're going to have to take a deep breath and regroup," he said. -AFP

\$5450 auction benefits young tennis players

A CHARITY auction at a Tennis Federation of Myanmar event in Yangon last week raised US\$5450 to help promote the sport among young people.

After some spirited bidding starting at \$1000, the top price paid for apparel autographed by internationally ranked players was \$2250 for a light jacket signed by ATP World Tour player, Aisam Qureshi.

Qureshi, one of the world's top doubles players, had earlier given the keynote address at the Pro-Am fund raising dinner held at the federation's Theinbyu Road

centre on December 7.

The other auctioned clothing was T-shirts, with one autographed by Andy Murray fetching the highest price of \$1400.

Announcing the total amount raised, guest auctioneer Richard Koe of Singapore said: "This will benefit a lot of young tennis players."

Apart from Qureshi, other speakers at the event included the president of the TFM, U Aung Maw Thein, and the federation's technical director, Mr Robert Davis.

-Geoffrey Goddard

Federer targets Rio Olympics

SAO PAULO – Roger Federer wants to play at the 2016 Rio Olympics and will cut back his schedule in an effort to extend his shelf life.

The 17-time Grand Slam title winner will be 35 by the time the Rio Games come around, but the Swiss world number two remains without a gold medal in singles having been defeated by Andy Murray in the London Olympics final this year.

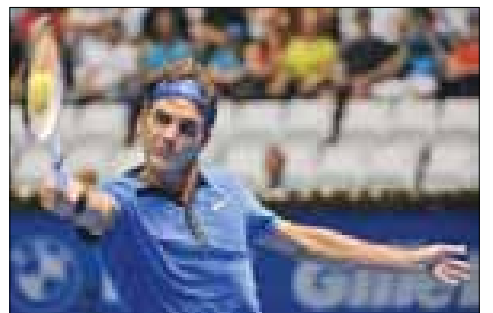
He was a gold medallist in doubles in Beijing in 2008.

"My goal is to be here again in three and a half years to play the Rio Olympics," said Federer on Thursday, ahead of a series of exhibition matches in Brazil.

Federer will play 14 events in 2013, beginning at the season's first Grand Slam event at the Australian Open in Melbourne, but will skip the Miami Masters and Monte Carlo Masters.

"I'm trying to prioritize the events in which I participate, therefore I am not able to play 25 tournaments in a year," he told the Folha newspaper.

"I am picking just those already won or to which I have a sentimental attachment, either with the people or with the city."



Roger Federer hits a return against Thomaz Bellucci of Brazil during an exhibition match at the Ibirapuera Gymnasium in Sao Paulo on December 6. Pic: AFP

Federer will share the exhibition tour in Brazil with home player Thomaz Bellucci, Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, Germany's Tommy Haas and Spain's Tommy Robredo, Victoria Azarenka, Maria Sharapova and Serena Williams are also part of the tour.

"I'm very excited to be here. I have waited for this for years. I have travelled almost every day of my life. I was not able to come here until now," Federer told the Globo website. -AFP

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TIMESSPORT

Myanmar cricket struggles for survival

By Tony Yoo

MYANMAR cricket is fighting for its future.

"In November the boys trained for four to five hours each day, with no sleep and not enough food", Myanmar national team duty supervisor U Hla Oo said. "But I worry it's not enough."

This week in Thailand, Myanmar is playing in the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Trophy Challenge. With the sport in a delicate state in this country the team realises their performance will have consequences back at home.

"The result of this tournament is very important", said U Hla Oo in Yangon before the side departed. The squad has been preparing since March this year, with training intensifying the past month.

The Myanmar Cricket Federation (MCF) desperately wants to give the sport a promotional push next year by having the team play in

front of a home crowd at the South East Asian Games. However that vision will be in jeopardy without good performances in northern Thailand.

Future funding from the ACC is directly tied to the placing in this competition.

The tournament runs through Thursday December 13 across three venues in Chiang Mai. Seven teams from the third tier of Asian cricket nations are competing. Myanmar has been placed in Group B along with Bahrain, Qatar and China. Group A sees Thailand, Singapore, and Iran jostle.

The top two teams in each group will advance to the semi finals, with the final to be played at Traidhos Oval. But the trip is off to a rough start, Myanmar lost to Qatar by eight wickets after mustering only 54 in its innings on December 7.

This is Myanmar's third ACC Trophy Challenge tournament. The 2009 and 2010 events saw the team beaten soundly by more experienced

nations. The national team is currently ranked 18th in Asia. The coach is a former professional cricketer from Bangladesh, Ashfaqul-Islam.

Cricket is an internationally popular sport. Its World Cup enjoys the third largest global television audience after the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup, according to the Wisden cricket almanac. Players from all over the world are recruited by the Indian Premier League on contracts worth millions of US dollars to play in packed stadiums.

Such is the globalisation of the sport that China has recently embarked on an aggressive programme to develop its domestic scene. The authorities there view cricket as a way of competing for "soft" power with its Asian rival India.

Starting from almost a zero player base in 2004, the Chinese Cricket Association aims to qualify for the World Cup by 2019, according to

ESPN CricInfo. China's first ever international victory came against Myanmar in the 2009 ACC Trophy Challenge.

Despite fever-pitch adoration of the game in neighbouring India and Bangladesh, and the massive investment in China, in Myanmar cricket has struggled for acceptance as anything more than an imperial relic.

British officials played cricket in Myanmar during the colonial era. European teams and even the historic Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) toured the country in the early 20th century.

"[It] was a pre-test tour to India for the most part," MCC spokesperson Neil Robinson told *The Myanmar Times* by e-mail of the two matches played in Yangon in 1927. "There don't seem to have been any actual Burmese playing for Burma or Rangoon Gymkhana. The three non-English players on the national team appear to be Indian Muslims."

The sport died out after independence, but the last decade has seen an attempted revival. Aside from expatriate activities, the last few years the MCF has been promoting the game throughout Myanmar via schools. This year saw eight boys teams and six girls teams from all over the country participate in youth competitions, said U Hla Oo.

Myanmar was admitted to the ACC in 2005 and the International Cricket Council (ICC) in 2006. Last December saw a dedicated ground for the sport constructed at Saw Pong, on the outskirts of Yangon.

The match against China on Monday is a big occasion for the national team. U Hla Oo predicted that is the most realistic chance of Myanmar securing its first ever international win at senior level. He said he was proud that the current team consists of all Myanmar-born players, and that would make any success even sweeter.

UEFA plans for Euro 2020 to take place across Europe

LAUSANNE - UEFA's executive committee has given the green light to holding the European championships in 2020 across the continent, the ruling body's secretary-general Gianni Infantino said on December 6.

Former French captain Michel Platini, who is president of UEFA, first mooted the idea of holding the tournament in a number of cities earlier this year, as a way of avoiding high costs at a time of dire financial constraints in many countries.

"UEFA Euro 2020 will be staged across the continent, in various major cities, following a decision taken today," said Infantino, calling the tournament in eight years' time "A Euro for Europe".

The response has been extremely positive from all the national associations, he added, apart from Turkey.

But there was widespread disbelief among many fans on Twitter, in particular over the potential cost of travelling to watch games in a number of countries.



UEFA president France's Michel Platini during the year's last meeting football's European governing body on December 6 in Lausanne. UEFA's executive committee has given the green light to holding the European championships in 2020 across the continent. Pic: AFP

"Meanwhile, the chief execs of (low cost airlines) Ryanair and Easyjet are jumping for joy," noted one user.

Others said that the idea of not having a single host nation would ruin the atmosphere of the tournament, which is football's second-biggest after the World Cup but considered among purists to be of a higher overall standard.

A decision to award Qatar the 2022 World Cup has already caused disquiet among fans, especially with the tournament being held in the searing heat of a Gulf summer.

Infantino said he was not in a position to say how many countries and cities would be involved but if the project was ready in January, it would

be rubber-stamped then or at the executive committee meeting on March 23.

Cities were likely to be chosen in early 2014 - six years before the start of the tournament, he added.

Turkey, which has put itself forward as a candidate for 2020 alongside Azerbaijan and Georgia and a three-way bid from the Republic of

Ireland, Wales and Scotland, was the only country opposed to the project.

Istanbul is also a candidate to host the Olympic Games in the same year, although the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has said that having one country host two major events so close to each other is against its rules.

FIFA secretary-general Jerome Valcke, speaking in a personal capacity, said last week that he failed to grasp the concept of a continent-wide tournament, saying it would destroy the competition.

Platini said before the eve of this year's Euro finals that the 60th anniversary of the competition, which is held every four years, could involve "12 or 13 cities across Europe" and that most of the 53 UEFA federations were in favour.

Central to his argument was that it would make organisation easier, after serious concerns about cost overruns and infrastructure delays in this year's hosts

Poland and particularly Ukraine.

This year's competition was the first time that the championships had been held behind the former Iron Curtain and the decision for the 2020 tournament also breaks new ground.

Euro 2016 is scheduled to take place in 10 cities across France but there are already concerns about the progress of new or refurbished grounds, particularly in the northern Lens and eastern Lyon.

The draw for the qualifying campaign for Euro 2016 will take place in the Mediterranean city of Nice on March 9, 2014.

The qualifying phase for the tournament, which will be expanded from the current 16 teams to 24, will run from September 2014 to November 2015.

The venue for the final has not yet been chosen, although it is likely to be held at the Stade de France, in Saint-Denis, just north of Paris and scene of France's 1998 World Cup triumph over Brazil. - AFP

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