



**'India has a crucial role to play in regional stability'**

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President U Thein Sein speaks during the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi on December 20. Pic: AFP

## ICRC jail visits to resume in early 2013

Government has agreed to respect ICRC standards, says country rep

By Nan Tin Htwe and Tony Yoo

INTERNATIONAL Committee of the Red Cross expects to resume prison visits in early 2013, its representative in Myanmar said last week, after a gap of more than seven years.

"We are talking with the Ministry of Home Affairs about organising the resumption of the visits. The government made [a] public statement it will resume, reopen access to prisoners for ICRC. Basically, we are in the process of working out with Ministry of Home Affairs how we are going to do it," ICRC resident representative Mr Georges Paclisanu told *The Myanmar Times* on December 17.

"What is clear is government has agreed to respect ICRC standards, which are applied worldwide," he said.

He said ICRC would work with prisoners and prison authorities and avoid political issues.

"Our main focus is not to [judge] whether a man or woman is rightfully in prison ... Our focus is to see that the spirit of international laws respected," Mr Paclisanu said.

The ICRC was forced to suspend prison visits in 2005 because the government insisted its staff be accompanied by officials from government-linked organisations. However, in November the government said in a statement that it would once again grant ICRC access to prisoners. ICRC has also been able to undertake infrastructure projects in the prison system,

including "installing sewage systems, solar power and access to groundwater in many of the country's prisons", the statement from the President's Office said.

Mr Paclisanu said the visits would be permitted at prisons throughout the country once a trial visit is conducted.

"I can't give you the date even though I'm fairly sure that authorities would agree with that date. We have to confirm it with them ... [but] it does mean January or February but not June," he said.

"Quite frankly I'm fairly optimistic that it's going to work. If it's not, we will work on fixing what does not work.

"Our job is not to tell the detainees [and the] authorities, 'That is wrong, fix it.' Our job is also to go see what are the points that need to be worked on, what can be done and find tangible solutions to work it out."

While he said the decision was "very good" for ICRC, Mr Paclisanu would not be drawn on its broader significance for the country and its political situation.

"We cannot pass judgement on political issues - whether the country is going in the right direction or not. But from the standpoint of our work it is very good. It's a fact that three years ago we cannot go into prison. Now we have received the clearance. Only a foolish person would not recognise that. We are happy with the step that has been taken by the government in regards of our access to prisons."

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## Myingyan officials under fire over ward voting

By Si Thu Lwin

TOWNSHIP officials in Mandalay Region's Myingyan township are under pressure to re-hold elections for some ward administrator posts in the township after residents complained of interference and a lack of transparency.

Residents in Myingyan's 20 wards showed much more enthusiasm for the vote than in Mandalay, with candidates even conducting

campaigns to win votes from their neighbours, observers said.

But the excitement also led to some disputes over how the elections were conducted, with complaints emerging from seven wards, residents told *The Myanmar Times* last week.

"The representatives for groups of 10 households (*seh eain mu*) carried out the election correctly at the beginning, but then they didn't show the number of

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votes at the end. They also said there were invalid ballots but they refused to show the ballots. So it was not a fair process," said U Aung Than, one of the candidates for ward administrator in No 9 ward.

"So we put a petition with signatures from 24 *seh eain mu* to the township general administration office and they said they will hold the

election again," he said.

Meanwhile, township administrators were forced to halt the election in No 1 ward because participants complained that the five-member supervisory team established to oversee the election had tried to influence the result.

"The supervisory team asked residents to select the *seh eain mu* that they wanted, not the ones that the



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Labourers work at the construction site of a football stadium in Nay Pyi Taw. Pic: AFP

## SEA Games: breaking the budget?

By Tim McLaughlin and Aung Si Hein

OFFICIALS in Nay Pyi Taw are understandably eager to show off the new stadiums that are to serve as the centrepieces of the Southeast Asian Games next year – just don't ask about the price tag.

Three enormous venues are nearing completion in Nay Pyi Taw, rising out of the flat plains of the sprawling, low-density capital. In January 2010, U Zaw Zaw's Max Myanmar began building the sporting complex in Zabuthiri township, including a multi-use indoor stadium, aquatics centre and 30,000-seat football stadium. Across the road is the games village that will host thousands of athletes and officials from the nine other ASEAN nations and Timor-Leste taking part in the 27<sup>th</sup> SEA Games, which will open on December 11, 2013.

A 30-minute drive from the venues and village, coaches at a training facility opened in 2011 are preparing 800 of the country's best athletes. A countdown calendar posted on the wall serves as a constant reminder of the dwindling days until competition begins.

Away from Nay Pyi Taw, a sailing facility is being constructed at Ngwe Saung Beach for yachting events, while facilities in Yangon are also being overhauled. In Mandalay's Chanmyartharsiri township, Max Myanmar is building yet another stadium, which will be used for the women's football games.

But the facilities in Yangon, Mandalay and Ngwe Saung are all serving as secondary sites to

Nay Pyi Taw.

It is clear that officials are keen to use the international event to showcase Myanmar's often criticised capital, known for its inaccessibility and grandiose monuments to the military.

The bookends of the SEA Games, the opening and closing ceremonies, will take place in Nay Pyi Taw. Organisers have traditionally used the ceremonies to emphasise national unity.

The Nay Pyi Taw football stadium is the venue nearest to completion; Deputy Minister for Sport U Thaug Htike said the stadium is 90 to 95 percent finished.

While the bill for the stadium

team winning its way through to the gold medal match. While that seems improbable given the teams recent travails, the deputy minister said he is confident at least that the stadium will be near to capacity.

"When Myanmar goes to the football final 100,000 people from Yangon, from Mandalay, from Nay Pyi Taw will be coming," he said with a laugh.

While track that encircles the field still needs to be surfaced and a few other finishing touches are yet to be added, project engineer U Aye Lwin Aung said he is confident that all will be completed by December 31. The two other venues in the complex are to be

put a firm figure on the budget because responsibilities are shared between 13 sub-committees.

When *The Myanmar Times* contacted the Ministry of Finance and Revenue last week, both a budget director and an assistant director declined to comment. They directed inquiries back to the Ministry of Sports.

Calls to Max Myanmar's Yangon headquarters were redirected to Nay Pyi Taw. Representatives from the company there also declined comment.

The lack of financial transparency over the games is a potential cause for concern, particularly given the country's budget deficit and the pressure on the government to

2010 Youth Olympic Games, the \$85 million budget ballooned to \$317 million.

But Pyithu Hluttaw representatives were less reticent with information on the SEA Games budget. U Aye Mauk of Mahlaing constituency said the parliament had so far approved about K340 billion (US\$400 million) in spending and would consider allocating more money if requested.

"In my opinion, we have already allocated enough money to the SEA Games ... but if further funding is needed, the hluttaw will also sanction it. The necessary funds were given to provide athletes with facilities to raise their spirits," U Aye Mauk said, adding that it was important the government "makes optimum use of the money".

The hluttaw has already slashed funding for some proposed venues in Pyin Oo Lwin and Yamethin and U Thein Nyunt of Thingangyun said that while the games are "very important" the country could not afford to burden itself with debt for the sake of a sporting competition.

"Because the country is poor ... we should [host the games] in the right fashion. We should not forget that the income of 26 out of every 100 citizens is below US\$1 a day," he said.

"Sixty million people will suffer the adverse effects of this debt. Therefore, long-term management is needed to ensure we get the most from the money spent," he said.

"For example, after the event we should consider using buildings that will be used to accommodate athletes to look after people who are facing housing difficulties."

### 'Sixty million people will suffer the adverse effects of this debt.'

is not known, it boasts numerous touches of extravagance. The VIP entrance features a mirrored wall overlaid with ornate woodcarvings. Team lounges have hardwood floors. The suite for visiting dignitaries is lined with rows of plush seats that provide a panoramic view of the pitch. The floor of the reception room for special guests is covered in a layer of lush carpet, which remains covered in plastic to protect it from the fine dust created by the sanding, sawing and scraping of the 700 employees rushing to have the stadium ready by the December 31 deadline.

A 30 foot by 60 foot television screen hangs at one end of the field. U Thaug Htike said he hoped that it would be showing highlights of the Myanmar national football

finished shortly thereafter, he said.

But while everyone is happy to show how preparations are moving forward, no one is willing to say just how much this complex or the SEA Games as a whole will cost Myanmar.

U Aye Lwin Aung said that he was unaware of the cost or budget of the football stadium, the construction project that he is overseeing. "We are just the workers," he said. "We don't know the cost."

U Thaug Htike was also evasive when pressed on the budget for the games.

"It is not our responsibility," he said. "You better go to [Ministry of] Finance and Revenue and ask them."

He said that it was hard to

increase social spending.

Recent SEA Games have been plagued by overspending and busted budgets that have strained the finances of regional and national governments. When Indonesia staged the games in 2011, the budget ballooned out to a reported 3 trillion rupiah (US\$319 million).

Singapore, which will host the SEA Games in 2015, after Myanmar, has already pledged to keep a tight rein on games-related spending.

"We are keeping a very tight watch over the entire budget," Acting Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, Chan Chun Sing said in July.

Singapore has recent experience with international sporting events to draw on: when it hosted the

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Company looking to compromise, say miners

By Pyae Thet Phylo

PROTESTING miners from Yamethin township are confident of reaching a settlement soon with Myanmar National Prosperity Company, a leader of the group said last week.

The 76 miners from the Moehti Moemi region were seeking K2 billion (about US\$2.4 million) from the company, which had offered only K500,000 to K1 million to each person. However, during a meeting at the office of Mining Enterprise 2 in Yamethin township last week, the company promised to review its offer and indicated it wanted to reach a settlement, said Ko Aung Gyi.

"We discussed it for two days, on December 17 and 18. It came to our knowledge that [Myanmar National Prosperity] will form a panel and decide [on a settlement]," he said.

"We are making the demands for 76 people. It took from six months to one year to dig and discover gold and a large sum of money has been invested. So our demand is fair."

The dispute erupted in June, when the miners allege Myanmar National Prosperity violated the terms of an agreement it reached with people who were already mining in the area. The agreement, signed in September 2011, saw Myanmar National Prosperity form a joint venture with miners already working in the area, said miner Ko Hlaing Myo Aung.

Under an agreement with the government, the company is required to provide 5,577 tonnes of gold to the state over five years, Ko Hlaing Myo Aung said. — *Translated by Thit Lwin*

## Thilawa to open in 2015, govt touts job creation

By Soe Sandar Oo

THE development of the Thilawa Special Economic Zone will create new jobs and aid poverty alleviation efforts, a senior government official said last week at the signing of an agreement between Myanmar and Japan to start developing the zone next year.

The Memorandum of Cooperation will strengthen ties between Myanmar and Japan through the development of the Thilawa SEZ, one of the three zones under construction in Myanmar, Deputy Minister for National Planning and Economic Development U Set Aung said at the signing ceremony in Yangon on December 21.

"The special economic zones are going to contribute towards economic and social development in the country. There are going to be many benefits and some of these benefits will include enormous employment opportunities at every level of society," he said.

The Thilawa SEZ is in Yangon Region's Thanlyin township. Under the agreement, work will begin on the 6000-acre project next year. A port and industrial park will be operating in 2015, Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) said.

Tokyo has already written off massive debts owed by Myanmar and Japanese media last month said it would pledge a fresh US\$615 million in loans, a significant portion for the Thilawa project — although no final figures have been released.

U Set Aung said the zone will create employment for Myanmar working abroad illegally and also rural poor who migrate to Yangon.

"Internal migrants are very important and we have to accommodate them ... we are concentrating on rural development and poverty reduction in Yangon Region. We need to create employment opportunities for rural migrants," U Set Aung said.

U Set Aung added that developers of the Thilawa zone needed to take into account both the social and environmental effects of the



Deputy Minister for National Planning and Economic Development U Set Aung and Japan's Vice Minister for Economy, Trade and Industry Mr Nobuhiko Sasaki shake hands after signing an agreement to develop the Thilawa Special Economic Zone in Yangon on December 21. Pic: Boothee

project.

"We have to find an equal balance for development. The three pillars of sustainable development are economic, social and environmental. We have to take all three into serious consideration," he said.

"We will do so through the implementation of the MoC in the Thilawa SEZ. The MoC not only signifies our economic cooperation with Japan, but also the friendship between our two countries."

U Set Aung said the project would be important for helping Myanmar catch up to other countries in the region following decades of isolation.

"Now, we have to do something for our country, especially for our economic and social development. We can achieve this through

the Thilawa SEZ project. The SEZs require us to develop new technologies and are a proper mechanism to lead the country towards economic reform and accelerate our development," he said.

METI vice minister Mr Nobuhiko Sasaki said the Thilawa project will be successful if Myanmar and Japan concentrate on sustainable development and invite as many investors as possible.

"The project will surely contribute to economic development and the creation of jobs in Myanmar," he said.

Mr Sasaki added that a strong marketing strategy will be necessary to attract foreign investment. — *With AFP*

US to open military ties soon, says official

WASHINGTON — The United States is poised to take "nascent steps" to resume military ties with Myanmar as a way of bolstering political reforms undertaken by the former pariah state, a senior US defence official said last week.

The Pentagon said the cooperation likely would take the form of "non-lethal" training for Myanmar officers focusing on humanitarian assistance, military medicine and defence "reform," the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told reporters on December 19.

"We're looking at nascent steps on the US-Burmese military-military relationship. We generally support the proposition that carefully calibrated, appropriately targeted and scoped military-to-military contact is effective in advancing overall reform efforts in Burma," the official said.

"The bottom line is we're interested, we're looking at ways to move forward and I think you'll see appropriately calibrated steps in the near future," he said.

Relations between the two countries have undergone a dramatic change since the change to a civilian government in March 2011.

US President Barack Obama's historic visit last month to Yangon underscored the transformation, as both Washington and Myanmar see benefits to bolstering diplomatic and security ties.

The Obama administration, seeking a strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific to counter Beijing's role, is keen to expand its influence in a country where China has had almost unchallenged dominance.

Officials said in October that the United States was willing to allow Myanmar to participate as an observer in major joint exercises in Thailand in 2013, an event that includes military teams from the US and Asian allies.

Senior US military officers and civilian defence officials were part of a US government delegation that held talks in Myanmar in October, opening the door to a defence dialogue. — *AFP*

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# Ward administrator selection process prompts complaints

By Kyaw Hsu Mon

POLITICIANS and residents have reported administrative problems and cheating in elections for ward and village-tract administrators, which are being held throughout the country this month.

The problems, mostly between organising commissions and residents, have emerged in Yangon, Mandalay and some rural townships. Under the Ward and Village-tract Administration Law, residents are grouped together into 10-household units. The leaders of the 10 household select a representative, known as *seh eain su*, for their group through secret ballot and the *seh eain su* for the ward or village-tract then select a ward or village-tract administrator. The term of the post is concurrent to the Pyithu Hluttaw.

While some cases of cheating have been reported, Dr Nyo Nyo Thin, a Yangon Region Hluttaw representative from Bahan township, said the main issue was poor record-keeping, which also plagued the April 1

by-elections.

She said in Bahan township the leaders of the ward commissions were given only three to five days to organise lists of residents.

"The main problem is the lack of time for the ward commissions to get the real information about the total number of residents in their area. Many residents are living with temporary family registration documents... so they are not eligible to be a *seh eain su* candidate," she said.

Those who were not included on the list of ward residents had to file a request to the five-member committee overseeing the elections to be added in time for the vote.

U Myint Oo, 65, from 45 ward in Yangon's North Dagon township, said a Union Solidarity and Development Party member in his award had tried to take the *seh eain su* administrator position without a vote.

"After we found out about it, we did not accept him [in the vote for the ward administrator]. The ward elections are the foundation of the democratic system, we should all recognise the importance of this process,"

U Myint Oo said.

People familiar with the process said that not all wards used the secret ballot to select the *seh eain su* representatives and ward administrators. In many cases, it depended on the level of interest from residents: while some embraced the chance to select their administrator through a vote, many have shown little interest.

"In Bahan township, many people have been very active to choose quarter officials and this is a positive sign for the development of the democratic process. These low-level elections are the very basis for democracy so I am very glad to see that people are making the effort to vote," Dr Nyo Nyo Thin said.

"But more time should have been given to collect the updated list of the number of residents in the wards," she said.

Mizzima editor Ko Myo Thant said many people were still not familiar with the new system of selecting administrators and the elections had not been properly publicised.

"There is also very little time for quarter officials to take the

lists of residents. Another thing is people should know what are the rights and responsibilities of the quarter administrator so they can choose the right person," he said.

"We need to take time to practise this law so that the right people are selected in the future. The main weakness is that because of the short timeframe most people do not understand the new law clearly."

U Ba Myint, a member of the election organising committee for Mayangone's No 9 ward, said all administrators had to be chosen by December 25.

"We have to submit the final lists of the quarter administrator to the township office on December 25 and then they will submit them again to the district level. We used the secret voting system in our ward," he said.

"Here, some USDP and NLD members are in the list but they are not representing their party, just standing as individuals. If they are selected to be the ward administrator they have to quit from their parties for this period, after that they can do as they want."

### From page 1

## ICRC

Meanwhile, a senior ICRC official said in a statement earlier this month that the committee is also providing assistance to displaced people in Rakhine State.

Mr Alain Aeschlimann, Southeast Asia head of operations for the ICRC said on December 11 that it had started permanent operations in June in the Rakhine State capital, Sittwe. The region has been hit by two outbreaks of communal violence in the past six months, with hundreds of lives lost and more than 100,000 displaced.

"Together with the Myanmar Red Cross Society, we are providing basic but vital assistance to the sick, wounded and displaced, regardless of their origins," said Mr Aeschlimann,

referring to his organisation's activities in Rakhine State.

"Both organisations are evacuating patients who cannot get to health facilities on their own and giving first aid to the injured. In addition, we are renovating sanitation facilities and supplying water in camps for displaced persons."

However, more recent violence has forced the ICRC to consider an expansion of its operations, he said.

"Following the last outbreak of violence, in October, we are considering a significant increase in our involvement."

He also said ICRC was "very pleased" to be able to resume prison visits.

"[W]e look forward to visiting prisons and other places of

detention," Mr Aeschlimann said. "We intend to start detention visits as soon as possible, rather than sitting in offices discussing the subject."

During the visits, ICRC officials will assess prisoners' welfare, including their living conditions and access to healthcare.

"We can work with the authorities and help them improve the treatment of detainees and conditions of detention," Mr Aeschlimann said.

## Myingyan

residents wanted to select," said ward resident U Myo Han.

However, Myingyan township administrator U Shwe Maun said there are no plans to re-

select ward administrators and the process had been completed democratically. He said he was unaware of any problems during the elections.

The strong participation in ward elections in Myingyan contrasted with those in Mandalay, where residents seemed unexcited about having the opportunity to choose ward administrators. Another noticeable element was the lack of female candidates.

Elections for ward and village-tract administrators in Mandalay Region are to be finished on December 31, state media said.

An estimated 1700 candidates are vying for administrator slots in Mandalay Region. -  
*Translated by Zar Zar Soe*

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# 'Dire need' for data on population: UNFPA

Census information will be important to improve the development and monitoring of national plans

By Ma Ning

CONDUCTING a census in Myanmar is not optional and challenges will be tackled head on through international cooperation, a senior United Nations official told *The Myanmar Times* in Yangon last week.

"There's a dire need to conduct a census in Myanmar in a timely manner," said Mr Mohamed Abdel-Ahad, the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) representative in Myanmar, said on December 19. "After 30 years of not counting the population, the census has become an imperative."

The most recent official census in Myanmar took place in 1983, when regional conflicts rendered parts of the country inaccessible. Since then, population statistics have been based largely on estimates and projections and vary substantially.

"This data is crucial to the development and monitoring of national plans. [A census] provides up-to-date and accurate data about the size, distribution and characteristics of the population and its dynamics such as migration, urbanisation and ageing," Mr Abdel-Ahad said.

The census is likely to benefit Myanmar's election in 2015. Data on population broken down by sex, age and location will help determine the number of eligible voters and the best places for polling stations as well as gauge voter turnouts.

However, Mr Abdel-Ahad emphasised that census data would not be used for voter registration.

"The Union Election Commission is responsible for the establishment of voter registration," said Mr Abdel-Ahad. "We don't want the census to be politicised."

One obstacle for UNFPA is how to effectively engage ethnic minorities in the census, especially those living in conflict-prone areas.

"We are quite aware of this risk. UNFPA has commissioned two experts to conduct risk assessment of the census," Mr Abdel-Ahad said.

He said the government expects to reach agreements with non-state armed groups by the time the census is conducted to grant enumerators access to areas under their control.

"We don't live in an ideal world. Conflict exists and restricted access happens, but we are always prepared to come up with valid statistical methods that will provide data on population of the area that can't be accessed," he said.

To address concerns about the census, an advisory committee including representatives from minority groups will be established to ensure these issues are properly addressed by the government.

"It's not one-way communication; it's two-way communication to allow a dialogue between the local authorities and the public at large," Mr Abdel-Ahad said.

A questionnaire with 41 questions will be available for public review when the pilot census is conducted next year in 20 townships throughout the country, including areas affected by conflict, such as Kachin and Rakhine states.

Enumerators will be trained on how to explain the questionnaire to various ethnic groups and people who are illiterate. In areas where indigenous languages and dialects are spoken, organisers will assign enumerators who can speak the local language.

Questions about household assets are also included in the questionnaire "according to the recommendations of the UN Statistical Commission", Mr Abdel-Ahad said, adding that this was a standard focus in any census.

The estimated cost of the census is US\$58.5 million, of which only \$20 million has been pledged.

"The success of the census will hinge upon the mutual commitment by the government and international development partners," Mr Abdel-Ahad said.

He added that UNFPA commended the flexibility of the government and its willingness to engage various stakeholders.

"The UN is committed to support the census at the highest level," he said. "It is time for the international community to respond positively to the commitment on the part of the government by allocating enough resources and bridging the funding gap."

# Ministry, UN launch project for first census in 30 years

By Geoffrey Goddard

A PROJECT to conduct a census of population and housing next year was launched at an event held jointly by the Ministry of Immigration and Population and the United Nations Population Fund in Yangon on December 14.

The census, which will be the first in Myanmar in 30 years and is expected to cost nearly US\$60 million, comes at a critical time for the country as it embarks on political and economic reform, said a press release issued by the ministry and the UNFPA to mark the event.

Speakers at the event included the Minister for Immigration and Population, U Khin Yi, who highlighted the government's commitment to conducting the census in line with international standards.

They included ensuring confidentiality of personal data, full participation of all groups and individuals and adhering to UN standards on census taking, the press release quoted U Khin Yi as saying.

U Khin Yi acknowledged that there would be some challenges in undertaking the census.

"However, conducting the census is in the national interest," he said. "We will have to overcome all



A government official at the launch. Pic: Supplied/UNFPA

the risks and difficulties with our strong political commitment."

The UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr Ashok Nigam, said the census would compile the biggest and only source of information on the size and distribution of Myanmar's population.

"The census helps us give a voice to the country's remarkable ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity, and plan and deliver services, in particular to the poorest and most vulnerable," Mr Nigam was quoted as saying.

The Department of Population has been preparing for the census since earlier this year through activities such as designing a questionnaire, developing a communication and publicity plan and

setting up the information technology infrastructure, the press release said.

The UNFPA Representative, Mr Mohamed Abdel-Ahad, said the agency would provide technical support and help to ensure adherence to international standards in census taking and assist the government in resource mobilisation.

Mr Abdel-Ahad highlighted the importance of a mutual commitment by the government and international development partners for the success of the census.

Of the estimated cost of \$58.5 million, the government and the UNFPA had committed \$20 million, leaving a funding gap of \$38.5 million, the press release quoted him as saying.

# No end in sight to conflict in Kachin State, says mediator

YANGON - A year after Myanmar's president ordered a halt to military offensives against ethnic minority rebels, fighting rages unabated in the northern state of Kachin as peace talks flounder, a mediator said last week.

"Fighting between the KIO (Kachin Independence Organisation) and the Myanmar military has been happening every day in recent weeks," said Yup Zaw Hkaung, a businessman and peace negotiator between the KIO and the government.

"Both sides say they are defending themselves," he said on December 18, adding that he had met US ambassador to Myanmar Derek Mitchell and two officials from Washington on December 17 to discuss the conflict.

"People are losing their homes and land as they have to flee the fighting," Yup Zaw Hkaung said, calling for mediation by a third party such as the United Nations.

Tens of thousands of people have been displaced since June 2011 when a 17-year ceasefire collapsed.

Several rounds of talks aimed at resolving

the conflict in the country's far north have shown little tangible progress. The KIO is calling for greater political rights and an end to alleged human rights abuses by the army.

"The KIO said it's impossible to have a meeting about the peace process at the moment although the dialogue can be continued later," Yup Zaw Hkaung said.

A member of the KIO's armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), said the rebels had come under attack by military helicopters near their base of Laiza close to the Chinese border, although it was not possible to verify the claim.

He said both sides agreed on the need for another round of talks after the most recent meeting in October, but no date or place had yet been decided. There was no immediate comment from the authorities.

"The government side doesn't have a real commitment," the KIA member said. "We ask for political negotiations, but they don't mention political dialogue. They just want a ceasefire. So it is a huge problem to find a solution." - AFP

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## Kickboxing fans prepare for pint-sized bout at Dagon semis

By Sein Heavy

FANS at this weekend's Dagon Golden Pennant Myanmar traditional boxing semi final will be treated to an unusual curtain-raiser: a bout between dwarves.

The 106.7-centimetre Tapaw, 28, from Hlaingbwe in Kayin State will take on 119.4cm Lapaw, 29, who hails from Pyu in Bago Region. The pair has met a number of times but each bout ended in a draw and they have vowed to fight to a conclusion at the December 23 meet. Tapaw is renowned for his headbutting prowess, while Lapaw prefers the more traditional boxing method of inflicting pain with his fists.

Apart from the novelty match, the December 23 semi-finals of the Dagon series at Thuwanna Indoor Stadium will pit Pho Kay against Thailand's Phankunmat in the first division. In the second division, Tu Tu will take on Tha Pyay Nyo and Phothagyi will face off against Lone Chae Lay.



Boxers Tapaw (left) and Lapaw. Pic: Supplied

The third division bouts will see Ka Nyaw Pho fight Htet Aung take on Naing Win. - Translated by Thit Ye Myint Aung and Hmyar Lwin

## DragonAir to launch Hong Kong flights on Jan 9, MAI to follow

By Zaw Win Than

BUDGET carrier DragonAir will begin offering four flights a week between Hong Kong and Yangon on January 9, the company said last week.

The new service will target both leisure and business travellers, the airline said.

DragonAir chief executive officer Mr Patrick Yeung said the airline had chosen Yangon as its first destination in Myanmar because it is the centre of most of the country's commercial activity and is an important business and communications hub.

"Yangon is an important addition to DragonAir's expanding network in Asia and launching this new destination will further strengthen Hong Kong's position as a leading aviation hub. We see tremendous potential in this market with

both tourism and commercial activities rapidly gaining momentum. We look forward to carrying more passengers between Hong Kong and Myanmar and helping to promote ties between the two places," Mr Yeung said.

The airline will use Airbus A321 aircraft on the route and flights will depart Hong Kong every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

However, DragonAir will not have the route to itself for long: national carrier Myanmar Airways International also plans to launch a Yangon-Hong Kong direct service.

While MAI had said flights would begin by the end of 2012, marketing executive Daw Aye Mra Tha told *The Myanmar Times* last week that the airline was still preparing for the launch. She said discussions with authorities from Hong Kong are continuing and flights would begin "very soon".

## 'Lean and mean' new airline shocks rivals with cut-price fares

Golden Myanmar Airlines to offer Yangon-Mandalay flights for just K27,000 when it launches in January

By Yu Yu Maw

THE domestic air market is set for a dramatic shakeup, with a new entrant planning to offer one-way fares to Mandalay for as little as K27,000 from January.

Golden Myanmar Airlines, a public company established in August, will begin flights on January 11, said Daw Kay Kalayar Aung, the airline's public relations manager. The five private domestic airlines charge about K80,000 for locals on the route and US\$130 for foreigners but Daw Kay Kalayar Aung said Golden Myanmar could offer fares for substantially less because it used a low-cost model.

"Our airfares are very cheap because we are low-cost carrier, not a legacy airline. Our seat costs are low because our organisation structure is lean and mean, with no frills at all. Our management assigns us all to multiple tasks. Most of the cheap fare seats are in advance sales, the rest of our seats will be close to the average fare but we can definitely say we have no expensive seats," she said.

Daw Kay Kalayar Aung said the K27,000 fare was not promotional and would be offered regularly.

"The other airlines have to welcome GMA because we are going to enhance the market demand. We are going to allow everybody to be able to fly. ... We are not looking for a niche market. We are a people-oriented carrier."

Golden Myanmar Airlines will fly the Yangon-Mandalay route nine times a week

using an Airbus A320 with 180 economy-class seats. Passengers will be required to buy food and pay for baggage over a 10-kilogram limit.

The spokesperson from a rival domestic airline said the cheap fares had sent shockwaves through the industry, as the existing airlines all set the same prices. However, he ruled out reducing prices to compete with Golden Myanmar Airlines.

"I think the airline can't afford to keep offering one-way fares of K27,000 in the long-term. Fuel prices are too high for that. We won't reduce our airfares to those levels," he said.

Golden Myanmar Airlines was formed by 15 major investors, including U Khin Maung Aye of CB Bank and Kaung Myanmar Aung Group and U Thein Tun of Myanmar Golden Star. It sells shares to the public for K10,000 each and also has an employee share scheme.

The airline will launch in January with two Airbus A320s and plans to add a new aircraft to its fleet every six months, Daw Kay Kalayar Aung said.

"Due to the market demand we shall extend our routes not only through the Asia region but also to the Middle East, Europe, Japan, Korea, and Australia - even to the United States. We hope we can do that over the next few years."

The head of one travel company said he welcomed the introduction of pricing competition on domestic routes and he hoped to see more low-cost airlines established in future.

"The flight takes approximately one hour and 15 minutes for Yangon to Mandalay so we can easily get by without food. Most travellers don't mind using low-cost carriers," U Tint Naung, managing director of travel company Golden Express.

# SNDP pushes Shan party merger

Concerns that parties will split Shan vote in 2015 election, opening the way for an NLD or USDP victory



SHAN Nationalities Democratic Party leaders say they are open to a merger with a rival Shan party before the 2015 election to better compete against the National League for Democracy and Union Solidarity and Development Party.

Speaking ahead of his party's national convention in Tachileik on January 2-4, SNDP vice chairman U Sai Hsaung Hsi said a merger with the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy was in the interests of the Shan people.

"There are likely to be two Shan parties in Shan State for the 2015 election and if these two merge into one, they will be stronger. They can have enough strength to compete against the two giant parties," he told *The Myanmar Times* last week.

The SNLD, which contested the 1990 election, was deregistered in 2010 but re-registered earlier this year after its leader, U Khun Htun Oo, was released from prison in January. The SNDP was formed by former SNLD members to compete



Shan Nationalities Democratic Party leader U Sai Aik Paung (left) at the party's national convention in Taunggyi in December 2010. Pic: Aye Zaw Myo

in the 2010 election, in which it won more than 50 seats at the national and state levels.

"We all originated from the SNLD. The NLD didn't register or run for the 2010 election so it was necessary

for us to establish the White Tiger (SNDP) party. Many former SNLD members joined us," said U Sai Hsaung Hsi, the Pyithu Hluttaw representative for Kyaukse.

However, U Sai Hsaung Hsi, who won a seat for the SNLD in the 1990 election, said he was unhappy at comments U Khun Htun Oo made in the United States in September in which he said the SNDP was "soft" in its dealings with the government.

He said his party's representatives had regularly called in the hluttaw for U Khun Htun Oo's release and the SNDP had even offered to let him run as its candidate in Lashio in the April 1 by-elections.

"U Hkun Htun Oo's comments that [the SNLD] could not merge with us is basically like throwing sand in our eyes. He accused us of being soft because he didn't know our activities. While he

might not know what we are doing, the people do. Though we want to merge, what he has said hinders it," he said.

"All the people will be delighted if a single party is formed putting aside grudges and focusing on the interests of our people in the way a politician should. We hope that he will change his mind after consulting his central executive committee members ... our party is not the reason why there are two Shan parties in Shan State."

As part of the SNDP's efforts to expand its support in Shan State, the party will hold its convention in the eastern Shan State town of Tachileik next week. U Sai Hsaung Hsi said residents and parliamentarians from the eastern bank of the Thanlwin River had requested the convention be held in their region.

"Last year it was held in Taunggyi, where our headquarters is. The

people have accepted the party's activities and trust us more and more. We shifted the venue for the convention to Tachileik because our campaign has gathered momentum and the local people requested us to do so. The convention will show the people how energetic and united we are, our achievements and our plans for the future," he said, adding that the party is likely to increase its number of deputy leaders and central executive committee members at the convention.

But the 2015 election remains a concern for the party, particularly the prospect of the Shan vote being split between the SNDP and SNLD.

SNDP member and Pyithu Hluttaw representative for Hsipaw U Ye Tun said a merger was "crucial" for the good of Shan State.

"Unless we overcome the challenge of merging these Shan parties ... we can't predict what will happen in terms of the 2015 election. I would say 90pc of people in the state want a merger to happen. Merging is possible if top leaders of both parties put aside their personal vanities and feelings and focus on serving the interests of all ethnic people in Shan State," he said.

U Ye Tun said the situation was also further complicated by the fact that the political organisations of some non-state armed groups could also enter the political fray if peace negotiations progress well.

"In mid-2012, the president said that armed groups can establish parties to get into the hluttaw to discuss federal principles. Therefore, new parties may appear in Shan State," he said.

U Sai Hsaung Hsi said the SNDP would also look at cooperating with these new political parties. "Armed groups are interested in politics. However, it is more likely that they will work with or support the current parties rather than compete. We are ready to work with anyone for the good of the people." - Translated by *Thit Lwin*

## SNLD prepares for peace seminar in Shan State

By Kyaw Hsu Mon

THE Shan Nationalities League for Democracy plans to hold a peace seminar in the Shan State capital Taunggyi in April aimed at furthering the peace process for all Shan State residents.

Chairman U Khun Htun Oo said the party decided to hold the conference because of the success of an earlier seminar in Yangon. He said representatives of the Pa-O, Lahu, Kokang, Wa, Palaung and other ethnic minority groups living in Shan State would be invited to participate.

"There are about 33 different ethnic groups living in Shan State and we will encourage them to participate in this

peace seminar," he said.

"Without their involvement we cannot say it is an all-inclusive peace process - we need to arrange their participation."

U Khun Htun Oo said representatives from about 15 ethnic political parties and more than 10 non-state armed groups in Shan State would also be invited.

"All ethnic groups in Shan state want real peace, including Wa and Kokang. The focus of this seminar will just be Shan state."

He said he expected about 500 people will participate. The Shan State Army-South, Shan State Progress Party, Restoration Council of Shan State and Shan non-government organisations took part in the Yangon seminar, which was organised by the SNLD.

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## Mandalay cemetery chief denies report of girl's death

AN OFFICIAL from Mandalay's main cemetery has rejected a news report about a young woman who was incorrectly pronounced dead and almost cremated before her mother discovered she was still alive.

*Monywa Times* published the article on its Facebook page on December 20 and requested readers to help the family, saying residents in their village did not want the young woman to return home because of superstitious beliefs.

"There was no such case here of a dead girl who came back to life. It is just a fake story. Before conducting any cremation we ask for official documents showing they are deceased," U Min Min, the in-charge at Kyar Ni Kan cemetery in Madaya township, said on December 20.

The report said the young woman was a university student. Her mother realised she was still breathing, the report said. - *Phyo Wai Kyaw and Si Thu Lwin*

# Union ministers apologise to monks over November 29 raid

By Phyo Wai Kyaw and Than Naing Soe

THE government has formally apologised to monks for a police raid on a Letpadaung protest camp last month that left up to 100 people injured. The apology comes after monks staged a series of protests in major cities, demanding an apology and action on other Letpadaung-related issues.

Minister for the President's Office U Hla Htun and Minister for Health Dr Pe Thet Khin led the government delegation at the ceremony, held on December 15 at Atumashi Monastery in Mandalay's Aung Myay Thar San township.

Monks from Monywa, Mandalay and Amarapura attended the ceremony, including some who were injured in the November 29 attack.

Addressing the issue of the controversial mine project, U Hla Htun told the monks that cooperation and discussion were the best way to reach a mutually beneficial solution.

"An Investigation Commission has been formed and is working to work out the best way forward on the Letpadaung mine conflict," the minister said.



Minister for the President's Office U Hla Htun apologises to monks at a ceremony on December 15. Pic: Phyo Wai Kyaw

While most monks welcomed the apology, U Oattama from Maha Gandayone Monastery said he still wanted the government to meet the monks' four other demands but would wait until the Investigation Commission has finished its work.

He said one reason the monks had accepted the government's apology is because they did not want to threaten the reform process.

"Because they have apologised to us, the protests will stop and then we will watch the Investigation

Commission's decision," he said. "We asked for five demands and told the government to respond no later than December 12. Before that, they agreed on the first demand - to apologise to the injured monks. We will continue to ask them to meet the other demands. But we also need to wait and see what comes from Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Investigation Commission in regards to our demands, such as to take action against those responsible for the raid," he said on December 15.

He said that monks will also continue to push the government to release those arrested for taking part in anti-Letpadaung protests.

"They released some of them but they had to sign a pledge [not to protest again] and so are not totally free."

Meanwhile, a letter from Ashin Thazana, who sustained serious injuries in the raid and is at Mandalay Central Hospital, was read at the ceremony. In the letter, he questioned why the head of hospital did not allow him and three other seriously injured monks to be transferred to Yangon or abroad for treatment.

U Hla Htun promised to look into the issue and transfer the monks to a hospital in Yangon if necessary.

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## NGO pledges more media support WHO findings to help fight malaria drug resistance

By Kyaw Hsu Mon

DENMARK-BASED non-profit International Media Support will continue to support the development of Myanmar's media industry in 2013, an official told *The Myanmar Times* in Copenhagen earlier this month.

IMS project manager for Myanmar Esben Harboe said the organisation's future programs will build on the work it has done in Myanmar since 2006 and would be driven by what support journalists in the country feel is most needed.

Mr Harboe said more training was needed to ensure journalists could make the most of the freer media environment and IMS plans to work across four main areas, including legal advice, public service media, education and access to the media in ethnic minority areas.

IMS provides training and other support through the Ministry of Information and media organisations, such as the Myanmar Journalists Association and Myanmar Journalist Network. For more than a decade it has also been a supporter of exile media, including *Mizzima*, *The Irrawaddy* and *Democratic Voice of Burma* and Mr Harboe said IMS was committed to working with both the private and public sectors.

"We've no secrets [about] working inside [Myanmar]. We're supporting the government to enact the press law by giving advice and providing training, media workshops and so on," he said.

"We've invited officials from the Myanmar Information Ministry to learn [about] international media this year. U Ye Htut and U Tint Swe



Men read a newspaper in Yangon on April 2. Pic: AFP

led the group and they visited here – the IMS office in Denmark.

"We're beginning journalism training in Yangon, Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw and Myitkyina. We can say that the project in Myanmar is bigger than in the other 52 countries [in which IMS operates].

"We'll continue to [offer] support for the Myanmar media industry, such as training of trainers, basic journalism training and language classes."

In mid-2012, IMS was one of the

supporters of the Conference on Media Development in Myanmar, which was organised by the Ministry of Information and Culture and UNESCO.

Established in 2001, IMS is a non-profit organisation that works to support local media in more than 50 countries affected by armed conflict, human insecurity and political transition. It helps to strengthen professional journalism and ensure that media can operate in challenging circumstances.

## WHO findings to help fight malaria drug resistance

By Tony Yoo

A TEAM of scientists coordinated by the WHO has launched "ground-breaking research" into drug-resistant malaria in Myanmar, as the organisation also reported that funds to help fight the disease had slowed in the past two years.

Scientists from the University of Maryland in the United States, working as a part of the WHO team, identified molecular markers that could assist in tracking the spread of drug-resistant malaria in Myanmar.

"This emerging form of artemisinin-resistant malaria, while it's still relatively rare, is already causing treatment failures where it first appeared, in Cambodia," Dr Christopher Plowe, the principal investigator, said in a statement issued by the University of Maryland. Artemisinin is a major component in the current treatment of malaria patients.

"The concern is that we'll lose this drug, at an immense cost of human life," Dr Plowe said.

The scientists have received US federal funding to use the new knowledge within Myanmar to identify drug-resistant incidences, and train Myanmar investigators in the latest laboratory technology.

"Myanmar has about 3 percent of the Southeast Asian population, but about 20pc of the region's malaria," said Dr Plowe. Under his leadership, specialists in Myanmar have already begun using the markers.

"We are now trying to validate these markers in our research in Myanmar," he said. "We want to focus limited resources on

artemisinin resistance to try to stop it in its tracks before it spreads."

The development was announced just days before the WHO said the global plateauing of anti-malaria funding in the past two years was a major concern. The finding was published in *The World Malaria Report 2012*, released by the organisation on December 17.

WHO cited the example of long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs), saying that the number distributed in endemic sub-Saharan African countries between 2010 and 2012 had fallen by more than half, from 145 million to just 66 million. The nets are considered a vital frontline preventative measure against malaria.

"This means that many households will be unable to replace existing bed nets when required, exposing more people to the potentially deadly disease," the report said.

Artemisinin is the leading drug for malaria treatment but resistance has been detected in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, the WHO says. It is thought that a major contributing factor is that artemisinin has been used as the lone treatment, rather than combined with other therapies.

Dr Plowe warned that drug-resistant malaria could bring devastating consequences for Myanmar and other countries.

"In addition to a loss of human life, if we lost this most important tool against malaria, the recent momentum for global malaria eradication could quickly evaporate. It takes a long time to develop a drug, and we have nothing on the shelf to replace this class of drugs."

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### Chinnery Assets Limited Vacancy Announcement

Chinnery Assets Limited (CAL), one of the subsidiaries of China National Petroleum Corporation International (CNPCI), engaged in oil and gas exploration and production jointly with Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) in Rakhin Offshore Blocks, is seeking applications for the full time positions of **Contract & Procurement Assistant** and **Admin & General Service Assistant**.

#### Qualifications and Requirements:

- Myanmar Nationality, above 30 years old, male or female;
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- At least 10 years practical experience in the contract or procurement or relevant aspects of the position;

#### 2. Admin & General Service Assistant

- Bachelor degree or above in Administration and/or the related field;
- At least 10 years practical experience in the relevant aspects of the position;

The successful applicant should be honest, healthy and responsible. Only those candidates whose qualifications and experience may satisfy the above requirements will be considered and contacted for an interview.

The applicant is required to write a one-page summary addressing the selection criteria to explain why s/he should be selected for this position.

Please send your detailed Curriculum Vitae with one latest photograph, together with the summery letter to the following person with the subject "Contract & Procurement Assistant or Admin & General Service-your name" before **17:00 pm on 25th January 2013:**

**Mr. Xu Hao, Administration & HR Officer,**

**Email: xuhjao@cal.net.mm; xuhao@cnpicnt.com**

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**Address: No. 44, Inya Myaing Road, Golden Valley-2, Bahan Township, Yangon**

**Note:** All the certificates and qualification papers shall be brought along with you upon interview.



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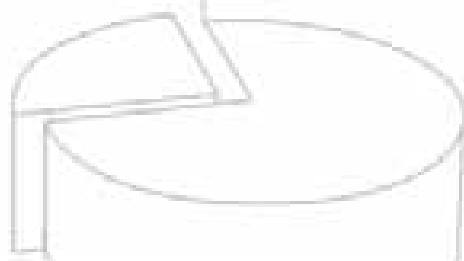
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# Myanmar travel buzz builds for 2013

By Tony Yoo

UNITED States President Barack Obama's visit to Myanmar last month has brought priceless publicity for the tourism industry, with the country recently named on several "must go" travel destination lists for 2013.

"President Obama's historic recent visit to Myanmar - the first ever by a sitting US president - is adding to already heated-up interest in the country," *Associated Press* said in its 2013 travel list last week.

The website of travel guide publisher Fodor's also credited President Obama's trip with putting Myanmar back onto the international tourism radar.

"After decades of political isolation, headline-making visits from [US Secretary of State] Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama confirmed the country's return to the Southeast Asia tourist trail," Fodor's said in its "25 Places to go in 2013" list.

Overseas tour operators have reported a surge in interest in Myanmar packages.

"Burma's been booming over the last couple of years and we've experienced high demand for spots on our Gecko's trips," said Stuart Lyall, Gecko's Adventures destination manager for Southeast

Asia. "It's one of those places you need to see now before things change."

Myanmar's relative lack of development and paucity of tourists was a common theme pushed by the end-of-year reviews.

"As Myanmar's doors open to the West, its unspoiled atmosphere is unlikely to last. Go now while it still feels undiscovered," Fodor's said.

*AP* said the US Tour Operators' Association ranked Myanmar number 1 on "a list of 'off-the-beaten path' countries they foresee becoming popular in 2013".

Australia's *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper also promoted Myanmar in its "2013: A Place Odyssey" review. However, it also quoted Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's warning last month to "be very careful that we are not lured by the mirage of success" and advised travellers to spend their money carefully.

"Choose civilian vendors over companies with government connections," the paper said in an article that could have been written five years ago, such as its lack of acknowledgement of changes that have taken place under the U Thein Sein government. "It is still possible to oppose the regime while



Top tourist destinations like Bagan are expected to receive more foreign visitors in 2013. Pic: Supplied

supporting the long-suffering Burmese, who are happy to have guests again."

But momentum had already been building before President Obama's historic visit: arrivals at Yangon Airport between January and October were up an astounding 50pc on the same

period last year, the Ministry for Hotels and Tourism announced last month.

Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Htay Aung told the *Bangkok Post* last week that the country expects to welcome one million people in the calendar year.

However, there are well-

founded concerns about how the country will cope with the continued influx of tourists.

"We need to upgrade service standards, transportation and also upgrade existing hotels and tourist sites including opening new tourist sites," the minister told the *Bangkok Post*.

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Phone: 372416 Dated: 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2012

## Govt to allow VOA for visitors from 22 nations

By Yu Yu Maw

THE Ministry of Immigration plans to expand a visa-on-arrival program to citizens of 22 European countries, a government official said last week.

"We can't say exactly which countries and when it will start. The types of visas made available will be the same as we are offering to citizens of 29 countries," said U Zaw Win Myint, assistant director of the Immigration and

Population Department.

A limited visa on arrival system was introduced on June 1 for business and conference visitors from 27 countries, while citizens of Macao and Hong Kong became eligible for the program in August.

However, fewer than 5 percent of visitors use the program, according to government statistics. Between June 1 and December 19, 11,357 received a visa on arrival, or about 66 a day.

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## Education key to fighting land grabs

By Su Hlaing Tun

FARMERS can fight land grabs - and now the law is on their side, say activists and experts. They say all they have to do now is to publicise the law.

Widespread ignorance of their rights under the Farmland Law and Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands Management Law means that farmers are losing their land or failing to receive proper compensation, said U Nay Myo Wai, chairman of Peace and Diversity Party. He was speaking at a national workshop on land tenure and land use rights held in Nay Pyi Taw last month.

"We like and support almost the entire law. However, it needs to be published so the public knows about it," he said.

"This problem crops up throughout the country. Because farmers don't know they can defend their land using by-laws such as La Na 39 and sections such as 4, 5 and 10, they cannot resolve their land problems," said U Nay Myo Wai.

Two union ministers who attended the workshop said government education efforts should be stepped up. The government is also making more efforts to consult residents before acquiring land for projects.

"A different administrative approach is being used so when carrying out projects not only is the approval of local authorities needed

but also the consent of the public," said Minister for the President's Office U Tin Naing Thein.

Stressing the break with past practice, he added: "We were wrong in the past. Now we are trying to make the system as effective as possible. Now we want to listen to your voice. Only then can we make the best choice for the people."

Another minister in the president's office, U Soe Thein, said: "The law isn't necessarily correct. We are still listening. Amendments can still be submitted to the hlttaw."

He also said more thought could be given to introducing stiffer penalties for corruption.

"Punishments should be appropriate, so as to deter offenders," he said.

Ward and village administrators, land record departments and legal groups will be expected to play their part in the public education process. "If the public are aware of legal procedures, it will be possible to combat corruption," said U Kyaw Nyein Aung, managing director of Settlement and Land Records Department.

One workshop participant said: "Before, everything was done to stop the public participating. Local administrative bodies wanted to make themselves look good at the expense of local citizens. Now everybody should cooperate to cure the national disease of corruption." - Translated by Thit Lwin

# Govt rescinds ban on monastery HIV care

By Cherry Thein

A BUDDHIST monk in North Okkalapa township has resumed offering accommodation and healthcare services for people living with HIV/AIDS at his monastery after the government rescinded a ban on the program.

The venerable Badhanta Kundala of Ah Thawkayama Shwe Hnintha Yaelae monastery said he is caring for more than 70 people with HIV, including women and children, at the monastery through the recently established Aye Mya Garuna foundation.

"Now I got permission and can provide accommodation and food for the patients when they receive treatment at Waibargi Hospital," the venerable monk said.

He began offering to accommodate patients in his monastery while they receive treatment at Waibargi Hospital in 2005. The number of recipients grew to almost 100 before the program was banned by the former government on the grounds that it was not appropriate for monks to conduct healthcare activities. HIV patients are now treated at Mingalardon Hospital and while the ban was in place, the venerable Badhanta Kundala instead donated money to pay for the medical fees of poor outpatients and in-patients at Mingalardon.

"I was asked to sign a pledge not to do anymore charity work because they said it is not suitable for a monk when women and children stay at the monastery. I offered the accommodation because I felt sorry for the

patients who were discriminated against at the hospital," he said.

"It is hard for them to use the public toilet, bathroom and even get drinking water when they are receiving treatment at the hospital," he said.

While at the monastery, the patients have access to sanitation facilities and receive food bought with funds from donors.

One HIV-positive patient from Bago Region who stayed at the monastery while she received treatment at Waibargi with her husband said people with HIV regularly faced discrimination from doctors and nurses.

"I was so sad when a doctor shouted at me 'you HIV' when I inquired about getting treatment for my husband," she said. "I did not know about the disease because we were living in very small village far from town. Many women have similar stories to mine."

Aye Mya Garuna member U Min Thein Tun said the foundation was formed so that activities at the monastery could be carried out officially. An application to register the foundation formally is being processed but the government allowed activities to resume in June.

"When sayadaw resumed accepting the patients, the number of patients increased significantly within one month. It is hard to accommodate them all in the monastery hall, particularly as some have tuberculosis," he said.

He said the foundation also wanted to give health education to patients and the public to help control the spread of diseases and combat discrimination.

By Soe Than Lynn

THE achievements of writer U Win Maung, better known as Min Yu Wai, were recognised with a lifetime achievement award at the National Literary Award ceremony last week.

Vice president Dr Sai Mauk Kham presented the lifetime achievement award to U Win Maung along with a medal and K1 million in cash in recognition for the more than 60 novels the author has written in his six-decade career.

Thirteen other National Literary Award prizes and 12 Sarpay Beikman manuscript awards were handed out at the ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw on December 14. The winners had been announced in late November from more than 2400 books in all genres, and were selected by a judging committee working under the Ministry of Information.

The achievement caps a prolific career for the 85-year-old U Win Maung, who also won a National Literary Award for a collection of poems titled *Water Fetching Time* in 1972 and a Sarpay Beikman translation award in 1954 for *Aesop's Fables*, which was written with his wife Ngwe Ta Yi.



Author U Win Maung, better known as Min Yu Wai, speaks at a ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw on December 14 after winning a National Literary Award for lifetime achievement. Pic: Soe Than Lynn

His works have been or are being translated into English, German, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese and Serbian. U Win Maung also received the Natyaykan Shwesaung award in 2005, a religious literary award in 2006 and Thuta Swesone award for lifetime achievement in 2011.

The author said his

passion for writing kept him healthy.

"I always bear in mind that I must be healthy and live a long time because I want to keep writing. I will write for the rest of my life, until my last breath. I envy those who died while they were writing, like Saya Tet Toe," U Win Maung said. -

Translated by Thit Lwin

## Signing Ceremony for Technical Transfer Agreement and MOU of Joint Investment by Asia General Electric Co., Ltd. (Myanmar) and Meidensha Corporation (Japan)

Asia General Electric Co., Ltd. was established in 2008 to participate in electric power sector, an essential infrastructure for the development of Myanmar. Asia General Electric Co., Ltd. (AGE) is the first company manufacturing "Foil Winding System Transformer" in Myanmar which can save energy by lower load loss.

Foil Winding System Transformer have strong points like lowest Noise Level, longer life with better cooling properties and durable short circuit and especially reducing the load loss.

AGE has manufactured transformers with single Voltage Ratio, Dual Voltage Ratio, On Load Tap Changer for lower voltage areas, and package type transformer for spacious purpose and helped the state reduce spending of foreign currencies.

Asia General Electric Co., Ltd. has received the technology and production system of "Distribution Transformer" from Q.T.C Transformer company in Thailand. The Data bank for each transformer is available for every test for quality control and their installed locations.

As the Asia General Electric Co., Ltd. has achieved the technology and production experience of Distribution Transformer and Power Transformer, research and Development division was formed and made quality-control (QC) on every transformer to be in International standard.

The state still has spent foreign currencies to purchase higher voltage transformer (230 KV, 132 KV) from foreign countries and AGE

has decided to make one more step in production of high voltage transformer in Myanmar, where more 132 KV power transformers are needed in northern part of the country.

AGE has reached agreement with Meidensha Corporation (Japan) (MEIDEN) to transfer technology to built power transformer (132 KV - 100 MVA) and there are on-going discussions for the production of 230 kv power transformer in near future.

AGE is making discussion with Meidensha corporation (MEIDEN) and Metal One Corporation for joint investment in Electrical sector in future.

Meidensha Corporation (MEIDEN) has been established in Japan since 1897 and objectively taken care of customers' satisfaction and quality development of electrical products and control systems. Power Transformers and High Voltage Switch gears made by Meidensha corporation (MEIDEN) were widely used in Myanmar in the past.

In order to gain international exposure and



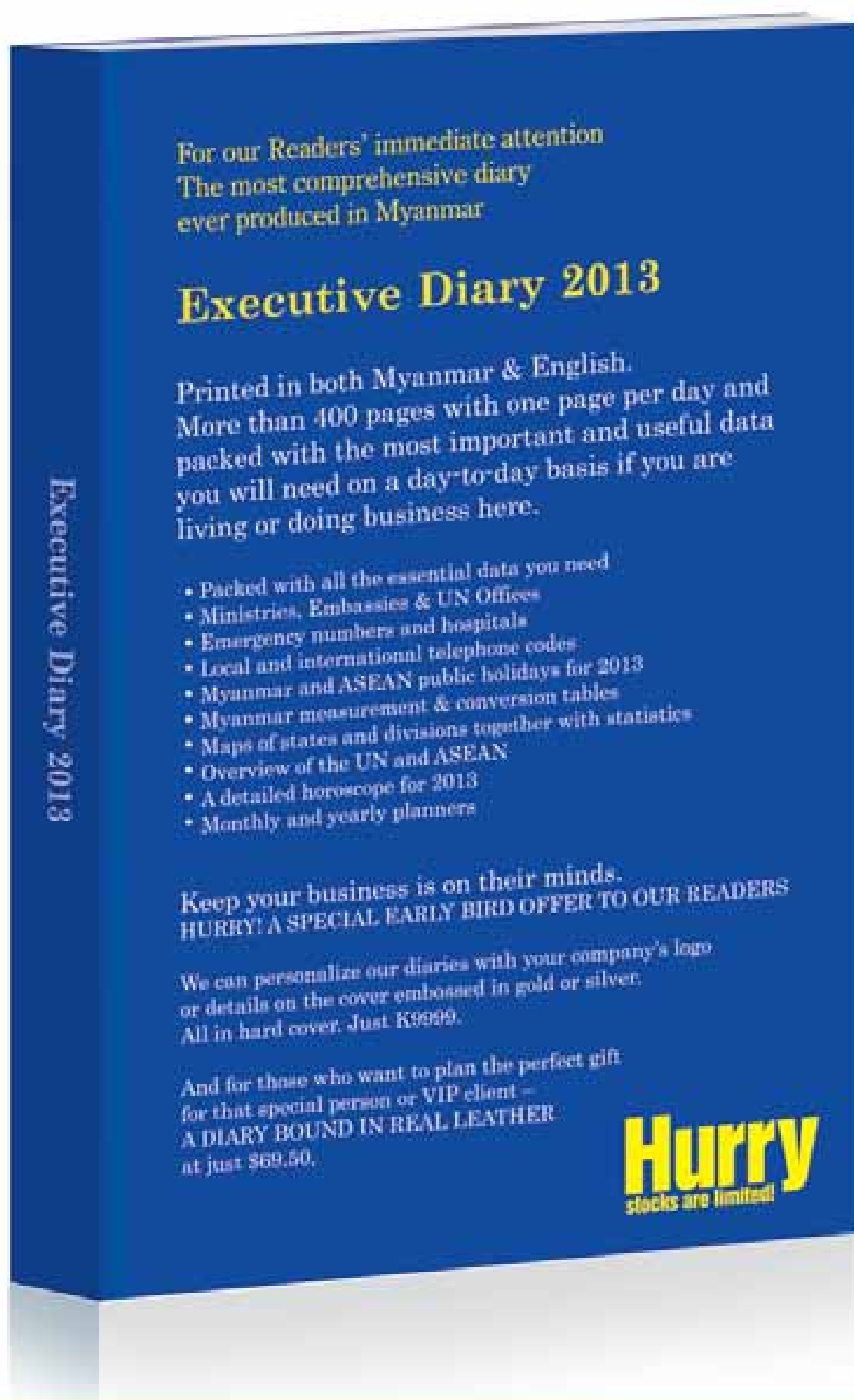
technical know-how for the employees of Asia General Electric Co., Ltd. sending trainees to the factory of Meidensha Corporation (MEIDEN), Japan, to get job opportunities for Myanmar people and to establish repair and production of Power Transformer locally; signing ceremony for Technical Transfer Agreement (TTA) between Asia General Electric Co., Ltd. (Myanmar) and Meidensha Corporation (MEIDEN) (Japan) and MOU of Joint Investment was held at the Sedona hotel on 15 December 2012.

The occasion was attended by Yangon Regional Minister for Electricity and Industrial U Nyan Tun Oo, Yangon Electricity Supply Board Chairman U Aung Khaing and officials, UMFCCL Chairman U Win Aung, Officials from Ministry of Electrical Power and Ministry of Industry, Officials from Myanmar Engineer Society, Officials from Meidensha Corporation and Metal One Corporation, Chairman of Japan Myanmar Friendship Association, Mr. Hideo Watanabe and representative of Japan and Myanmar business societies.



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# Dawei backers court Japanese investors

By Ei Ei Toe Lin

LEADERS of Myanmar and Thailand last week agreed to invite Japan as a third investor in the floundering Dawei project during a visit to the area.

President U Thein Sein and Thai Prime Minister Ms Yingluck Shinawatra visited the Dawei Special Economic Zone on December 17 and discussed ways of accelerating the project as well as issues related to telecommunications, electricity, environmental conservation and investment.

President U Thein Sein said the project is important not only for Myanmar and Thailand but also other ASEAN nations.

Moreover, he said that a third country must be invited as Myanmar and Thailand could not implement the project on their own. He singled out Japan because of its experience with similar projects and it had shown interest in the development.

Ms Yingluck agreed and pledged to speed up implementation of the project by improving cooperation between six sub-committees established by both sides.

The Dawei Deep Sea Port and Special Economic Zone

is in Nabule village tract, Yebyu township, Tanintharyi Region. The governments of Myanmar and Thailand signed an initial agreement launching the project on May 19, 2008.

A further agreement was signed in late 2010 but Myanmar partner Max Myanmar has pulled out of the project, while Thai developer Ital-Thai Development Company has struggled to attract investors. The project has also met grassroots opposition from communities upset over the minimal compensation paid and potential environmental consequences of the development.

Experts said the visit of the two leaders was an important step for boosting the confidence of prospective investors but they expected it would be hard to persuade Japanese firms to put money into Dawei.

"Thilawa is the priority for the time being because it is close to the big market of Yangon while Dawei is a long-term project. Thilawa is for light industries but Dawei is for heavy industries," Mr Kiwamu Honda of Dawei Development Company Ltd told the *Bangkok Post* newspaper on December 18.

"Japan has an interest in



Labourers work on an elevated platform at a deep sea port project in Tanintharyi Region that is part of the Dawei Special Economic Zone development in January. Pic: AFP

both Dawei and Thilawa, but it has to choose one for now," he said.

Mr Honda also noted that the master plan for Dawei has been proposed but is still awaiting endorsement by the Myanmar government.

U Tin Maung Swe, chairman of the Support Group for the Deep Sea Port and Special Economic Zone, said the two leaders

discussed ways to accelerate the project, including attracting more investment, but he refused to give further details.

"It is a closed door meeting, they discussed secretly," he said.

He said some Thai businessmen accompanied Ms Yingluck but no Japanese investors took part in the trip.

"Japanese investors came and surveyed the project site several times. They are also interested in Dawei and they told me they are willing to invest in it," he said.

Addressing the concerns of local residents, he said compensation had been given according to what they had requested. Relocation projects will continue for those living in project areas and work on infrastructure will get underway early in 2013.

The Special Economic Zone will directly affect 16 villages, with 3984 households totalling 23,120 people forced to relocate.

Ko Lay Lwin from Nabule village tract said the developers paid what they asked but residents

still are not happy at having to move.

"We don't want to go anywhere and don't believe in this development. There are three gas pipeline projects that pass through Dawei but we still have to pay K435 a unit for electricity. We are worried whenever we hear the words 'development project'," he said.

But Ko Ye Lwin Myint, a member of the Dawei Development Association, said he preferred Japanese investors to those from China.

"I think Japan values its image and the Japanese government is transparent. However, we have to watch closely so that our region is not too damaged by this development," he said.

According to the initial project plan, Ital-Thai will get a 75-year concession to develop the area and will provide 50 percent of the investment for phase one, estimated at US\$8.6 billion. Max Myanmar was to invest 25pc.

The project comprises three phases, to be carried out over a period of approximately 10 years, from 2010 to

2019, although it has been delayed.

U Tin Maung Swe said the first phase should be completed by 2015.

### Clarification:

The article "No belief in peace process: survey", published in the December 17-23 edition (No 657) of *The Myanmar Times*, incorrectly stated the number of people surveyed was 526. The number surveyed was 529. The article also stated that most respondents did not believe that either the government or armed ethnic groups wanted peace. The organisations that conducted the survey said that most respondents "have doubts that the peace processes would be successful". The organisations also said that "121 respondents said there were rape cases and 62 respondents mentioned that civilians were killed during armed conflict", rather than what we reported, which was: "Respondents said they witnessed or were victim to 121 cases of rape and 62 deaths." We regret any confusion this may have caused.

# Artists join NLD for fundraiser

By Yhoon Hnin

A MUSIC festival organised by the National League for Democracy will be held at People's Park this week to raise money for the party's education activities.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will open the two-day festival at 1pm on December 27, the party's education network said at a press conference last week.

The fundraising fair will feature hundreds of shops, including bookstores and food outlets run by private companies, NGOs and charities and tickets are available for K7500 a day.

The music will begin at 5pm on December 27 and five bands will performed with 43 famous singers. Another 36 singers will perform the following night.

Tickets can be bought at the NLD head office on Shwegonedaing Road, other outlets and at the gate.

Sky Net will broadcast the concert live over two nights.

"The education network helps poor students with free education, accommodation and food with the support of public. At the moment, Myanmar's education system has fallen behind and to improve the quality of education we need the public to show their support," party patron U Tin Oo said.

Meanwhile, a number of private companies announced they would donate money to the education network. Media organisations Sky Net and Shwe FM donated K130 million, Air Bagan and Asia Green Development Bank donated K70 million and Myanmar Distribution Group K10 million.



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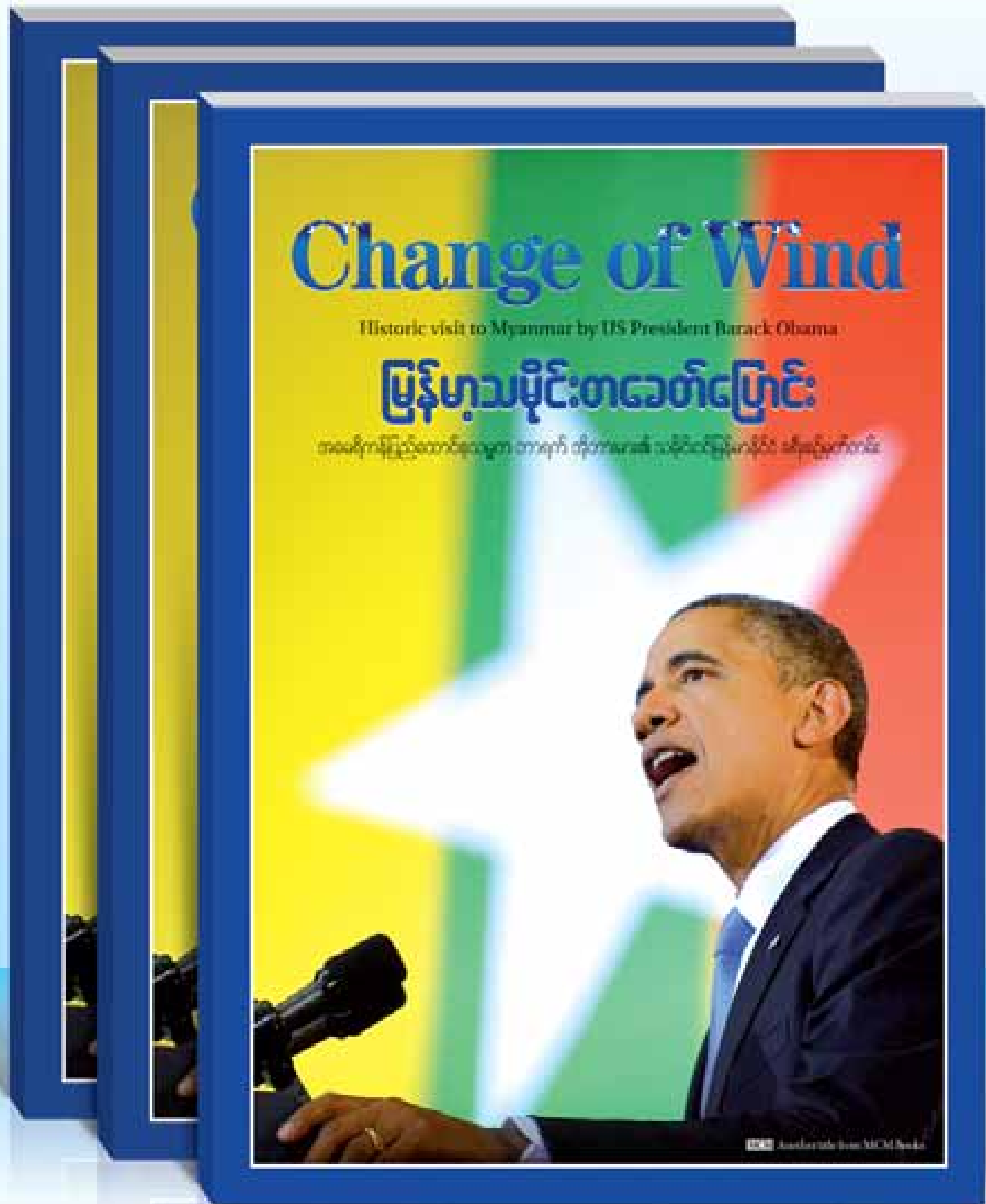
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# Kachin fighting intensifies: sources

By Bill O'Toole

INTENSIFYING conflict in northern Myanmar has opened new fronts south of the Kachin Independence Army's stronghold in Laiza and near the town of Pangwa on the China-Myanmar border, several sources said last week. They said it was the worst stretch of fighting yet since a ceasefire between the government and Kachin Independence Organisation ended in June 2011.

"Day by day the fighting is continuing," said U Myint Thane, joint general secretary of the National Council of the Union of Burma, based in Thailand. "It has disappointed all of us."

Speaking from the group's headquarters in Chiang Mai, KIO central committee member Wawhkyung Sin

Wa said he wasn't sure of the exact scale of the fighting. "[But] we've had reports that there are over 400 [Tatmadaw] troops near Laiza and more than 500 near Pangwa," he said.

Sources familiar with the conflict say the Tatmadaw has expanded its arsenal in the most recent battles, and is using machine-gun equipped helicopters and heavier artillery against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) troops. Fighting has occurred every day since December 13, the sources said.

*The Myanmar Times* could not confirm these reports with the Tatmadaw. One officer from the Ministry of Defence in Nay Pyi Taw, who asked not to be named, said: "I have no right to say what is taking place in Kachin State, although I

know [what is taking place in Kachin State]."

Many aid workers in the region are concerned about the effect this new round of fighting will have on the many camps for people displaced by the conflict that are scattered throughout the area controlled by the KIA. Mr Sin Wa estimated that hundreds of people have been displaced just in the past two weeks of fighting, increasing overcrowding and shortages of supplies in the camps. "We need more money to feed the IDPs (internally displaced people)," he said. "We only have a handful of assistance."

A senior official from the Kachin Baptist Convention, who asked not to be named, said he was concerned that people in camps near Pangwa would have to leave if the fighting got any closer.



"The people [in the camps around Pangwa] are afraid because the fighting is happening near their camps," he said.

While the KIO maintains that its armed wing is acting

purely in a defensive role, there have been reports from Hpakant of KIA soldiers attacking police and military installations. Wawhkyung Sin Wa acknowledged that these

reports were accurate but did not want to characterise the attacks as being part of an offensive strategy, "It was a manoeuvre in a military context," he said. "There are more government troops coming into Hpakant every day. The government are the ones who broke the ceasefire; we have to defend ourselves."

Though fighting continues to escalate, Wawhkyung Sin Wa confirmed that the central government had sent a letter to the KIO leadership on December 13 requesting another round of peace talks in the New Year. He declined to speculate on how the KIO central committee would respond, saying only: "If the government keeps sending troops and making offences, it's difficult to think about meeting again."



Editor of the Myanmar-language edition of 'The Irrawaddy' Ma Aye Chan Myate at the magazine's Yangon office last week. Pic: Thiri

## 'Irrawaddy' hits the streets

By Zon Pann Pwint

EXILE English-language news magazine *The Irrawaddy* has finally gone on the market in Myanmar, with copies distributed legally within the country for the first time.

Copies of the first two editions of the magazine will be distributed for free.

"The magazine got official permission two weeks ago to distribute copies in Myanmar for the first time," said Ma Aye Chan Myate, editor of the magazine's Myanmar-language edition.

The magazine's head office is in Chiang Mai and the English-language edition of *The Irrawaddy* has been published since 1993. Distribution inside Myanmar was banned by the military regime but two months ago *The Irrawaddy* opened an office in Yangon on 32<sup>nd</sup> Street. It now employs more than 25 journalists, some of whom relocated from its Chiang Mai office.

Ma Aye Chan Myate said this would improve the editorial balance in the magazine, which she said was reduced from a monthly to a quarterly in December 2010 due to funding cuts.

"The magazine spent two decades in exile and although it focused on Myanmar news was out of contact with local people so that it may have caused some disputes as to whether it was balanced in its reporting," she said.

While *The Irrawaddy* employed "truthful" reporters inside Myanmar when it was banned, they worked under difficult conditions and many people were afraid to give interviews.

"We couldn't keep in close touch with the

public, there were gaps in the writing. We opened an official newsroom in Yangon to keep in touch with the public when we got an official licence to distribute," she said.

"There is no longer a reluctance to give interviews to our reporters. Some people even contact us to provide news for our publication.

"We want to live inside the country. The past 20 years were trying times for all of us. We want to found an open and independent media inside the country, living close to the local people."

Ma Aye Chan Myate said no decision has been made as to whether the magazine would be monthly or weekly.

"We want to stand as an independent and forthright media. That's why we only came after censorship had been abolished. In future issues we will also report freely and openly what the public should know, as we have in the past," she said.

*The Irrawaddy* also runs English and Myanmar language websites that are updated daily. Ma Aye Chan Myate said no decision had been made on whether to publish a Myanmar-language version.

### Clarification:

The article "Myanmar media industry still sceptical", published in the December 17-23 edition (No 657) of *The Myanmar Times*, quoted Kyaw Zwa Moe of *The Irrawaddy* as saying, "I think our readership will diverge in the country [away] from our traditional audience." What he said was: "I think our readership will be diverse in the country apart from our traditional audience." We regret any confusion this may have caused.



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Our operations in Myanmar will grow in 2013, and we are looking for qualified applicants for the following five positions. Successful candidates will be expected to contribute to the development of IFC's Myanmar Program by developing excellent client relations, designing and implementing projects for meaningful development impact, and ensuring IFC procedures are respected. In addition, successful applicants are expected to actively identify new opportunities for IFC, provide input to IFC's strategy and build relationships with industry stakeholders.

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# At film awards, change is in the air

By Zonn Pan Pwint

AFTER six years, Myanmar's Academy Awards are returning home. Handed out in Nay Pyi Taw since 2006, the ceremony for the best films of the 2011 calendar year will be held in Yangon later this month – the city in which the awards began, way back in 1952.

That is not the only change for the film industry's night of nights. The December 30 ceremony will begin at 3pm, rather than 6pm, so that the broadcast is not cut off at 8pm for the national news.

But the most important difference with past years is that judges have the freedom to give the awards to the most deserving films and actors, rather than those that will not offend the tastes of the Minister for Information.

Tekkatho Yin Yin Lae, one of 17 members on the judging panel, said judges were elated at the lack of interference from the Ministry of Information this year.

"In previous years, there was another selection stage after our final assessment at the Ministry of Information. But this year the final assessment was really the final stage and the minister said that he will not veto our decisions. So I think this year there will be justice," she told *The Myanmar Times*.

The changes come after long-serving Minister for Information U Kyaw Hsan was replaced by U Aung Kyi in August.

The judging panel, which comprises directors, artists and technical experts, considered 15 films released in 2011 for the prizes.

The films expected to share the 11 awards are *Htar Wara Alintanmyar* (Eternal Lights), *Wit Kyawe* (The Fate), *Yin Kwal Nar* (The Pain of a Broken Heart), *Pan Kyar Withmone* (The Pollen of a Lotus Flower) and *A Mwe Za Yar* (A Web of Inherit).

Tekkatho Yin Yin Lae said



Pic: Yadanar

Former Minister for Information U Kyaw Hsan speaks at the 2010 Academy Awards, held in Nay Pyi Taw in January.

judges were heartened by a noticeable increase in both the quality and quantity of eligible films.

"This year was more competitive than in the past. For example, *Htar Wara Alintanmyar* looked as though it would have

take home the top awards, Tekkatho Yin Yin Lae said, adding that she preferred to recognise films with actors and directors that had never previously received an Academy Award.

"For example, I chose a comedian this year for Best

Meanwhile, *Pan Kyar Withmone*, directed by Zin Yaw Mg Mg, was shot around Bagan, Mingun and Shan State and was visually captivating.

"*Pan Kyar Withmone* was smooth and pretty – what you come to expect from a

2011 showed significant improvements on previous years in terms of visual and audio quality.

"The audio quality varied significantly but was better ... we expect filmmakers in future to do their post-production

**'In previous years we were a bit afraid of what the minister would say, whether he would complain about our nominee list.'**

been quite difficult to shoot. You can see this is a good film from the first time you watch it. And you can appreciate it even more when you watch it a second time," she said.

"I am glad to see such improvements in the movie industry."

But judges were divided over which films should

Male Supporting Actor. I think most of the judges will agree with me," she said.

She predicted that *Htar Wara Alintanmyar* director Tun Aung Zaw was the frontrunner for the Best Director prize. The film is set in a rustic village called Wanatchaung near Mandalay and shows the sacrifices of a schoolteacher.

director like Zin Yaw Mg Mg," Tekkatho Yin Yin Lae said.

Long overlooked for the top awards, Tekkatho Yin Yin Lae said comedies could also pick up some prizes, with *A Mwe Za Yar* featuring Thu Htoo San a likely choice.

Fellow judge U Kyi Soe Tun said the films from

abroad or improve the facilities available locally by introducing foreign expertise and equipment," said the director.

He said that while some of the comedies released in 2011 would likely pick up awards, he wanted to see less vulgar humour and more satire on modern politics and society.

"Comedies created as a satire on modern politics or society are really rare," he said.

U Kyi Soe Tun said judges had favoured actors who took on roles outside their normal acting range.

"Those who acted in roles that differed from their usual characters, like Phoe Phar Gyi ... can expect to win an Academy Award this year," he said.

However, he said the judges had taken a hard line on melodrama, particularly unnecessary, shallow or excessive displays of emotion.

"Those whose faces were covered in tears but showed no deep emotion otherwise are not going to be considered," he said.

"But actors or actresses who have not been awarded in the past can be more hopeful this year."

Like Tekkatho Yin Yin Lae, U Kyo Soe Tun said judges had enjoyed the opportunity to select the winners freely.

"We are trying to select this year's Academy Award winners without bias or corruption. In previous years, we were a bit afraid of what the minister would say, whether he would complain about our nominee list, but this year we have chosen the winners fearlessly and the minister did not interfere," he said.

Meanwhile, judge Hinthada U Myint Ngwe agreed that this year would see comedians receive more awards.

"They can hope to at least get a Supporting Actor award," he said.

"This year we didn't see many dramas like last year's *Moe Nya Eain Mat Myu*, a story by famous writer Tekkatho Phone Naing," he said.

"But *Pan Kyar Withmone*, a story by writer Khin Khin Htoo, was a pretty drama in which the director and actors all did their jobs very well. Dramas are probably also going to get the awards for music and cinematography." – *Translated by Zar Zar Soe*

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Applicants should send a two page curriculum vitae with a covering letter explaining why he/she is the most suitable candidate for the role. The deadline for applications is 31 January 2013.



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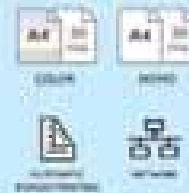


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## Promises of respite for ASEAN in 2013



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**EMBARRASING** stumbles even happen to big guys. At this year's London Olympics, a sloppy baton change by the favoured Brits caused their relay team to be disqualified.

At previous Games in Beijing and Athens, America's top-rated sprinters dropped the baton and ruled themselves out of the medals.

So perhaps we should cut Cambodia some slack for repeatedly dropping the baton during its chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations over the past year.

At key meetings and summits, Cambodia's kowtowing to Beijing and its failure to back fellow members in their deliberations about the South China Sea sovereignty disputes led to

open revolt.

This was evident at last month's summit when Cambodia falsely alleged that ASEAN leaders had agreed not to "internationalise" the conflicting maritime claims.

Half the group's members rebutted that assertion, and when Cambodia fought to

Jim Della-Giacoma said the events of the past year have laid bare the deep fault lines that run through ASEAN's diverse membership.

Well, at least the annus horribilus is almost over. And to the relief of all, the baton will pass from Cambodia to Brunei next month.

Although it is tiny,

**'The annus horribilus is almost over. And to the relief of all, the baton will pass from Cambodia to Brunei.'**

keep language favoured by Beijing, its ASEAN colleagues resisted and expunged such wording from the final declaration.

The episode was so shameful that the group's secretary-general Surin Pitsuwan admitted last month that it had caused ASEAN to suffer a crisis of confidence.

On December 13, the International Crisis Group's regional director

Brunei has more experience of ASEAN affairs and a wiser understanding of the group's consensual credo.

And in Foreign Minister Prince Mohamed Bolkiah and Second Minister Lim Jock Seng, it has a veteran duo who are actually liked by other members.

Cambodia's Foreign Minister Hor Namhong is also experienced; indeed, at 77 and after fourteen

years in the job, many believe he is past his sell-by date as an effective minister.

More to the point, he is disliked by many of his ASEAN colleagues, who often wince at the mere mention of his name.

That cannot be said of the quiet but warm Mohamed nor of the avuncular Lim.

Of course, it is alleged that Mohamed only got the job because he is the Sultan's brother, and that Lim is the brains behind the twosome.

Whether true or not, few dispute they form a competent and likable team, so there is less chance of internal squabbling or the non-issuance of communiqués under Brunei's chairmanship.

That is something to welcome.

Yes, there is a trade-off in that little Brunei will not actively push for any major initiatives, but that is all well and good; what ASEAN needs now is a year of quietly restoring group amity and solidarity.

That process will be aided when the talented but rather excitable Pitsuwan is replaced at the end of this month by Vietnam's deputy foreign minister Le Luong Minh, a grey and cautious apparatchik.

Typically, Surin has urged that Minh be given a greater mandate to act on behalf of the entire group, but there is little chance of that happening – doubtless much to Minh's relief.

During his five-year



Outgoing ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan, who will be replaced by Vietnam's Le Luong Minh. Pic: AFP

term, Minh has said that talks are even-handed and do not descend to the depths of rancour encountered in Phnom Penh during the past year, most people will be happy.


Good luck to him on both counts. There is no way the United States, China or India will agree to the latter goal, and while there may be talks about maritime sovereignty disputes, they are unlikely to go far.

Still, as long as such

talks are even-handed and do not descend to the depths of rancour encountered in Phnom Penh during the past year, most people will be happy.

Said Della-Giacoma: "As the new secretary-general settles in, ASEAN watchers are not expecting as much public reflection in the coming year, especially with taciturn Brunei taking over the rotating chairmanship."

Let's hope he is right.



**ASEAN+3 MACROECONOMIC RESEARCH OFFICE (AMRO) 2013 Staff Recruitment**

AMRO, located in Singapore, is the surveillance unit of ASEAN+3 countries ([www.amro-asia.org](http://www.amro-asia.org)). AMRO is currently looking for 1 Senior Economist, 3 Economists, 1 Financial Sector Specialist, and 1 Legal Advisor starting from early 2013 (Fixed Term Hire). The candidates should be a national of ASEAN countries, China, Korea and Japan. AMRO offers competitive remuneration and expatriate benefit packages pursuant to the internal guidelines.

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## Govt takes lead on extractive industries

By Stuart Deed

PRESIDENT U Thein Sein last week announced the formation of a heavyweight committee tasked with guiding the implementation of the Extractives Industry Transparency Initiative in Myanmar.

The notice was printed on the front page of the state-run *New Light of Myanmar* newspaper on December 15.

Chaired by Myanmar Investment Commission chairman U Soe Thein, the committee is tasked with forming a working group to ensure that private and government parties cooperate to implement the initiative in Myanmar.

"The leading authority is meant to ensure better management for extractive industries of natural resources, develop good investment environment, create opportunity for a frank and transparent discussion between private investors and the people and join hands with the public-based societies of the private sector so as to be able to affectively deal with the tasks of extractive industry transparency initiative on behalf of the State," the notice states.

Other members include the Union ministers for environmental conservation and forestry, energy, mines and finance and revenue. The notice said the committee has been given until December 31, 2013 to accomplish its goals.

David Allan, an advisor for Myanmar non-governmental organisation Spectrum, a group seeking to help provide public input to the process and a member of Myanmar Coalition for Transparency, said the timing of the president's announcement was perfect.

"In the current extraordinarily busy time, they [the government] need to send the right signals as quickly as possible," Mr Allan said. "This is a strong and positive signal."

Mr Allan added that the extractives sector in Myanmar has been "controversial" in the recent past.

"Many wish to see more transparency for investors in the sector, covering contracting processes, allocation processes and reconciliation on revenue flows. Some could say it [the formation of an extractives committee] is a logic progression to the passage of the FIL (Foreign Investment Law).

"Others might say that foreign investors want to be able to demonstrate what due diligence processes and practices will ensure their sectoral investment will benefit the whole country and not just a few," he said.

"Others may say that the Letpadaung copper project issues have required responses in addition to the commission that has been set up. Or it could be that this has been part of a longer term plan, and developing it has

taken time. Many observers will say that this is a very good move of many required in the area and applaud it," he said.

However, Mr Allan said that for Myanmar to meet EITI criteria it needs to set up a multi-stakeholder group that includes representatives from government, industry, civil society and the public.

"The process for determining representation is an important process in the eventual EITI candidacy application," Mr Allan said.

He added that some within the extractives industry have welcomed the president's announcement: "One response I had from an existing extractives investor I sent the announcement said 'the first step in Myanmar joining the EITI group and hence pledging transparency in the resource sector. Good news.'"

"Some may be concerned about the additional burden of reporting, but most responsible groups will welcome it as it gives them a chance to show what they are contributing to Myanmar's finances, and counteract the accusation



Monks protest outside the UMEHL office in downtown Yangon following the crackdown on Letpadaung on November 29. Pic: Boothee

that the extractives sector only exploits and doesn't spread benefits around," Mr Allan said.

An oil and gas consultant, who asked not to be named, said Western extractives companies would welcome the announcement: "We are familiar with doing business in a responsible manner and any action by the government

to increase transparency will make us more competitive."

Adding, "Changes of this nature are welcome. It potentially could be disastrous if someone like the UN got involved and tied everything up in red tape."

Mr Allan said the formation of the committee is "one very important step forward in what will be quite

a process".

"There are many important questions this authority and the multi-stakeholder group will be needing to discuss that determine how implementation will proceed. There is much learning from other countries on this," he said.

Mr Allan added that international experience

shows that disaggregated reporting is critical to maximise understanding of which level of government authorities various benefits flow to, as well as from which exact project areas.

"To what degree of detail should Myanmar report in a disaggregated way? International experience shows that the most value from the process comes from ensuring that payments are as detailed as possible," he said.

"Also critical for Myanmar's people is how the benefits from natural resource projects are spent. For more information on this, it is the national budget process that is most important. In Myanmar's democratic society the public will want more involvement on the budget process and the transparency of the process. ... The availability of documents like a "Citizens Budget", the "Auditor General's Report" and the "Executive Budget Proposal", which links the government's strategy and work plan to the national budget, can be expected to be of great interest to the people."

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## Companies vie for Mandalay airport tender

Seven consortiums from a list of 16 applicants are now in the running to upgrade the international airport

By Tim McLaughlin

FROM white elephant to regional transport hub: that's the challenge for seven consortiums prequalified to tender for a contract to upgrade, operate and manage Mandalay International Airport as part of a public-private venture.

The Ministry of Transport's Department of Civil Aviation announced the list of seven consortiums, selected from 16 applicants, in the December 17 edition of the state-run *New Light of Myanmar*. The consortiums feature two to five companies, with at least one foreign and one Myanmar firm, and the seven were chosen based on "financial experience,

experience record, qualified personnel and equipment resources".

Among the companies seeking to win the tender are the operators of Munich, Dublin and Phnom Penh airports, along with many of the country's most well-known construction firms, such as Htoo Construction and Asia World. Three firms linked to U Serge Pun are in the running across two consortiums, as are Shwe Than Lwin and Shwe Taung Development.

While the list contains a number of companies known for their close ties to the previous military regime, a Yangon-based civil aviation consultant told *The Myanmar Times* that the relative transparency of the tender process was a positive step forward for the Ministry of Transportation.

U Win Swe Tun, deputy director general of the Department of Civil Aviation, said the tender was fair because it had been managed by a consulting firm from Japan.

It is not known when the winner will be announced but U Win Swe Tun said the tender would "hopefully" be finalised by the start of the 2013-14 financial year, which begins on April 1.

The final selection process will be undertaken by a committee headed by Minister for Transport U Nyan Tun Aung.

According to the government, Mandalay International Airport is capable of handling three million passengers a year but receives just a handful of international flights a week. While it was only completed in 2000, the airport already needs significant upgrades to its electrical and water systems, runway and runway lighting, according to the Department of Civil Aviation.

However, some argue it is in a position to benefit from both its geographically fortuitous location and Myanmar's uptick of foreign visitors.

"In 10 years Mandalay could be a regional hub on level with Singapore or Bangkok," the Yangon-based consultant said, noting that nearly 500 flights pass over Myanmar daily but never touch down.

According to the Asian Development Bank, international visitor arrivals were up by more than 25 percent in 2011, and the annual number of visitors is expected to top the one million mark this year.

Another potential attraction of Mandalay airport is its 25,000 acre site, which means plenty of space for planes and maintenance facilities.

Among the prequalified companies last week was a consortium featuring two Japan-based companies, Mitsubishi Corporation and JALUX Inc, with Serge Pun and Associates (SPA)



A view from the tarmac at Mandalay International Airport. Pic: Supplied

Project Management the Myanmar partner.

The Munich Urban Frontier Aung Myanmar Essar consortium comprises five companies: Flughafen Munchen GMBH of Germany, Urban Strategic Pte Ltd and Frontier Investment and Development Advisors of Singapore, Aung Myanmar Technology Company Limited and Essar Projects of India.

Flughafen Munchen GMBH operates the Munich Airport, which according to Airport Council International was the 27th busiest in the world last year, with more than 37 million passengers.

INTL International Ptes, Ltd comprises ITNL International from Singapore, IL & FS Transportation Networks Limited of India, Dublin Airport Authority of Ireland and Htoo Construction Co, Ltd.

Dublin Airport Authority is Ireland's state-owned airport authority. The company runs the country's three largest airports, at Dublin, Cork and Shannon. Dublin, the largest, handled 18.4 million passengers in 2010.

Htoo Construction owner U Tay Za also owns airlines Asia Wings and Air Bagan, which both fly to Mandalay airport.

China Harbour Engineering Co, Ltd is the smallest consortium in terms of the number of companies, featuring just China Harbour Engineering Asia World Co, Ltd.

Though the majority of the company's projects are marine related, CHEC, a subsidiary of China Communications Construction Company, has previous experience in Myanmar's aviation sector. The company constructed Myanmar's largest airport, Nay Pyi Taw International Airport. The US\$100 million airport opened in December 2011.

Asia World is heading up the refurbishment

and expansion of Yangon International Airport. The expansion will up the yearly passenger capacity to 3.7 million from 2.7 million. The work is scheduled to be completed in 2015.

AVIC International Holdings Corporation is anchored by AVIC International of China. The Yunnan Airport Group, also of China and Shwe Than Lwin of Myanmar round out the consortium.

Yunnan Airport Group operates 12 airports in Yunnan Province, on the border of northern Myanmar.

VINCI Airport comprises VINCI of France, Muhibbah Engineering of Malaysia and Shwe Taung Development Co of Myanmar.

VINCI's prior experience in the ASEAN region comes from Cambodia. It is the concession company for Cambodia's three international airports, in Phnom Penh, the country's largest city and capital; Siem Reap, home to the Angkor Wat temple complex; and Sihanoukville on Cambodia's coastline.

Bouygues Batiment International includes Bouygues Batiment of France, First Pacific Company of Hong Kong, First Myanmar Investment and Yoma Strategic Holdings of Singapore.

U Serge Pun, chairman of the SPA Group, looks to be hedging his bets on the lucrative contract. First Myanmar Investment Co and Yoma Strategic Holdings are two of three of his companies spread over two consortiums. The other is SPA Project Management.

Through its majority ownership of Hermes Airports, Bouygues Batiment upgraded and manages Cyprus' two international airports, Larnaca and Paphos, through 25-year Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) agreements with the government of Cyprus.

Bouygues Batiment was also involved in updating Prague Václav Havel Airport in the Czech Republic.

With Hanthawaddy International Airport also under construction in Bago, there are clear signs of progress on the ground for Myanmar's civil aviation sector. Myanmar's lone state-run airline, Myanma Airways, often confused with privately owned Myanmar Airways International, continues to lag woefully behind.

Formed in 1948 originally under the name Union of Burma Airways (UBA), the carrier flies only domestic routes and has been dogged by a spotty safety record.

Two crashes in 1998 claimed the lives of 52 passengers and crew. More recently in June 2009, a flight from Yangon to Sittwe suffered significant damage when the hard landing caused the plane's landing gear to fail. Three people were injured as the plane skidded off the runway and into a nearby fence.

On November 23, the British government advised Foreign and Commonwealth staff against traveling on Myanma Airways over safety concerns. Similar concerns have been voiced by the US State Department.

GE Capital Aviation Services announced in September that it would be leasing two modern aircraft to bolster Myanmar's aging fleet but it is still severely underdeveloped when compared to the flag carrying airlines of other Asian nations.

The development of Myanma Airways in conjunction with the Myanmar's airports seems like an ideal fit, but has yet to be fully realised.

"The Ministry of Transport will need to take the chance to upgrade with the help of a foreign company. They need to be a leader in aviation," the Yangon consultant said.

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## Electricity price on the rise

By Soe Sandar Oo and Htoo Aung

The Ministry of Electric Power is set to compensate for an estimated K368.952 billion (US\$430) million loss in the 2013-2014 fiscal year by increasing the price of electricity and natural gas, senior representatives of Myanmar Electric Power Enterprises (MEPE) announced last week.

Due to General Transformer's plans to increase their electricity price and the rising price of natural gas, the Ministry of Electric Power will continue to lose millions if the pricing system remains the same, said Daw Zaw Zaw Than, general manager of the MEPE's financial department, on December 19.

"We buy and distribute the electricity at a normal price, so the Ministry of Electric Power is losing money. We lose one kyat and 74 pyar for each unit we sell to the Yangon Electricity Supply Board. The Ministry of Electric Power has lost K18.751 billion (\$21.9 million) in the 2012-2013 fiscal year," she said.

The Ministry of Electric Power is currently buying electricity from General Transformer, Hydropower Generation Enterprise and Shwe Li Hydropower Generation Enterprise, and offshore natural gas from the Ministry of Energy.

Currently, 67 percent of electricity is sourced from Hydropower Generation Enterprise, while 23pc is sourced from General Transformer and 10pc is sourced from Shwe Li Hydropower Generation Enterprise. General Transformer's contribution will increase to 31pc after March 2013.

"One of our biggest problems is that we need to buy more natural gas," Daw Zaw Zaw Than added.

The price of natural gas is currently \$5 for one British Thermal Unit (BTU). However, the price will rise to \$11.1966 per BTU after



Power lines supply electricity to a middle-class housing complex in downtown Yangon. Pic: AFP

March 2013.

Myanmar will implement a standardised system for pricing electricity and natural gas based on an international model, which will be provided for by foreign investment, said Daw Aye Aye Mon, director of the MEPE's financial department said.

"The [rise in price] will not affect the majority of lower and middle class people. The system will be based the amount of kilowatts each [unit] uses," she said.

A household expending 200kw over one month will pay K35 per unit while a household expending over 200kw will pay K50 per unit, Daw Aye Aye Mon said. Industrial units expending between 10,000 and 15,000kw per month will be charged K75 per unit.

In comparison, China charges K72 per unit for a household expending up to 150kw over one month while Thailand charges K50 for the same.

## Japanese back Myanmar electrics

By Justin Heifetz

MEIDENSHA Corporation (MEIDEN) has moved into Myanmar, signing a technical transfer agreement with Asia General Electric Co, Ltd (AGE) and a Memorandum of Understanding between AGE and Japan's Metal One Corporation, MEIDEN's President and CEO Junzo Inamura announced last week.

On December 17, the Tokyo-based electronics equipment maker signed with AGE, a national transformer manufacturing and sales company, to build a local network for power transmission and distribution.

Development will focus on transformer design, manufacturing and repair.

"Through the supply of the low cost and high-quality licensed products manufactured by AGE, MEIDEN will reinforce its competitive edge in the Southeast Asian Region," MEIDEN's official announcement states.

"AGE will have the latest technology on high quality



A man struggles to operate a power generator in downtown Yangon earlier this year. Pic: Seng Mai

medium and large power transformers and it will solidify its presence as the largest supplier of power transformer in Myanmar," the announcement continues.

MEIDEN also signed an MoU between AGE and Metal One, Japan's leading steel trading house, for the study of equity investment.

"If the equity investment is made, it will be the first case of equity investment from Japan to a power infrastructure-related company in Myanmar,"

MEIDEN's announcement states.

Under the conditions set out in the MoU, Metal One will provide AGE with electromagnetic technology to manufacture midsize and large transformers.

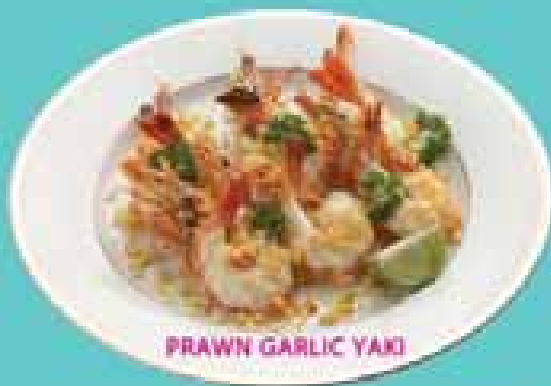
The MoU also states that MEIDEN would consider investing in AGE if the cooperation is successful.

MEIDEN was founded in 1897, and employs nearly 8,000 people. The corporation is listed on the 1st Section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange.



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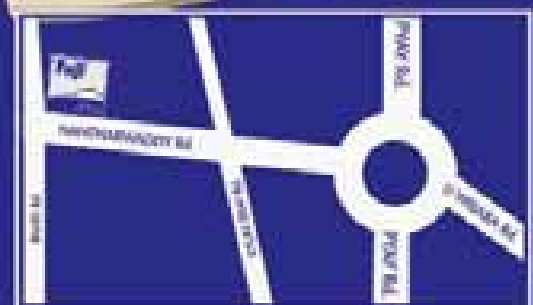
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Woodside Petroleum is seeking a license for oil exploration in the Rakhine Basin. Pic: AFP

## Woodside gets deal for another Myanmar license

By Stephen Bell

PERTH –Woodside Petroleum Ltd said on December 17 it will acquire a 50 percent stake in a second exploration license offshore Myanmar, expanding its overseas footprint further as it seeks to reduce a reliance on Australian gas developments for growth.

Woodside's offer to acquire the interest in block A-6 in Myanmar's Rakhine Basin has been accepted by license owner MPRL E&P Pte Ltd, Woodside said in a statement on its website.

The deal, which is subject to several conditions including due diligence and government approvals, provides an option for future drilling, the company said.

"The proposed agreement also provides Woodside and MPRL E&P with the opportunity to participate jointly in future deepwater bid rounds," it added.

It follows Woodside's deal in October to acquire a 40pc stake in Daewoo International Corp's production sharing contract for Block AD-7, also in the Rakhine Basin. –Wall Street Journal

## Govt to draft first worker safety law

By Shwe Yee Saw Myint

THE first law on safety and health in workplaces is being drafted by the Ministry of Labour and will be promulgated in 2013, a senior ministry official said last week.

"The law will aim to prevent air and water pollution and improve safety at worksites, including fire prevention, ensuring construction workers use protective equipment, ensuring the safety of worksite operators and taking precautions for natural disasters," U Si Thu Aung, head of the ministry's Factories and General Labour Law Inspection Department, said last week.

U Si Thu Aung spoke about the draft law during a seminar on occupational health and safety at the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Yangon on December 15.

"We are considering the safety of all workers in Myanmar's construction industry. We hope that the law will be obeyed and will ensure the safety of the country's labourers," Minister for Labour U Maung Myint said during the seminar.

"According to section 24 of Myanmar's constitution, the government must provide the means to protect labourers ... so we have the task of drafting this new labour law," he said.

According to the Ministry of Labour, 33 people died in workplace accidents this

year. The Ministry's department officer for construction, Daw Mya Win, said workers must start obeying regulations and wearing protective equipment to improve safety standards and reduce accidents.

"New construction sites need a drain for waste, a good sanitation system, fire alarms and a safety net for construction workers. These precautions need to be widely understood by workers entering the industry," she said.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Electric Power's Electrical Inspection Department, about three electrical workers die a month from accidents, which are most common at garment factories.

"At the construction site, the system for water and power often causes electrical fires. We have to pay more attention to implementing a means of protection, and it must be done under the law," said U Khin Myint, deputy director of the Electrical Inspection Department.

U Law Zal, a contractor with the Yadana Shwe Htoo Company for 15 years, said: "Most contractors don't know about safety [precautions] very well. We try to prevent our workers from harm through our own experience working, but we want to know how to prevent harm systematically. The construction site is full of danger, and many workers die falling down elevator shafts or from electrocution."

## Thais tie up a new net factory deal

Thailand-based Mitsui Company is in talks with the Myanmar Fisheries Federation (MFF) to invest in Myanmar's first fishing net factory, an MFF representative said last week.

"There is no fishing net factory in Myanmar, so fishermen and fish farmers are faced with many difficulties. There will be a factory coming soon,"

MFF member U Han Htun announced on December 18.

A fishing net factory had originally been planned for construction in Yangon's In Sein township in 1972. However, the construction was never eventuated and local fishermen have had no other option but to buy expensive fishing nets from neighbouring countries, according to the MFF.

– Myat Nyein Aye

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A fisherman nets his catch at Inle Lake in March 2008. Pic: Douglas Long

# BlackRock sees distortions in credit ratings

By Sebastian Boyd & Ye Xie

Credit rating companies are distorting capital markets by assigning the same debt ranking to countries from Italy to Thailand and Kazakhstan, according to BlackRock Inc (BLK), the world's biggest money manager.

While 23 countries share the BBB+ to BBB- levels assessed by Standard & Poor's, the lowest investment grades, up from 15 in 2008 at the beginning of the financial crisis, their debt to gross domestic product ratios range from 12 percent for Kazakhstan to 44pc for Thailand and 126pc for Italy, International Monetary Fund estimates show. The cost of insuring against a default by Italy, ranked BBB+, over the next five years is almost triple that for Thailand, which has the same rating.

For BlackRock, which oversees US\$3.7 trillion in assets, the measures are so untrustworthy that the firm is setting up its own system to gauge the risk of investing in government bonds. This year, the market moved in the opposite direction suggested by changes to levels and outlooks 53pc of the time, data compiled by Bloomberg show.

"The rating agencies were very, very slow to the game," Benjamin Brodsky, a managing director at BlackRock International Ltd, said in a November 23 interview from London. "They all came after the fact. For us, this is not good enough."

Since S&P cut the US to AA+ from AAA on August 5, 2011, yields on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note have fallen to 1.76pc from 2.56pc. After France was downgraded on January 13, 10-year yields fell to 1.97pc from 3.08pc.

Ratings companies, the arbiters of creditworthiness and the likelihood of default by governments

and companies in the \$46 trillion global debt market, are coming under more scrutiny from regulators and investors.

When S&P downgraded the US, a Treasury official said the company had made a \$2 trillion error. France's top central banker said Moody's Investors Service's ranking is wrong. Russia's deputy finance minister said S&P and Fitch Ratings exaggerated its weaknesses relative to higher-rated countries.

A court in Australia found November 5 that S&P misled investors during the financial crisis that began in 2007.

BlackRock started compiling its own Sovereign Risk Index to measure countries' creditworthiness in June 2011. The latest quarterly update in October rates Spain, Ireland and Italy similar to Argentina and Venezuela, among the 10 most risky countries. S&P puts Argentina, which defaulted on its debt in 2001, at B-, six levels below Spain. Venezuela is B+, six grades below Italy and Ireland.

The New York-based fund manager sorts countries based on their willingness to pay debts, their access to external funding, the strength of their finance industries and fiscal metrics such as debt-to-GDP, according to Brodsky. The index shows Malaysia and Russia rank similar to the US, while the Philippines is no riskier than France and the UK.

"Ratings should be evaluated on the basis of their correlation over time with defaults, not with short-run movements in market prices," John Piecuch, a spokesman for S&P, wrote in an e-mail response to questions from Bloomberg on December 6. "Ratings and market indicators of creditworthiness often diverge, because they are generated by fundamentally different processes and can be driven by very different factors."

The number of countries rated in the BBB category grew as S&P cut European nations such as Spain that are mired in the three-year-old debt crisis and promoted developing nations, including Colombia, from below investment grade. Those ranked A- or above shrunk to 43 from 52 since 2008, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

While S&P has downgraded Italy twice since September 2011, the country is still rated the same as Kazakhstan and Thailand. Italy's economy probably contracted 2.1pc this year, compared with growth of 5.4pc in Thailand and 5.2pc in Kazakhstan, according to economists surveyed by Bloomberg.

"Rating agencies tend to

be a lagging indicator rather than leading indicator," said Neil Shearing, chief emerging markets economist for Capital Economics Ltd, in a telephone interview from London on November 19. "The danger is giving too much weighting to rating agencies' opinion."

After S&P cut its rating on US debt to AA+ from AAA in August 2011, John Bellows, then acting assistant secretary for economic policy at the US Treasury, spotted what he thought was a mistake in S&P's math. There was no "justifiable rationale" for the downgrade, Bellows wrote on a Treasury blog post.

S&P said its decision wasn't affected by the "change of assumptions." - Bloomberg



For BlackRock, the measures are so untrustworthy that the firm is setting up its own system to gauge the risk of investing in government bonds. Pic: Bloomberg



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 for SHINYOUNG WACOAL INC.

P.O. Box No. 26, Yangon.

Phone: 372416 Dated: 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2012

## BGH to move into Myanmar

By Justin Heifetz

THAILAND'S largest hospital group will set up a hospital in Myanmar next year to profit from the country's expanding economy, a senior company official announced last week.

Dr Chatree Daungnet, vice president and chief executive of Bangkok Dusit Medical Services Plc (BGH), told the *Bangkok Post* on December 22 that the company hopes Myanmar will improve regulations related to acquiring land, transferring money and

business ownership by the time BGH establishes a local branch in 2013.

Although BGH has already completed a feasibility study in Myanmar, the company's plans for developments have been stalled by a lack of clarity over economic regulations, the report said.

However, BGH has confirmed that it will still proceed with plans to establish a hospital in Myanmar next year.

"Patients from Myanmar coming for medical services at our hospitals in Thailand now rank second to the UAE. This means [Myanmar] has strong potential," Dr Chatree told the *Bangkok Post*.

*The Nation* recently selected BGH as its top pick in the Thai healthcare sector.



Thailand's Bangkok Hospital, one of the 31 hospitals currently owned by BGH. Pic: BGH

## New Parami bridge connects North Dagon, South Okkalapa

A RECONSTRUCTED bridge across the Ngamoyeik River in Parami was inaugurated on December 19, state media reported.

The 600-metre long bridge connects North Dagon and South Okkalapa townships and passes over a railway line.

It had been used by commuters for many years before being reconstructed

to withstand loads of approximately 68 tons.

The bridge was formally opened at a ceremony attended by Yangon Region Chief Minister U Myint Swe, Yangon Mayor U Hla Myint, Region Minister for Forestry and Energy U Kyaw Soe and Region Minister for Planning and Economy U Than Myint. - *Jessica Mudditt*



A graphic rendition of the Hoang Anh Gia Lai Myanmar Centre, to be constructed in Yangon's Bahan township by 2017. Pic: HAG Land

## Vietnam inks \$300m development deal

By Justin Heifetz

THE Ministry of Tourism's Directorate of Hotels and Tourism signed a Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) contract and land leasing agreement with Vietnam's Hoang Anh Gia Lai Group (HAG) for a US\$300 million mixed-use complex in Yangon, state media reported last week.

Officials from the Ministry of Tourism met representatives from HAG on December 19 at Amara Hotel in Nay Pyi Taw to sign for the construction of the multi-purpose Hoang Anh Gia Lai Myanmar

Centre.

The BOT concession contract comes after the ministry invited foreign companies to invest in Myanmar's tourism sector.

The Hoang Anh Gia Lai Myanmar Centre, now in its first phase of construction, is being built on Kabar Aye Pagoda Road in Yangon's Bahan township. The centre is expected to include a five-star hotel with business and recreation facilities; retail space and restaurants; and offices and apartments for lease.

HAG has announced that all legal procedures to develop the 8-hectare

plot have been completed, according to Vietnamese news agency *Tuoi Tre*.

"The realty market in Myanmar has become heated after the country opened to the world, and we are speeding to grab this chance," Le Hung, CEO of HAG Land, told *Tuoi Tre* on December 19.

"We have finished clearing site on the leased land plot," he confirmed.

The first phase of construction is slated for completion by 2015, while the second and final phase should be completed by 2017, according to the Directorate of Hotels and Tourism.

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## China's new housing prices surge

SHANGHAI – The cost of new homes increased in more Chinese cities in November than in the previous month, official figures showed on December 18, despite efforts from the government to keep the market in check.

Prices in 53 out of 70 cities tracked by the government rose month-on-month, the National Bureau of Statistics said in a statement, up from 35 cities in October and 31 cities in September.

Prices of new homes dropped in 10 cities and stayed unchanged in the remaining seven cities, the bureau said.

China has been taking steps to keep house prices under control for more than two years. Measures included prohibitions on buying second homes, raising minimum down-payments and imposing property taxes in certain areas.

The government pledged to continue its control measures next year after a two-day central economic work conference last weekend, but notably did not repeat its reference to "bringing home prices down to a reasonable level".

"This may indicate that China is unlikely to issue any new policies aimed at controlling home prices in the next few months, which may cause a rise in home prices," said Wendy Chen, a Shanghai-based economist at Nomura Securities.

She added that a government plan to push urbanisation, outlined at the economic meeting, may also boost demand for new homes and drive up prices.

The urbanisation plan is part of efforts to expand domestic consumption and achieve more balanced growth after having relied on exports for most of the past three decades.

The country's once red-hot economy that saw annual growth rates exceeding 10 percent has slowed markedly this year. The government expects gross domestic product to expand 7.5pc in 2012, down from 9.3pc in 2011.

– AFP

# Chengdu structure world's largest

By Sebastien Blanc

CHENGDU, China – A thousand kilometres from the nearest coast a towering glass wave rolls over the plains of Sichuan, the roof of what Chinese officials say will be the world's largest standalone structure.

The 100-metre-high New Century Global Centre is a symbol of the spread of China's boom, 500m long and 400m wide, with 1.7 million square metres of floor space, big enough to hold 20 Sydney Opera Houses, local authorities say.

By comparison the Pentagon in Washington – still one of the world's largest office buildings – is barely a third of the size with a mere 600,000 square metres of floor space.

The Global Centre is just a few kilometres from the US consulate where the police chief of Chongqing fled to seek asylum, triggering the fall of his patron Bo Xilai and exposing the biggest scandal to rock China's Communist Party for years.

But it represents a different side of China, where lower costs and government subsidies are still fuelling double-digit growth in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province.

The city of 14 million people plans to expand its subway from two lines to 10 by 2020, build a new airport and become a new Silicon Valley.

The Global Centre will house offices, conference rooms, a university complex, two commercial centres, two five star hotels, an IMAX cinema, a Mediterranean village, a skating rink and a pirate ship, among other attractions.

About 400,000 square metres will be devoted to shopping, most of the outlets high-end luxury brands.



Labourers working inside what is being billed as the world's biggest stand alone building at Chengdu, in southwest China's Sichuan Province, on December 12. Pic: AFP

Despite Chengdu being around 1000 kilometres from the sea, the complex has a marine theme, with fountains, a huge water park and an artificial beach, accented by the undulating roof, meant to resemble a wave.

"This is an ocean city built by man," said guide Liu Xun. "There will be 1000 rooms [in the hotel] and all will have seaside views."

The thick smog that normally blankets Chengdu risks making it a sunless sea, but visitors will not need to worry about that, she said.

"We have borrowed a Japanese technique. There will be an artificial sun that will shine 24 hours a day and allow for a comfortable temperature," Liu said. The system uses specialised

lighting technology that heats as well as illuminates.

The centrepiece will be a 5000-square-metre artificial beach, to include a rafting course and a seafront promenade, complete with parasols and seafood outlets that can accommodate 6000 people.

A giant screen 150m long and 40m high will form the horizon and offer sunrises and sunsets, accompanied by nautical breezes.

The exterior facade is near completion and an army of workers are rushing to finish the Chinese-designed building in time for a June 2013 international forum hosted by US magazine *Fortune*.

China's incoming president Xi Jinping is expected to attend

the event and meet the heads of some of the world's biggest multinationals.

Another enormous building is planned across the road. Award-winning British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid's Chengdu Contemporary Arts Centre is to include a theatre, an opera house and a museum.

In a video developers China Exhibition and Travel Group describe Chengdu as a "world class modern city of idyllic beauty", and say the Global Centre – including restaurants serving "the rarest oceanic fish species" – will bring to mind "the fabulous heavens".

It is, they say, "a landmark which commands the world and is looked upon by the world with respect". – AFP

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	36.20 Sq.m.	389.65 Sq.ft.		
	350.20 Sq.m.	3,769.52 Sq.ft.		

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## PC makers under pressure from tablets, smartphones

SAN FRANCISCO – The shift to smartphones and tablets became a landslide this year, crushing desire for laptop computers and pressuring manufacturers to adapt to the mobile internet era.

The trend promised to gain momentum in 2013, with people using handheld gadgets to remain connected to the Web on the go and switching to sophisticated systems in homes or offices.

“Tablets will not kill PCs (personal computers),” Forrester Research analyst Frank Gillett told *AFP*. “Tablets will force them to evolve.”

Signs that the evolution is underway include Microsoft overhauling Windows to synch the world’s most widely used computer operating system with tablets and smartphones as well as desktops and laptops.

Microsoft is even selling its own Surface tablet based on the Windows 8 software released in October.

“I don’t think the PC is going away,” said analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group in Silicon Valley.

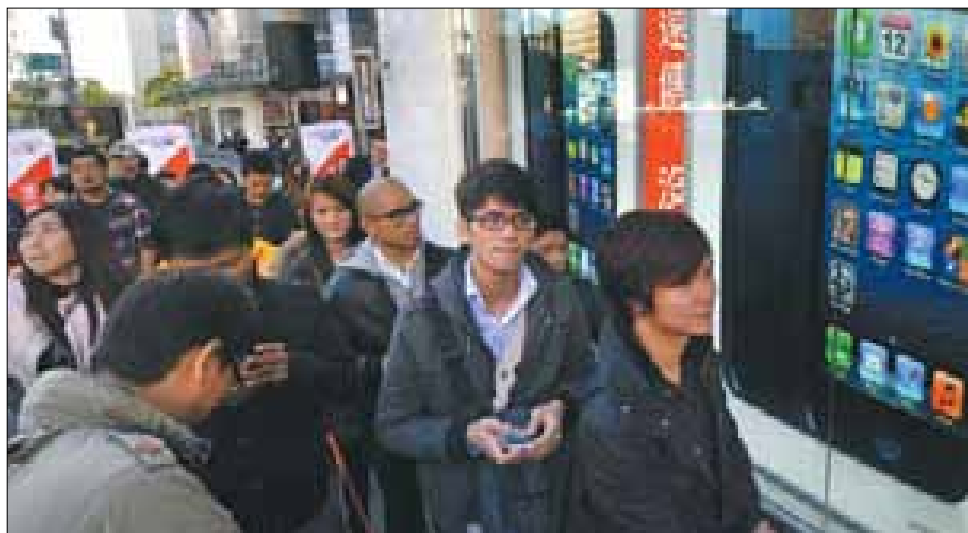
“What is clear is we are going through some turmoil; the market is resetting itself around new products.”

While people opt for tablets instead of laptops for computing on the move, they will yearn for bigger screens and more processing power when they settle down for “real work,” say analysts.

“Your tablet can do so much that fewer people need laptops, but when you get to your desktop you want something that contrasts significantly from your tablet,” Gillett said.

“I think we will ultimately see the reinvention of PCs.”

Gillett described a future in which people go seamlessly from working on mobile devices to desktop stations where tablets can be docked and augmented with sensors,



Customers queue outside a shop in Taipei on December 14 to buy the latest Apple iPhone 5. Surging demand for tablets and smartphones saw growth in PC sales fall below two percent in 2012 for the second consecutive year. Pic: *AFP*

processors, bigger screens and more.

He refers to the concept as “frames” for computing.

The analyst contends that the limping economy is among factors behind a temporary lull in PC purchases destined to end as people “go through this illusion they will do it all on a tablet and realise they can’t.”

“Tablets will substitute for some, even many, laptops but because a tablet can’t do as much as a laptop it

Hewlett-Packard and Dell are struggling amid sluggish demand as sales of tablet computers and other devices surge.

Enderle said China-based Lenovo is thriving by selling the gamut of computing devices.

“Lenovo is showing success in all categories, supporting the notion that while the market has more products it is all still personal computing,” he said.

“Before we were buying a

choose a pantheon of devices and all of these are connected through the cloud... so the user is now the centre of the tech universe.”

More than 32 million tablets were shipped worldwide in the third quarter of 2012, a 75 percent increase from the same period a year earlier, said Futuresource Consulting.

Futuresource projected that global tablet shipments this year would reach 137 million units and nearly triple during the coming five years.

“We’re seeing significant industry growth across all key world territories, with the majority of tablet market activity still originating from consumer purchases,” said Simon Bryant of Futuresource.

Part of the success of tablets was attributed to the average price dropping below \$400, due in large part to competition between device makers using free Android operating software from Google.

“Tablets continue to captivate consumers,” said Tom Mainelli, research director for tablets at IDC.

– *AFP*

### ‘I think we will ultimately see the reinvention of PCs.’

will eventually stimulate PC sales,” Gillett said.

“What ultimately happens here is that the laptop and desktop get rethought and reinvented for a tablet world.”

The market for tablets and smartphones is red-hot, leaving the PC as an afterthought for many. Microsoft, which was the biggest tech firm in 2009 because of its dominant Windows operating system for PCs, has fallen behind Apple and is struggling to remain a major force amid gains by Google and Amazon.

Former giants like

laptop or desktop computer,” he said. “Now, we are increasingly carrying many products.”

Research firm IDC projects global PC sales this year of 367 million, up a fraction of a percent from 2011 and marking the second consecutive year of growth below two percent. ABI Research predicts tablet computers will overtake notebook PCs by 2016.

Roger Kay of Endpoint Technologies Associates said that the PC “still is pretty relevant” but “not the centre of the computing universe.”

“I think people are going to

## Most US publications have mobile presence, finds industry survey

WASHINGTON – Almost all major US newspapers and magazines have a mobile Web presence and most of those without one will create one in the coming months, an industry survey showed on December 17.

The report by the Alliance for Audited Media, formerly known as the Audit Bureau of Circulations, said 90 percent of the publications in its members’ survey had a mobile presence, up from 51pc in 2009.

The remaining 10pc expect to follow suit within the next 12 months.

The survey said publishers, unlike a few years ago, are looking at how to make mobile apps and platforms profitable: 22pc said their smartphone and tablet apps or platforms are money-makers, and half expect these platforms

table stakes to continue reaching and growing digital readership.”

John said the survey showed publishers “have embraced tablets, smartphones and the Web as an integral part of their overall cross-platform publishing strategy.”

They are meeting their readers where they live – in print, on tablets and smartphones, and on the Web.”

The survey found that media companies are producing 3.4 iPad and iPhone apps, three Kindle apps and 2.4 Nook apps.

Some 56pc charge for content on the iPad, followed by the iPhone at 42pc, Kindle at 38pc and Nook at 31pc.

Subscriptions are not the only revenue source. Most respondents agreed that a dual revenue stream

### ‘Media companies know that delivering content..is key.’

to become profitable over the next two years.

The survey showed that Apple was the dominant platform for these apps: 85pc of publishers have iPhone apps and 87pc iPad apps.

But the number of publishers developing Amazon Kindle apps has grown from 24pc in 2011 to 67pc in 2012. Nook apps, for those using the Barnes & Noble platform, have increased from 14pc in 2011 to 57pc in 2012.

“Media companies know that delivering content whenever and wherever consumers want is key,” said Eric John, AAM vice president of digital services.

“They know digital content, including browser-based editions and mobile apps, is no longer the wave of the future, but

from advertising and subscriptions is necessary to make digital platforms profitable.

AAM said that 48pc of newspapers have a paywall to charge for some or all of their content. Combined percentages for newspapers, magazines and business publications show 41pc use a paywall.

Of those without a paywall, 44pc plan to have one in the next two years.

The most popular type of paywall is metered, where customers may access a limited number of articles before payment is required.

Some 40pc use metered paywalls, while 17pc use a hard paywall where payment is required to read any content and 3 percent use a combination paywall that restricts access to premium content. – *AFP*

## ‘Sporting’ assault rifle used in Newtown school massacre

WASHINGTON – The weapon used in the Newtown school massacre is a civilian version of the powerful M-16 assault rifle issued to US troops since Vietnam and can be bought legally across the United States.

Police said gunman Adam Lanza killed most of his victims with the Bushmaster AR-15, made by Bushmaster Firearms International, which fires .223 calibre bullets, equivalent to NATO’s standard 5.56 millimetre ammunition.

Lighter than the rifles used in World War II or Korea, the round is designed to penetrate body armour or steel helmets and kill an enemy soldier from up to 600 metres, at a velocity of nearly 1000 meters (3200 feet) a second.

The AR-15 is also the template for the military’s current M-4 rifle, a shortened carbine variant of the M-16, which is carried by the American soldiers in Afghanistan and around the world.

The same military-style assault rifle was used in another shooting spree in July in Aurora, Colorado, with the

gunman opening fire in a cinema at the premier of the latest Batman film.

The gun featured in other rampages in recent years and was used by the infamous “Beltway snipers,” when John Allen Muhammad and his stepson Lee Boyd Malvo murdered 10 people in the Washington area in 2001 and 2002.

The M-16 is featured in countless war films, from *Apocalypse Now* to *Rambo*, and in the popular, violent video game *Call of Duty*.

The civilian version of the rifle is virtually identical to the one carried by American soldiers since the 1960s, except that it is not fully automatic.

When firing the “semi-automatic” civilian variant, the trigger has to be pulled for each shot, rather than held down to spray a burst.

In 1994, Congress banned assault rifles and large ammunition clips that carry more than 10 rounds. But the measure expired in 2004 under a Republican-led Congress.

It is legal for Americans to own a semi-automatic assault rifle, though

not the military version.

About 2.3 million assault rifles were produced in the United States in 2011 and another million imported, shows data from the US federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Bushmaster’s corporate parent, Freedom Group, touts itself as America’s largest maker of semi-automatic weapons or so-called “modern sporting rifles.”

A Bushmaster AR-15 can be bought online for less than US\$1000 and is advertised as suitable for “hunting, competition, home defence and tactical use.”

The number of firearms owned by Americans has grown from 192 million in 1994 to 294 million in 2007, including 106 million handguns, 105 million rifles and 83 million shotguns, says the National Institute of Justice.

The number of guns per capita for civilians has roughly doubled since 1968, from one gun for every two Americans to one gun a person. – *AFP*

### Bushmaster .223

The principal weapon used by Adam Lanza in his attack on 20 children and 6 adults at the Sandy Hook Elementary School, in Newtown, United States, on Friday



- ▶ Length: 100.3 cm
- ▶ Weight: about 3.3kg (w/o magazine)
- ▶ Semi-automatic
- ▶ Price: about \$700 - \$1,000
- ▶ Magazine capacity: 30 rounds
- ▶ Authorities found several magazines at Sandy Hook school
- ▶ All the victims had been hit 3 to 11 times

- The weapon was legally owned by Lanza’s mother, whom he shot at her home before heading to the school
- Two hand guns were also found at the scene

Source: Bushmaster Firearms International/Budgunshop.com

# ASEAN pressures India on maritime rows with China

NEW DELHI – Southeast Asian countries last week urged India to intervene to help resolve bitter territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea, saying it was “crucial” to maintaining peace and stability.

ASEAN, the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, on December 20 called on India – which vowed to promote co-operation on trade and maritime security with the countries – to take a more decisive stance in the region.

Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Tan Dung asked for New Delhi’s direct intervention over South China Sea territorial disputes while Myanmar President Thein Sein said India’s role was “crucial” to ensuring peace and stability in the region.

But India’s foreign minister insisted the issue did not require his country’s intervention.

China claims most of the South China Sea, including waters close to the shores of its neighbours. China’s claim is contested by the Philippines as well as Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan

and Vietnam, which have overlapping claims to some or all of those same areas.

“Doing something about it includes not doing something about it” Indian Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid said, adding that issues of sovereignty “need to be resolved between the countries concerned”.

“China knows it, India knows it that there is too much to lose if we don’t

strategic shift to the region.

The Pentagon will send P-8 submarine-hunting aircraft, cruise missiles, Virginia-class submarines, coastal combat ships and F-35 fighter jets to Asian ports and bases in coming years, the senior official told reporters

“What you’re seeing is part of a bigger effort, the Pacific theatre will get the newest weapons systems first,” he

– for rotational deployments in Singapore.

Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said on December 18 that the stealthy F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, which is still in development, could be deployed at the Iwakuni air station in Japan’s Yamaguchi prefecture by 2017.

Washington also is providing Japan with another powerful X-band radar to bolster its missile defenses, a move announced in September.

The senior US defence official said Southeast Asian governments were watching closely to see how China’s new political and military leadership will handle the territorial disputes.

“There was palpable concern and deep concern” over Beijing’s recent actions on the South China Sea, the official said.

He was referring to tough new maritime rules from China’s Hainan province, a controversial map in new Chinese passports and allegations that Chinese fishing boats cut the seismic cables of a Vietnamese geological survey vessel.

– AFP

## ‘Doing something about it includes not doing something about it.’

overcome issues from time to time,” he said.

Relations between India and China, who have an unresolved border dispute, are often prickly and marked by mutual distrust – a legacy of a brief border war in 1962 – but they are trying to broaden trade ties despite political tensions.

In another development, an American defence official said on December 19 that the US plans to deploy some of its newest warships and other high-tech weapons to the Asia-Pacific as part of a

said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Pentagon has promoted a tilt to Asia after a decade of ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, reflecting concern over China’s growing military power and its assertive stance in territorial disputes with its neighbours.

The United States already plans to deploy more than half of its fleet to the Asia-Pacific and to station four littoral combat ships – speedy new vessels designed to operate near coastlines



A member of a folkloric group performs during celebrations marking the end of the Mayan age at the Tikal archeological site in Guatemala on December 20. Guatemala was one of five Meso-American countries that celebrated the end of the Mayan ‘Long Count’ calendar, which began in 3114 BC, and the beginning of a new Mayan era on December 21. While doomsayers hunkered down to await a predicted apocalypse on December 21, others took a more lighthearted view of a Mayan prophecy of the world’s end and marked the event with stunts and parties. Pic: AFP

# US gun group demands armed police in schools

## Briefly

WASHINGTON – US President Barack Obama on December 21 nominated Senator John Kerry as his new secretary of state to succeed Hillary Clinton, who is stepping down after four years as the top US diplomat.

WASHINGTON – A Republican plan to let tax breaks expire on US millionaires collapsed late on December 20 when it failed to earn enough party support, leaving talks on averting the “fiscal cliff” unresolved.

JERUSALEM – Israel has approved plans to build another 523 homes in the West Bank, settlers said on December 20, in the first step towards a new settlement “city” that drew furious Palestinian condemnation.

• Earlier report, P. 33.

UNITED NATIONS – A record 111 countries voted on December 20 for a moratorium on capital punishment at a keynote UN General Assembly human rights meeting. The 41 countries that voted against the moratorium included the United States, China, Japan, India, Iran, North Korea and Saudi Arabia. Thirty-four countries abstained. – AFP

WASHINGTON – The United States’ most powerful pro-gun lobbying group demanded on December 21 that armed police be deployed to every school in the country.

“The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun,” said National Rifle Association vice-president Wayne LaPierre, in his first public comments since the shooting at a primary school in Newtown, Connecticut on December 14.

“I call on Congress today to act immediately to appropriate whatever is necessary to put armed police officers in every single school in this nation,” he said.

LaPierre’s comments came two days after President Barack Obama called for “concrete” proposals within a month from a new task force that will be led by Vice President Joe Biden and examine new gun control laws, better mental health access and the impact of violent culture.

“The fact that this problem is complex can no longer be an excuse for doing nothing,” Obama said.

Obama’s timeline means he will make new legislation to stem gun violence one of the first major issues of his second term, after he is sworn in on January 20. – AFP

• Commentary, P. 32; related report, P. 38.

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# Fraud and the Second Amendment

## COMMENT by Cass Sunstein

THE rise of the Second Amendment as a serious obstacle to gun control legislation is astonishingly recent.

Its rise is a tribute less to the vision of the Founding Fathers than to the skill, money and power of the contemporary gun-rights movement, which has not only exerted disproportionate influence on Congress, but also helped transform the landscape of constitutional argument. Americans should be able to have a serious national discussion uninhibited by wild and unsupportable claims about the meaning of the Constitution.

Here's a quick way to see how rapidly things have changed. Warren Burger was a conservative Republican, appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court by President Richard Nixon in 1969. In a speech in 1992, six years after his retirement from the court, Burger declared that "the Second Amendment doesn't guarantee the right to have firearms at all." In his view, the purpose of the Second Amendment was only "to ensure that the 'state armies' - 'the militia' - would be maintained for the defence of the state."

A year before, Burger went even further. On "MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour," Burger said the Second Amendment "has been the subject of one of the greatest pieces of

fraud - I repeat the word 'fraud' - on the American public by special interest groups that I have ever seen in my lifetime." Burger was not in the habit of taking stands on controversial constitutional questions on national television. In using the word "fraud," Burger meant to describe what he saw as a clear consensus about the meaning of the Constitution.

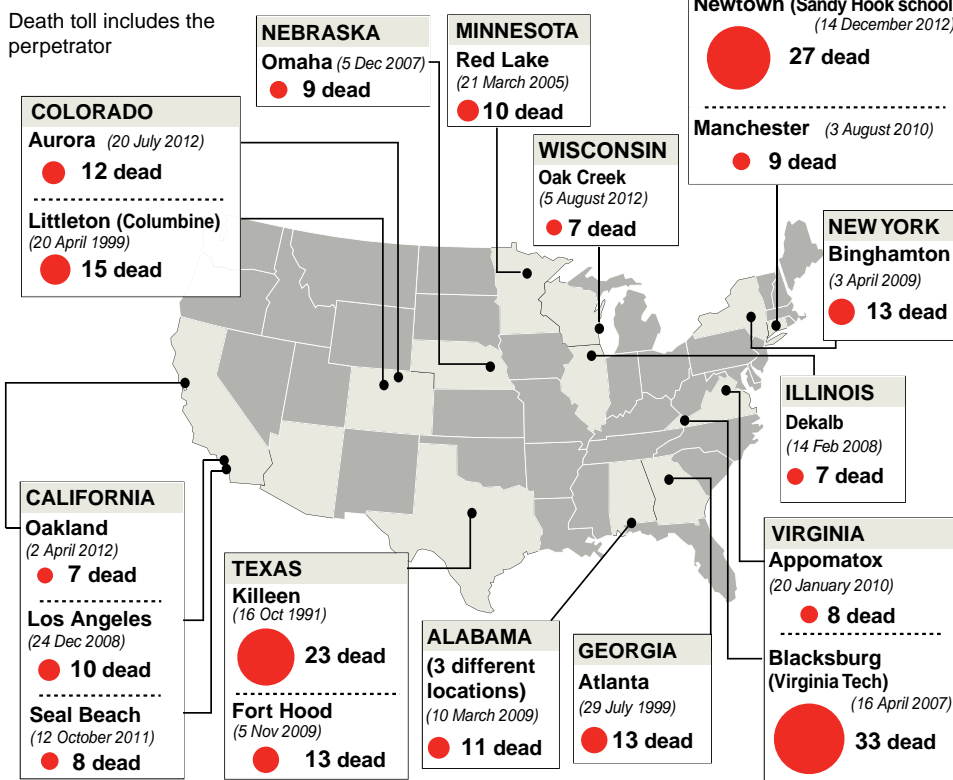
To understand what Burger was thinking, consider the words of the Second Amendment: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Fair-minded readers have to acknowledge that the text is ambiguous. Sure, it could fairly be read to support an individual right to have guns. But in light of the preamble, with its reference to a well-regulated militia, it could also be read not to confer an individual right, but to protect federalism, by ensuring that the new national government would not interfere with citizen militias at the state level.

Many historians believe, with Chief Justice Burger, that some version of the latter interpretation is the right one. Until remarkably recently, almost all federal judges have agreed. It is striking that before its 2008 decision in District of Columbia v. Heller, the Supreme Court had never held that the Second Amendment protects an individual right to have guns.

For almost seven decades, the court's leading decision was US v. Miller.

### Recent deadly shootings in the US

Death toll includes the perpetrator



The 1939 case involved a ban on the possession of a sawed-off shotgun. Sounding like Burger, the court unanimously said that the Second Amendment's "obvious purpose" was "to assure the continuation and render possible the effectiveness of" the militia. Without evidence that the possession of a sawed-off shotgun was related to preservation of a well-regulated militia, the court refused to say that the Second Amendment protected the right to have such a weapon.

For decades, federal courts overwhelmingly rejected the conclusion that the Second Amendment protects an individual right. It was not until the 21st century that lower federal courts, filled with appointees of presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, started to adopt the individual-rights position. And, of course, the Supreme Court itself adopted that view in 2008, by a 5-to-4 vote.

I am not saying that the court was wrong. The legal question is genuinely

difficult and people disagree in good faith how to solve it. What is important to see is that in the very recent past, the United States has lived through a Second Amendment revolution, spurred by an intensely focused and well-funded social movement with both legal and political arms.

More important still, the Supreme Court has proceeded cautiously and it has pointedly refused to shut the door to all gun regulation. On the contrary, the court said, "Nothing in our opinion should be taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms."

To this the court added that the sorts of weapons it was protecting were those "in common use at the time" that the Second Amendment was ratified. We should respect the fact that the individual right to have guns has been established, but a lot of gun-control legislation, imaginable or proposed, would be perfectly consistent with the court's rulings.

In the political arena, opponents of gun control, armed with both organisation and money, have been invoking the Second Amendment far more recklessly, treating it as a firm obstacle to any effort to regulate guns and bullets.

As a result, they have made it difficult for Congress and many state legislatures, even to hold serious discussions about what sorts of regulation might save lives.

Consider this disturbing statement by Stephen Halbrook, a lawyer who has represented the National Rifle Association, about the very kinds of guns used in the Connecticut tragedy: "They get a lot of coverage when there's a tragedy, but the number of people unlawfully killed with them is small."

Reasonable people can debate about what policies would actually work. That is a debate worth having. It is past time to stop using the Second Amendment itself as a loaded weapon, threatening elected representatives who ought to be doing their jobs. - Bloomberg News

(Cass Sunstein, the Felix Frankfurter professor of law at Harvard University, is a Bloomberg View columnist. He is the former administrator of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, the co-author of *Nudge* and author of *Simpler: The Future of Government*, forthcoming in 2013).

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Dated: 24 December 2012



# Israel warned at UN over 'provocative' settlements

UNITED NATIONS – The United Nations and UN Security Council powers on December 19 condemned Israel's heightened settler construction in the Palestinian territories as a threat to flagging peace efforts.

UN leader Ban Ki-moon and the UN envoys from several European Union countries, Russia and China warned Israel against building thousands of new settler homes approved in recent weeks.

US ambassador Susan Rice did not join their public attack on Israel, but slammed the "provocative" act during closed UN Security Council consultations.

Israel has approved thousands of new homes in the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem since the UN General Assembly voted on November 29 to recognise Palestine as a non-member state.

Israel gave the green light to plans for 2610 homes in the as yet unbuilt Givat HaMatos district in east Jerusalem and tenders for 1048 units in the occupied West Bank immediately before the UN meeting.

## Israel provokes ire over housing permits



UN secretary general Ban said the Israel-Palestinian peace process was in "deep freeze," worsened by the

settlement approvals. "I call on Israel to refrain from continuing on this dangerous path, which will

undermine the prospects for a resumption of dialogue and a peaceful future for Palestinians and Israelis alike," he said.

The United Nations also called on Israel to end its freeze on transferring customs and tax payments that it collects for the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority.

Israel's UN ambassador Ron Prozor said the new announcements were "planning and zoning" and that it could take years before the government allows the start of construction.

The United States traditionally protects Israel at the Security Council. Using its power as a permanent member, it has vetoed many resolutions criticizing Israel, including over settlements.

US ambassador Rice however reaffirmed growing US impatience with its ally during closed talks at the council, diplomats said on condition of anonymity.

She said the settlements are "counterproductive" and added that the United States "is deeply disappointed that Israel insists on continuing a pattern of provocative action." – AFP

# Savile report raps BBC, but clears it of cover-up

LONDON – An official report on December 19 strongly criticised the BBC's handling of allegations of child sex abuse against late presenter Jimmy Savile, but cleared the world's biggest broadcaster of a cover-up.

The findings by an independent inquiry sparked the resignation of the BBC's deputy director of news, and led to the editor and deputy editor of the program at the centre of the scandal being replaced.

The report exposed the "chaos and confusion" at the BBC although it dismissed claims that its flagship current affairs program Newsnight dropped an investigation into Savile so as not to jeopardise Christmas tribute shows to him.

The BBC commissioned the inquiry by former Sky News executive Nick Pollard in October during a major crisis at the corporation that cost then-director-general George Entwistle his job.

Savile, who died last year at the age of 84, was one of the BBC's top TV and radio presenters.

The child abuse claims were first made public by rival broadcaster ITV two months ago and since then police have identified 199 crimes in which Savile is a suspect, including 31 alleged rapes.

Newsnight first had evidence of the allegations a year ago, shortly after Savile's death, but it dropped the story after just a few weeks.

The Pollard report found no evidence to support claims that this was to avoid an embarrassing clash with planned Christmas tributes to the late star.

But it criticised the decision to drop the probe and the BBC's failure to deal with the ensuing crisis at the broadcaster, which it said was plagued by infighting and a "critical lack of leadership and coordination".

"The decision to drop the original investigation was flawed and the way it was taken was wrong but I believe it was done in good faith. It was not done to protect the Savile tribute programs or for any improper reason," Pollard said.

The scandal over Newsnight's dropped investigation was compounded when the program broadcast a television report last month which wrongly implicated a senior former Conservative politician, Alistair McAlpine, in child sex abuse.

The BBC was forced to apologise and pay substantial damages to McAlpine and Entwistle resigned as director-general after only 54 days in the job. – AFP

# Rhino killings set record

JOHANNESBURG – At least 633 rhinos have been killed in South Africa this year, a record toll as demand for their horns continues to surge on the black market in Asia, the government said on December 19.

More than 60 percent of the slaughtered pachyderms were from the vast Kruger National Park, South Africa's largest wildlife reserve and

the country's top safari destination.

Rangers a week earlier predicted around 20 more animals will be killed before the end of the year in the park, which boasts 40 percent of the world's rhino population.

The number of rhinos poached in South Africa has climbed sharply from 13 in 2007 to 448 last year. – AFP

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## Rudolph's red nose mystery solved for Christmas

PARIS – Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer's snout has been immortalised in movies, books and song.

But until now, no-one has offered a scientific explanation for the glow that allows the world's most famous antlered herbivore to guide Santa's sleigh through the night before Christmas.

In a study released on December 17, researchers in the Netherlands and Norway

used a hand-held microscope to examine the nasal lining of five healthy humans, two reindeer and a sixth person with a non-cancerous nasal growth.

Reindeer noses have 25 percent more blood vessels than human noses, found the tongue-in-cheek investigation, published by the *British Medical Journal* in its Christmas edition.

The tiny blood vessels

provide plentiful oxygen-carrying cells and help control the body's temperature, showed their findings, which were backed by an infrared image of a reindeer after exercise.

"Rudolph's nose is red because it is richly supplied with red blood cells, comprises a highly dense microcirculation, and is anatomically and physiologically adapted for

reindeer to carry out their flying duties for Santa Claus," the paper observes.

Rudolph's round-the-world feat has been closely scrutinised by physicists.

In order to deliver presents to children in about 100 million homes where the Santa tradition is observed, he would have to travel at about 1000 kilometres (650 miles) a second, they estimate.

At such speeds, the reindeer, Santa and the sleigh would be vaporised by friction with the air, along with the gifts and any little elvish helpers who came along for the ride.

Rudolph would need to deploy an ion shield to protect them, or exploit loopholes in the space-time continuum so that they travelled between dimensions in order to deliver the presents on time. – AFP

## Briefs

### Russia approves adoptions ban

MOSCOW – Russia's lower house of parliament on December 21 gave final approval to a contentious bill that retaliates against a new US human rights measure by barring Americans from adopting the country's children.

Washington swiftly slammed the move saying Russian children would be harmed by the measure.

The State Duma passed the bill without debate in a quick 420-7 vote as protesters picketed the building demanding the measure be voted down.

The measure, which underscores the severity of the recent strain in Russia-US ties, would end about 1000 adoptions a year.

### Assange promises more WikiLeaks

LONDON – WikiLeaks will release one million documents next year affecting every country in the world, founder Julian Assange said in a speech from the balcony of the Ecuadorian embassy in London on December 20.

In a "Christmas message" marking six months since he sought asylum in the embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden over claims of rape and sexual assault, Assange also said the door was open to negotiations to resolve his situation.

It was Assange's first public appearance since he addressed a crowd from the same balcony on August 19.

### Louvre attracts 10m visitors

PARIS – The Louvre said on December 20 its new Islamic art wing helped cement its position as the world's most-visited museum with nearly 10 million visitors in 2012, over a million more than last year.

The exact figures will be released early next year, but in the meantime the Paris museum said there was a "remarkable progression in Chinese visitors, who now figure in the top three groups (of non-French visitors) alongside Americans and Brazilians".

### World's oldest person dies, 115

WASHINGTON – The world's oldest person – an Iowa woman cleaned people's houses until she turned 90 – died on December 17 at age 115.

Dina Manfredini, a native of Italy who was born on April 4, 1897, died at a retirement centre near Des Moines, Iowa. She had lived independently until the age of 110.

Manfredini's death apparently leaves a Japanese man, Jiroemon Kimura, as the world's oldest person. He was born just 15 days after Manfredini. – AFP

## WHO malaria warning

GENEVA – The fight against malaria has slowed in the past two years, threatening to reverse progress in combatting one of the world's biggest killers, the World Health Organisation warned last week.

Funding for efforts to prevent the deadly mosquito-borne disease increased sharply between 2004 and 2009, part of a drive that has saved more than a million lives in the past decade, but has since levelled off, the UN's health body said.

"Millions of people living in highly endemic areas continue to lack access to effective malaria prevention, diagnostic testing and treatment," it said in a statement on December 17.

In its annual World Malaria Report, the WHO said that last year, only

US\$2.3 billion went towards fighting malaria globally – less than half the estimated \$5.1 billion needed.

"The funding for malaria is not enough," Richard Cibulski of the WHO's Global Malaria Program told reporters in Geneva, cautioning there could be a resurgence of the disease in coming years.

The slowdown was regrettable in light of progress made in the preceding decade, WHO said, noting that between 2000 and 2010, the global malaria mortality rate plunged 26 percent, while it fell 33pc in Africa, saving an estimated 1.1 million lives.

In 2010, an estimated 219 million people were infected with the disease and 660,000 died, the UN agency said, revising up slightly its previous estimate for that year. – AFP

## Pussy Riot prisoner tells of 'dead world'

MOSCOW – One of Russia's jailed Pussy Riot punk band members complained last week of grey monotony and strict rules in her prison camp in the Urals mountains, in her first detailed account of her experiences.

In an article in *The New Times* weekly on December 17, Maria Alyokhina, 24, described her first weeks at Corrective Labour Colony No. 28 in the Perm region, where she is serving a two-year sentence for the group's anti-Vladimir Putin performance in a church.

"Everything around is grey. Even if something is another colour, all the same it has an element of grey. Everything: the buildings, food, the sky, words," said Alyokhina, the mother of a young son, who writes poetry and has taken part in ecological activism.

The camp is surrounded by factories belching harmful fumes and by coniferous forest, she said.

"It is an anti-life," added Alyokhina, who last month asked to be transferred to solitary confinement after conflicts with fellow inmates.

The camp is a "dead world," where prisoners feel "not needed, discarded," she said.

She said she was transferred to the camp via three prisons, travelling in train cars and vans, before driving through the iron gates with 18 other



Maria Alyokhina... 'an anti-life'. Pic: AFP

prisoners.

The camp has a workshop where women sew 12 hours a day for maximum pay of 1000 rubles (US\$32.57) a month, she wrote.

The emphasis is on following rules so as to qualify for early parole and this is also the main topic of conversation among the women, she said.

Women are more likely to get parole if they visit the prayer room although Russia is a secular state, she complained.

They also get bonus points for visiting the library and the psychologist and contacting relatives.

"Everything a prisoner does is to get a tick for early parole," she said.

Alyokhina often looked

exhausted at the Pussy Riot trial but was praised by observers for her confident questions to witnesses and lawyers.

Alyokhina and bandmates Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Yekaterina Samutsevich were sentenced in August to two years in prison for hooliganism motivated by religious hatred after they performed a "punk prayer" in a Moscow cathedral.

Samutsevich was released on appeal with a suspended sentence in October because guards grabbed her before she could take part.

Tolokonnikova is serving her sentence in the central Moscow region of Mordovia, known for its network of camps dating to the Soviet era. – AFP

## Pimping case setback for DSK

PARIS – A probe into allegations that Dominique Strauss-Kahn procured prostitutes for sex parties will continue after a French court on December 19 rejected a request for pimping charges against the former IMF chief to be dismissed.

Lawyers for the disgraced politician said they would appeal against the court's decision.

"Mr Strauss-Kahn's defence is certain that he will ultimately be cleared of the absurd charges of pimping that have been made against him," they said in a statement.

The setback for Strauss-Kahn came a week after he agreed a financial settlement with a New York hotel maid

who had accused him of sexual assault in a case that forced him to resign from his IMF job and wrecked his chances of becoming French president.

Details of the settlement were not disclosed but legal experts said Strauss-Kahn would have been required to pay Nafissatou Diallo several million dollars.

French prosecutors are convinced they have a case against Strauss-Kahn for "aggravated pimping in an organised gang".

The case, known as the "Carlton affair" in France, centres around allegations that business leaders and police officials in Lille operated a vice ring supplying women for sex

parties, some of which are said to have taken place at the Carlton Hotel in the northern city.

Among Strauss-Kahn's fellow accused is Jean-Christophe Lagarde, a police commissioner, and Rene Kojfer, the former public relations officer at the Carlton.

Lawyers for Lagarde and Kojfer have claimed their clients have been caught up in a political witch-hunt against Strauss-Kahn, arguing that there would have been no probe but for his involvement.

The Carlton case is one of a series of investigations that were launched in the aftermath of Strauss-Kahn's arrest in New York. – AFP

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Dated: 24 December 2012

# Consulate attack probe slams 'grossly inadequate' security

WASHINGTON – A long-awaited inquiry into a deadly militant attack on the US mission in the Libyan city of Benghazi last week slammed State Department security arrangements there as "grossly inadequate."

But the months-long probe released on December 18 also found there had been "no immediate, specific" intelligence of a threat against the mission, which was overrun on September 11 by dozens of heavily armed militants who killed four Americans, including the US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens.

"Systemic failures and leadership and management deficiencies at senior levels within two bureaus of the State Department resulted in a Special Mission security posture that was inadequate for Benghazi and grossly inadequate to deal with the attack that took place," the report said.

The Accountability Review Board also concluded "there was no protest prior to the attacks, which were unanticipated in their scale and intensity."

The attacks, in which the consulate and a nearby annex



The fatally injured US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, is helped by Libyan civilians after the attack on Benghazi consulate in September. Pic: AFP

were targeted, have become fiercely politicised, with Republicans lambasting the administration for security failings as well as a possible cover-up over al-Qaeda's role.

The US envoy to the United Nations, Susan Rice, came under relentless Republican criticism for

saying days after the assault that, according to the best intelligence, it was triggered by a "spontaneous" protest outside the mission.

Rice has since been forced to pull out of the running to replace US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who steps down early next year.

In the unclassified section of its report, the five-strong board said it believed every effort had been made to rescue Stevens, who died in the attack – the first US envoy killed on duty in three decades.

Clinton said she accepted "every one" of the 29 recommendations made by the ARB, which has spent the last three months investigating the incident.

She also said the State Department was working with the Pentagon to "dispatch hundreds of additional Marine Security Guards to bolster our posts" and was aiming to train up more diplomatic security personnel.

The *New York Times* reported the State Department is asking Congress to transfer US\$1.3 billion from contingency funds that had been allocated to Iraq.

This would include \$553 million for the extra Marines, \$130 million for diplomatic security personnel, and \$691 million for improving security at diplomatic missions, the daily said.

– AFP

# Easy win for Zuma in ANC leadership vote

BLOEMFONTEIN – South African president Jacob Zuma scored a thumping victory in the ANC's leadership contest on December 18, opening the way for him to lead Africa's largest economy until 2019.

Zuma won the backing of more than 75 percent of the ANC's 3977 voting delegates at a party conference in Bloemfontein, making him the odds-on favourite to retain the presidency after general elections in 2014.

"The national conference has spoken and we are all part of that decision," a triumphant Zuma said in brief remarks to delegates.

Businessman Cyril Ramaphosa won the deputy presidency setting him up to become Zuma's eventual successor.

Zuma had faced an embarrassing, if lacklustre, leadership challenge from Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, who won 991 of the votes.

The vote took place despite the conference being threatened by right-wing extremists.

Police said four men plotted to kill Zuma, Motlanthe, government ministers and senior party officials. The men were charged with treason and terrorism.

Analysts say that after three years in power marked

by crisis, Zuma faces a tough slog ahead.

He will have to work hard to win back South African voters, who increasingly see the ANC as out of touch, incompetent and corrupt.

Zuma's poll numbers have steadily eroded amid a series of scandals. Criticism of his administration reached a crescendo earlier this year when police killed 34 striking miners in one day and it was revealed that about US\$27 million of taxpayers' money had been used to refurbish Zuma's private home.

Despite public anger at the state of the country, the ANC is likely to romp home in 2014 as it has consistently received about two thirds of the vote in elections since the end of apartheid.

Opening the five-day meeting Zuma tried to reassure investors that he does not back calls for mass nationalisations and that the country is not "falling apart."

The reassurance came as unemployment remains stuck at about 25 percent and the economy is growing at its slowest rate in three years.

Meanwhile crucial sectors such as mining have been hit by strikes over low wages and are struggling to modernise and reduce reliance on masses of cheap labour. – AFP

# Attacks in Iraq kill dozens

BAGHDAD – A wave of attacks targeting both Iraqi security forces and civilians killed 48 people on December 17, in a second day of deadly violence ahead of the first anniversary of the withdrawal of US forces.

December 17 was the deadliest day in Iraq since November 29, when 50 people were killed. The latest violence comes after attacks killed 19 people and wounded 77 on December 16.

US military forces completed their withdrawal from Iraq on December 18, 2011, ending a nearly nine-year war that cost the lives of tens of thousands of Iraqis, thousands of Americans and hundreds of billions of dollars.

Violence in Iraq is down significantly from its peak in 2006 and 2007, but insurgent groups still pose a significant threat, and attacks occur almost daily. – AFP

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## Fury in India over gang rape on bus

NEW DELHI – Riot police fired water cannon on December 19 at a protest in New Delhi over the gang rape of a 23-year-old student who was left fighting for her life as outrage against the brutal attack grew across India.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh joined his ruling Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi in condemning the “heinous” assault by six drunken men who were joyriding on a bus after dark on December 15 when they picked up the woman and a male companion.

After taking turns to rape the woman, the attackers then threw the pair off the vehicle.

Four people, including the bus driver, have so far been arrested.

As the government tried to address the anger with series of steps, protests spread to other major cities including Mumbai, Kolkata and Ahmedabad.

Police used water cannon on one group of demonstrators as they tried to tear down steel barricades outside the official residence of Delhi’s Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit.

Before the violence broke out, protesters carrying banners chanted: “We want equal rights for women.”

“Women don’t feel safe in the city, this is appalling,” said student protester Jayesha Koushik, 18.

“The blame is always put on the women.

‘She was not wearing the right dress, she was out at the wrong time, she must have provoked it’. How can you blame the women for rape?”

National crime records show that 228,650 of the total 256,329 violent crimes recorded last year were aimed against women.

Rape cases in India more than doubled between 1990 and 2008. The incident on December 15 was the latest in a series of particularly brutal attacks in the capital.

“It’s a heinous crime. It is very upsetting,” Prime Minister Singh told a parliamentary delegation which met him to discuss the latest attack.

Singh said he had asked Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde to “ensure that (the) culprits are brought to justice and such cases do not recur”, said the *Press Trust of India*

Shinde announced in parliament that there would be a crackdown on buses having tinted glass and heavy curtains – measures that should already be in force.

Congress’s Gandhi who is India’s most powerful politician, described the attack as a source of shame for the capital after she paid a visit on December 18 to the hospital where the brutalised victim is being treated.

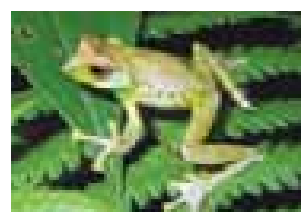
Hospital doctors were shocked by the rape victims’ injuries. “They cannot be described in words,” a surgeon who did not want to be named told *AFP*. – *AFP*

## Good news and bad for Mekong region wildlife, says WWF

HANOI – From a devilish-looking bat to a frog that sings like a bird, scientists have identified 126 new species in the Greater Mekong area, the WWF said on December 18 in a report detailing discoveries in 2011.

But from forest loss to major hydropower projects on the Mekong River, threats to the region’s biodiversity mean many of the new species are already struggling to survive, the conservation group warned.

“The good news is new discoveries. The bad news is that it is getting harder and harder in the world of conservation and environmental sustainability,” Nick Cox, manager of WWF-Greater Mekong’s Species Program, told *AFP*.



The Sweet singing frog (*Gracixalus quang*) was found in the high-altitude forests of northern Vietnam. Pic: AFP/WWF/Jodi Rowley/Australian Museum

and five amphibians.

The WWF said that while the number of new species discovered was testament to the region’s astounding biodiversity, there had been some “worrying developments” that posed a threat to their future.

WWF singled out Laos’ determination to build the Xayaburi dam on the main stream of the Mekong River as a significant threat to the river’s “extraordinary biodiversity” and the livelihoods of more than 60 million people. “The Mekong River supports levels of aquatic biodiversity second only to the Amazon River,” said Cox.

The Mekong River supports about 850 fish species and the world’s most intensive inland fishery, the report said.

Last month, Laos said it had begun work on the controversial multi-billion dollar Xayaburi dam, defying objections from environmentalists in its bid to become a regional energy hub. – *AFP*



A newly discovered miniature fish species, *Borarus naevus*, found in southern Thailand. Pic: AFP/WWF/Peter Maguire

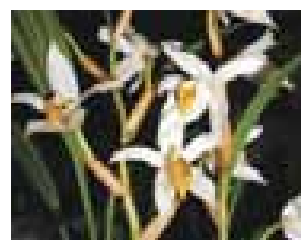
Some 126 species were newly recorded last year in the Greater Mekong region, which comprises Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos and the southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan.

Some, such as the Beelzebub tube-nosed bat discovered in Vietnam, depend on tropical forests for survival and so are especially vulnerable to deforestation.

In just four decades, 30 percent of the Greater Mekong’s forests have disappeared, the report says.

Others, such as a short-tailed python species found in Myanmar are more at risk from illegal hunting for meat, skins, and the exotic pet trade, the report said.

The list, dominated by plants, included 21 reptiles



The Thick-spiked Coelogyne Orchid (*Coelogyne pachystachva*), native to Thailand, is among the 126 new species identified in the Greater Mekong area in 2011. Pic: AFP/WWF/John Varigos

## Killings target polio campaign

PESHAWAR – Gunmen in Pakistan mounted fresh attacks on December 19 on health workers carrying out polio vaccinations, taking the death toll to eight and prompting UN agencies to suspend work on a campaign opposed by the Taliban.

Pakistan is one of only three countries in the world where polio is still endemic, but efforts to stamp out the crippling disease have been hampered by resistance from the Taliban, who have banned vaccination teams from some areas.

Eight people – six of them women – working to immunise children against the highly infectious disease have been shot dead in Pakistan during the three-day UN-backed nationwide vaccination campaign which started on December 17.

In the latest attack on December 19, a female health worker and her driver were shot dead in Charsadda near Peshawar, the main town in the northwest, police official Wajid Khan told *AFP*. Another worker was shot and critically wounded while giving out polio drops earlier the same day on the outskirts of Peshawar.

Two other polio teams were targeted in similar attacks in Nowshera and Charsadda, but the workers escaped unharmed.

Violence has blighted every day of the polio campaign. A health worker was shot dead in Karachi on December 17 and four more were killed in the city with another gunned down in Peshawar on December 18.

The bloodshed prompted the UN children’s agency

UNICEF and the World Health Organisation to suspend work on polio campaigns throughout Pakistan.

Rumours about polio drops being a plot to sterilise Muslims have long hampered efforts to tackle the disease in Pakistan. Suspicion of vaccination programs intensified after the jailing of a doctor who helped the CIA find Osama bin Laden in 2011 using a hepatitis campaign.

Polio cases in Pakistan fell to 28 in 2005 but have risen sharply in recent years, hitting 198 in 2011 – the highest figure for more than a decade and the most of any country in the world last year, said the WHO.

There have been 56 infections so far in 2012. – *AFP*

## Gun control success followed massacre Down Under

SYDNEY – When Martin Bryant massacred 35 people with semi-automatic weapons at Port Arthur in 1996, then-Australian prime minister John Howard reacted swiftly by pushing for tough new national gun laws.

Such was the shock nationwide that just 12 days later a bipartisan deal was reached for tighter controls – the National Firearms Agreement which banned rapid-fire rifles and shotguns.

Within a year gun licences had been tightened, a weapons buy-back scheme was enacted and an amnesty launched for anyone holding illegal arms, moves that took more than 600,000 guns out of action.

There have been no mass killings since.

Despite the powerful gun lobby in the United States, the conservative Howard said last week in the aftermath of the Newtown school massacre that now is the time to tackle the politically sensitive issue.

“It will be difficult but it can be done,” Howard, who had only been in the job two months when the Port Arthur killings took place, was quoted as saying by Sydney’s Daily Telegraph on December 20.

Speaking earlier this year after another US gun massacre, Howard noted: “If I hadn’t done something I would have been squandering the moral authority I had as a newly-elected prime minister.”

In 2009 in Australia there

were 0.1 gun murders for each 100,000 people compared to 3.2/100,000 in the US, showed the most recent data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Philip Alpers, an analyst on gun violence at the University of Sydney who worked on weapons control in the US for four years, said drawing parallels between Australia and US was difficult.

“Culturally we are very

**‘It will be difficult but it can be done.’**

different. The automatic Australian reaction after Port Arthur was that we need to pull back on gun ownership – fewer guns are better. Howard had a groundswell of public support on his side,” he said.

“In the US, reaction over the past few years has increasingly been more guns make us safer. Guns are confused with freedom and opinion is so polarised that it might be impossible for Obama to do anything.”

As a consequence of Howard’s actions, Australia arguably has some of the most restrictive firearms legislation in the world and Gun Control Australia, a voluntary organisation, says the laws have saved many lives.

“Thousands of lives have been saved: why do the gun clubs deny this?” it says on its website.

The Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, which lobbied against the Howard laws, says gun death

rates were falling anyway.

It refers to an independent report by the Melbourne Institute in 2008 which contradicts claims that fewer guns mean fewer homicides and suicides.

“There is little evidence to suggest that it had any significant effects on firearm homicides and suicides,” the Melbourne study found, referring to the National Firearms Agreement.

It said gun buybacks appeared to be a logical and sensible policy and helped ease the public’s fears.

“(But) the evidence so far suggests that in the Australian context, the high expenditure incurred to fund the 1996 gun buyback has not translated into any tangible reductions in terms of firearm deaths,” it said.

– *AFP*

## Briefs

### China arrests 1000 doomsday believers

BEIJING – China has detained another 90 members of a Christian sect accused of predicting doomsday, state media said on December 21 taking the total held to more than 1000.

The members of the “Almighty God” sect were detained in the central Henan province, state-run *China News* reported.

The group told believers that a new era presided over by a “female Jesus” had arrived and that tsunamis and earthquakes would rock the world, the state-run *Global Times* daily reported earlier.

### Cambodia to get \$525m in ADB aid

PHNOM PENH – The Asian Development Bank on December 18 announced a \$525 million aid plan for Cambodia over the next three years to promote the country’s economic growth.

The ADB said the money would be used to fund projects to promote rice production and exports, improve transport links and irrigation systems and develop towns along economic “corridors” connecting Southeast Asia.

The plan aims to boost Cambodia’s economy and make it “more resilient to external shocks.”

### Pilot error blamed for Sukhoi crash

JAKARTA – Indonesian investigators blamed pilot error on December 18 for the deadly May crash during a demonstration flight of a Sukhoi jet, post-Soviet Russia’s first passenger plane.

The National Transport Safety Committee absolved Sukhoi of responsibility for the crash, ruling out technical failures in its report.

The safety board found that the aircraft’s terrain awareness and warning system had sent multiple alerts to the pilot, who switched off the device before jet slammed into a volcano, killing all 45 on board.

### VN sets limit on funeral wreaths

HANOI – Vietnam has imposed strict limits on the number of wreaths that can be laid at officials’ funerals and banned civil servants from burning ‘ghost money’ in a bid to assuage public anger over government waste.

“Funerals must be solemn, civilised (and) thrifty, to match the country’s socio-economic situation,” said a decree, signed on December 17 by Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung but made public on December 20.

“We must limit and eventually eliminate customs that are backward and extravagant,” the decree added. – *AFP*

# South Korean president-elect puts security first

SEOUL – Incoming president Park Geun-Hye, basking in her election as South Korea's first female leader, promised on December 20 to stand tough on national security despite seeking engagement with North Korea.

In her first policy address since her historic win the previous day, Park stressed the "grave" security threat posed by the North as underscored by last week's rocket launch.

She also pledged to work for regional stability in Northeast Asia where South Korea, China and Japan are engaged in a series of bitter territorial disputes.

"The launch of North Korea's long-range missile symbolically showed how grave the security situation

facing us," Park said.

"I will keep the promise I made to you to open a new era on the Korean peninsula, based on strong security and trust-based diplomacy," she added.

During her campaign, Park had distanced herself from the hardline policy of outgoing President Lee Myung-Bak who suspended major humanitarian aid to the North.

Park had promised a dual policy of greater engagement and "robust deterrence" and had not ruled out a summit with the North's young leader Kim Jong-Un.

Analysts say she will be restricted by hawks in her ruling conservative New Frontier Party, as well as an international community

intent on punishing the North for what it saw as a disguised ballistic missile test.

"Given her basic stance towards Pyongyang and the rocket launch, she is unlikely to be the first mover in improving relations with the North," said Hong Hyun-Ik of the Sejong Institute think-tank.

"But she won't object if the second Obama administration moves to engage the North in dialogue after the dust over the rocket launch has settled," Hong said.

China, North Korea's only major ally, congratulated Park on her election and pushed for an improvement in Seoul's ties with Pyongyang.

"We hope the North and South of the Korean

peninsula can resolve their problems through peaceful means and realise a lasting peace," said foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying.

Park promised to work on building trust in Northeast Asia but, in an aside clearly aimed at Japan, stressed that stability had to be based on "a correct historical perception".

Seoul and Tokyo are embroiled in a sovereignty row over a tiny group of South Korea-controlled islands in the Sea of Japan.

There are concerns in South Korea, where bitter memories linger of Japanese colonial rule from 1910 to 1945, about rising nationalism in Japan under incoming prime minister Shinzo Abe.

Park is the daughter of the former military ruler Park Chung-Hee – a deeply divisive figure in modern Korean history. His 1961-79 rule was grounded in two objectives – defending the country against the North and economic development. He delivered on both but only through the ruthless suppression of dissent.

Park's legacy loomed large over his daughter's campaign and she publicly acknowledged abuses under his regime and apologised to families of the victims.

On December 20 she paid her respects at her father's grave, and also at the grave of one of his bitterest critics and political rivals, former president Kim Dae-Jung. – AFP



South Korean president-elect Park Geun-Hye after her election victory last week. Pic: AFP

# No compromise on islands, vows Abe

TOKYO – Japan's premier-in-waiting Shinzo Abe came out fighting last week after his sweeping election victory, saying there can be no compromise on the sovereignty of islands at the centre of a dispute with China.

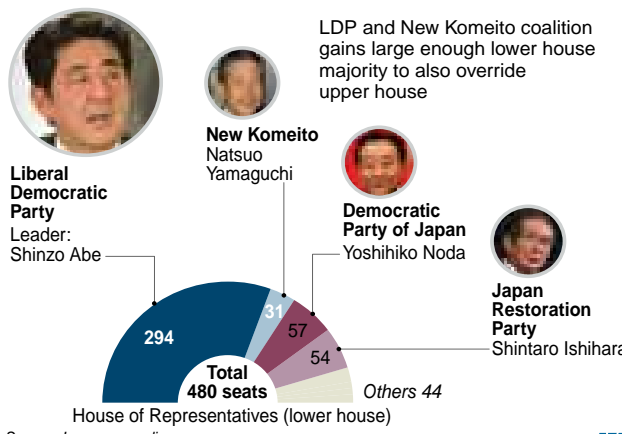
China reacted with alarm to Abe's victory, after his conservative Liberal Democratic Party crushed opponents in national polls and he immediately restated Tokyo's claims.

"The Senkaku islands are Japan's inherent territory," Abe told a news conference on December 17, referring to an archipelago Beijing calls the Diaoyus.

"Japan owns and controls the islands... under international law. There is no room for negotiation on

## Japan's conservative landslide

Decisive victory to the LDP in Sunday's vote for the lower house



this point."

Beijing declared itself ready to work with Japan on "further development

of stable relations" but expressed disquiet at where Abe would lead Japan.

"We are highly concerned

about which direction Japan will take," foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said at a regular briefing.

"The current task is now to properly handle the current issue" of the territorial dispute, she added.

Abe is expected to be elected as premier by fellow lawmakers when parliament meets for a special session on December 26.

The former premier has vowed to put the moribund economy back on track after years of deflation, made worse by a soaring currency that has squeezed exporters.

Topping his agenda was a promise to pressure the Bank of Japan into more aggressive easing policies aimed at kick-starting growth as the world's third-largest economy slips into recession.

Voters on December 16 dumped Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda three years after his Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) promised a change from more than half a century of almost unbroken LDP rule. The result cost Noda his party leadership.

The rout was completed by news that the LDP and its junior coalition party New Komeito secured a large enough majority in the lower house to overrule the upper chamber.

Fukushima plant operator TEPCO was a big winner on December 17, with its shares rocketing 33 percent, leading the charge by energy firms as investors cheered the likely end to a nascent move to snuff out atomic power.

Anti-nuclear sentiment has run high in Japan since last

year's disaster at the plant, with opinion polls showing a majority of voters want to phase out atomic power.

But the mood did not bring success for parties pushing for an atomic exit.

Analysts say the LDP's victory came by default – with voters disenchanted by the DPJ after three years of flip-flops, policy missteps and diplomatic drift, but having little faith in any of the alternatives.

With turnout at a record low even Abe acknowledged the outcome was not a ringing endorsement.

"I think this result means a 'no' to the political confusion of the DPJ. People will be strictly watching if the LDP will be able to live up to expectations," he said. – AFP

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## Yangon lit fest aims to overcome culture of one-way lecture

By Zon Pann Pwint

IN 2009 writer Ma Thida attended Brown University in the United States as a fellow of the International Writers Project.

During her stay the university organised an event called There Will Still Be Light: A Freedom to Write Literary Festival, and declared their plans to invite Bengali writer Amitav Ghosh, author of the novel *The Glass Palace*.

Ma Thida suggested that well-known Myanmar novelist Nay Win Myint also be invited, but when the organisers tried to find information about the writer on the internet they came up empty. There was simply no information about Nay Win Myint that had been posted online in the English language.

This was despite the fact that in his home country he had published nearly 200 short stories, as well as novels, travelogues, translations and more. He had also won the National Literary Prize in 2007.

"Because the festival organisers couldn't find information online, they thought Nay Win Myint was not a popular author," Ma Thida said.

"But it's not surprising that the names of many writers who are well-known in Myanmar are unheard-of in the international literary field."

She said she hopes this will start changing when the English-language Irrawaddy

Literary Festival is held at Inya Lake Hotel in Yangon from February 1 to 3, 2013.

Ma Thida will be among more than 100 local authors who are expected to participate as speakers and facilitators at the event, which she feels is the "first hopeful sign" that the works of Myanmar will soon be listed among the classics of world literature.

Ma Thida said the festival is the brainchild of Jane Heyn, the wife of the British ambassador to Myanmar. Among the international authors who will participate are Jung Chang, Sudha Shah, Timothy Garton Ash and Vikram Seth.

"When I give literary talks in Myanmar, I feel it's a one-sided conversation like giving a lecture. I hope the festival will change the entrenched habit of one-way Myanmar literary talks," she said.

"We will also gain valuable experience in learning how to host literary talks and festivals in a way that is totally different from the way we have done in the past. The talks will be thrown open to the audience and to readers, and they will involve discussions, and question-and-answer sessions."

Ma Thida said such two-way interactions will benefit both readers and writers.

"There are numerous literary genres and subgenres, and the works of local authors will be categorised. We will form the authors into groups, and members of each group will discuss the themes from their works," she said.

*Alintan* (Ray of Light) journal is publishing a series of brief biographies of the participating authors from abroad, to help familiarise local readers with their works. Last week's edition included a biography of Chinese-born British writer Jung Chang, author of *Wild Swans* and *Mao: The Unknown Story*.

"I can't guess to what extent local readers are familiar with the works of authors from abroad. They might not know anything at all, and I don't know to what extent they are enthusiastic about the festival," Ma Thida said.

"But they will be inspired by the works of foreign authors and have a desire for reading English-language literature."

Historian Thant Myint-U has also been invited to attend the festival, and said he is very much looking forward to it.

"I have attended literary festivals around the world. I am delighted that we will be having one here. I hope that the Yangon festival will become one of the best in Asia," Dr Thant Myint-U told *The Myanmar Times* by email.

He said he has suggested many authors to invite. "I believe several authors have been invited, including my old friend, the historian William Dalrymple who organises the Jaipur Festival yearly held in India," he said.

"The Jaipur Festival attracts over 200,000 people, most of them school children



Writer Ma Thida. Pic: Thiri Lu

who come from around India. This festival in Yangon will of course be far smaller, but I hope that we may also have young people come from other parts of the country."

Dr Thant Myint-U said the festival will be a wonderful opportunity to interact with some of the top writers from around the world.

He added that Myanmar has a long history of literary festivals, but this might be the country's first such event in the English language.

"It is a great opportunity to put Yangon on the international literature map, though I hope that in the future there will be equal attention given to Myanmar-language works and works in Myanmar minority languages," he said.

Dr Thant Thaw Kaung, the managing director of Myanmar Book Centre, said the festival was organised by the British embassy and sponsored by the British Council, along with local organisations.

"The festival will be the first, but not a one-off event. It is going to be a continuous event in the future. The objective of the festival is to promote literary works, including English-language literature," he said.

He added that they will be displaying books by many famous authors during the festival.

"We are going to invite world-famous publishers and they will also display their books at festival," he said.

Ma Thida said an official launch ceremony for the festival to be held on January 6 at Inya Lake Hotel. The patron of the festival, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is expected to attend the festival.

## Film to explore hard life of migrants

By Nyein Ei Ei Htwe

A TEAM of local filmmakers has cooperated with a Thailand-based nongovernmental organisation in shooting a movie about migrants from Myanmar living and working in Thailand, with plans to release the film early next year.

The film, titled *Father's School*, is produced by the Foundation for Education and Development (FED).

It was shot in Phang-nga, Phuket, in southern Thailand, and will premiere in the same region early next year, U Htoo Chit, managing director of the foundation, said at a press conference at Traders Hotel in Yangon on December 18 (International Migrants Day).

The dramatic film is about the lives of Myanmar migrants living in Thailand and their difficulties with education, health and social issues.

The film was directed by Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi, based on a script written by Daw Htoo Htoo Thar. The main actors include Ye Deight, Chit Thu Wai, Kaung Pyae and Thandar Bo.

U Htoo Chit said there are about 4 millions Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand, but most are illegals who do not have passports.

"There are a lot of difficulties in their

daily lives. As they are illegal migrants, they don't have labour rights like others," he said.

"But businessmen prefer them because they don't need to pay them as much as other workers. And if they don't want to pay them anything at all, they can call the police. These workers don't have any public voice, so I wanted to let everyone know about their lives."

FED was founded in Thailand in 2000, focusing on the development of awareness about the rights of migrant workers and their families.

Scriptwriter Daw Htoo Htoo Thar said that during her own visits to southern Thailand, she saw firsthand the dangers and difficulties faced by migrants, especially children.

"One of the main themes of my script is child education because most migrant parents think their children don't need to be educated," she said.

"They take them out of school at age 12 or 13 because the kids can start working and earn a small amount of money for the family. But the parents don't understand the long-term effects on their children's lives."

She said she worked on the script for about one year while staying in Thailand, and she included many true stories about people she encountered while there.

"Except for the two main actors, all the supporters are based on real characters. I even put U Htoo Chit in the story after I studied his actions, work and deep benevolence for migrants," she said.

Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi said he was approached by U Htoo Chit about directing the film while visiting Chiang Mai. He added that he did not accept until he had conducted some research into FED.

"After I found out about FED, I decided to shoot the film and donate my directing fees to the foundation. I didn't read the script even after I accepted the project to make the film, but I was very thankful to get the chance for donating," he said.

Actors Ye Deight and Chit Thu Wai also donated their acting services to the film, and worked straight through the production period without asking for time off, said Chit Thu Wai, who also serves as a volunteer teacher for the foundation.

"The migrants were so thankful that we shot the film, and they welcomed us very warmly. I worked as hard as I could, and felt it was the least I could do for these families who are living in such difficult situations," she said.

*Father's School* will be screened in cinemas in Myanmar after it is approved by censors, Daw Htoo Htoo Thar said.

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## Huge crowd cheers Mraz, local singers

By Nuam Bawi

AROUND 70,000 music fans flocked to People's Square east of Shwedagon Pagoda on December 16 to enjoy a concert by two-time Grammy-winning singer-songwriter Jason Mraz, supported by a cast of some of Myanmar's most accomplished musicians.

The crowd estimate was according to a press statement released by the concert's organisers, MTV Exit, the day after the event, which was aimed at not only entertaining the audience, but also educating people about issues related to human trafficking.

At a press conference held at Summit Parkview Hotel a few hours before the concert started, Mr Mraz said he has had some experience working with survivors of human trafficking, and he felt it was "important" to be part of the concert in Yangon.

"We are expecting about 50,000 people today, and who knows how many more – hundreds of thousand, millions of people – will watching the programs, series and documentaries that will follow," he said.

"If the people see that, they can say, 'I know what that is now' or 'I've seen that this is happening'. People are waking up every day to the issue [of human trafficking]."

He added that after he goes back to the US, the experience of playing in Yangon will

stick with him for a long time.

"It's going to stick with me, what we will be able to accomplish here today. I'll be able to tell people about the things I saw and music I heard. The story will be told and more people will know about this place. And those are the best souvenirs."

The excitement generated by the concert was obvious even before the gates opened at 4pm, as a big crowd gathered of people keen to secure places close to the huge stage.

Among the local musicians who performed were R Zarni, Lynn Lynn, Sai Sai Kham Hlaing, Phyo Gyi, Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein, Chit Thu Wai and Chan Chan, with backing music provided by The Trees.

Slot Machine from Thailand played about six songs, while Mr Mraz and his band belted out more than 10 tunes, ending with "I'm Yours", his most famous song among Myanmar fans.

The huge crowd was generally enthusiastic about the show.

"No world-famous singers come to Myanmar, so I was curious to see what kind of performances there would be at this concert," audience member Htut Myat Thu told *The Myanmar Times* at the venue.

"Up to now I've only seen these kinds of concerts on TV. This is the biggest concert I've ever seen in my country. I'm so excited."

He added that it was the first time for Myanmar singers to perform alongside a



R Zarni, Jason Mraz and Phyu Phyu Kaw Thein appear at a press conference at Summit Parkview Hotel in Yangon on December 16. Pic: Ko Taik

world-famous act, which revealed some of the weaknesses of the local music scene.

"There are many differences in the level of performance between local singers and international acts. I hope the local singers can do better next time," he said.

On December 18, just before he left

Yangon, Mr Mraz toured Shwedagon Pagoda, met with survivors of human trafficking and filmed with MTV EXIT for an upcoming television special.

The Yangon concert will be broadcast internationally on MTV on March 13, 2013.

## People's Square earns its name with a concert for the masses

By Douglas Long

WHAT initially attracted me to the Jason Mraz concert in Yangon on December 16 was the fact that tickets were free, and the venue was within easy walking distance of my apartment in Sanchaung's Myaynigone ward.

But there were a few other pleasant surprises along the way, including the rare opportunity to walk down the middle of Pyay Road (closed to traffic for the event) without getting run over by an out-of-control bus; and the chance to guzzle as many litres as I desired of free Coca Cola at the concert, as long as I was willing to wade through the ever-deepening piles of discarded soft-drink cups to get a refill.

I arrived just before 6pm, ignoring the skuzzy scalpers selling free tickets for K2000 each, squeezing through the tiny crack in the front gate of People's Square, and entering one of the most spectacular concert venues on the planet, with the illuminated Shwedagon Pagoda supplying the dramatic backdrop.

Chan Chan was the first performer, and she turned out to be one of the highlights of the first group of singers, most of whom delivered two songs each. Chan Chan made a dramatic entrance with a group of lotus-bearing dancers, and won over the crowd in her normal way: with her nice voice, nice smile and nice pop songs.

The entertainment then took a precipitous dive into a trench of sub-middling sluggishness, kicked off by Sai Sai and his tepid brand of hip-hop lite. At best he can be considered Myanmar's

answer to DJ Jazzy Jeff, but his appearance managed to grab the attention of the small gaggle of 12-year-old girls standing in front of me.

Chit Thu Wai was up next – she's the antithesis of the angry young woman, with a sweet face and sour voice that together make her the poster child for why actors shouldn't assume they are good singers just because they've been on TV.

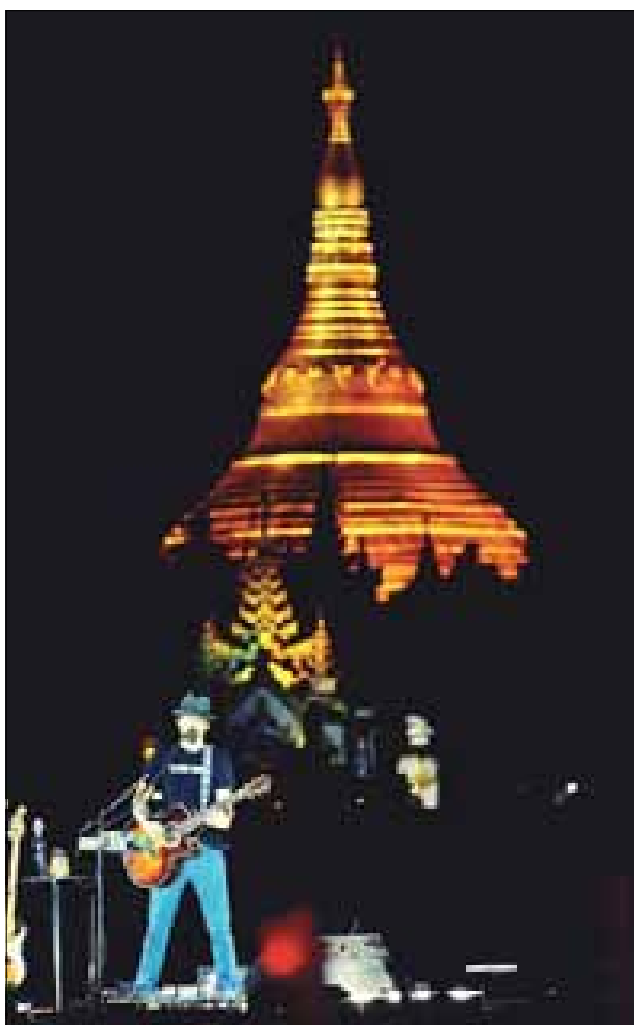
Gifted singer-songwriter Lynn Lynn went onstage next, shining an all-too-brief beam of light into the dimness. It's a shame that a real musician such as Lynn Lynn was allowed to perform only one song while lesser talents were accorded more respect by the concert's organisers.

Singer Phyo Gyi marked a return to the forgettable. There was one song about a radio or something, but the toothless quality of the music ensured the complete absence of any lasting impression.

Local diva Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein spearheaded the ascent from the trench. As usual, she took the stage born aloft on a platform and wearing one of her ultra-baroque outfits that have led lazy observers to compare her with Lady Gaga.

But there's really no resemblance: Unlike Ms Gaga, the Myanmar singer dwells in a safe-for-the-whole-family realm where contentious social boundaries are not pushed, and raw sexuality is kept well under wraps – usually beneath dozens of metres of fabric that make up many of her costumes.

It's also worth noting that outlandish costumes were a staple of Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein's onstage persona



Jason Mraz performs in People's Square in Yangon on December 16. Pic: Ko Taik

for years before anyone anywhere in the world had ever heard of Lady Gaga.

As for her performance, Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein normally takes a while to get warmed up – her first song was plagued by flat spots and brave but failed attempts to hit some very low notes – but once she gets going, her voice becomes a remarkable, unrelenting force that has

justifiably earned her the status of one of the greatest singers in the country.

R Zarni is another local entertainer with an awesome voice. He is a man who knows how to rock, in a 1980s glam-metal kind of way. Mark my words: If a big-name director ever makes a feel-good summer movie about the hunky, glamorous fighter pilots of the Myanmar Air

Force, an R Zarni song will surely provide the rousing soundtrack as the final credits roll.

Then it was time to change the drum kit – thank god. The local tradition of having the same backing band (in this case The Trees) play throughout the night for a host of different vocalists is a real plague on Myanmar's concert scene. Despite the constantly rotating singers, this practice results in an overall sameness to the music – after a few songs it all starts blending together.

So after a couple hours of musical uniformity, I was primed to hear the decidedly more robust sounds that emanated from the speakers when Slot Machine took the stage. These well-dressed lads from Bangkok are clear products of the New Romantic resurgence, and I wondered if their band name was intended as an homage to the Las Vegas-based group The Killers, who are an obvious influence.

The band delivered a decent performance, playing through a half-dozen likeable if unsurprising alt-rock songs, and demonstrating the virtues of putting sweat into developing the sort of solid stage presence that so many Myanmar bands seem to think is unimportant, to their detriment.

Musically speaking, Jason Mraz has never struck me as being all that special (I'm sure his mom, who according to the song "93 Million Miles" wants him to move back home, would disagree): His reggae-tinged pop tunes, while occasionally catchy, border on the redundant, and it can be difficult to stomach his "everything's

just super-awesome for everyone" spiel.

Still, it's tough to sustain strong feelings of dislike for such an obviously swell guy, unless you're a sociopath who drives around in a pickup truck looking for cats to shoot with your composite bow. I mean, props to anyone who gives shout-outs to the birds in roughly half his songs, and even the squirrels score a long-overdue mention in "Only Human".

The duet with Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein on "Lucky" was a charming highlight of the hour-long set, and a few of the more upbeat songs had the audience swaying their torsos and waving their arms to the sensible rhythms.

The musicianship throughout the set was nearly flawless, and the band undoubtedly brought a level of professionalism to the stage previously unseen in Myanmar. Perhaps this will inspire local acts to tighten up and improve their game.

Above all else, though, there was something very moving about seeing such a concert in People's Square.

Up to 2005 – before the grand opening of insta-capital Nay Pyi Taw – the big, open square east of Shwedagon saw use once a year, as the site of the cloistered and heavily guarded Armed Forces Day ceremony presided over by the militarists who misruled the country for too long.

Back then, it would have been tough to imagine a group of musicians turning it into a space worthy of the name People's Square, where tens of thousands of Myanmar could hear and applaud songs about freedom, revolution and self-realisation, without having to flee to another country to do so.

# FARFALLA

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## Kengtong festival celebrates Shan culture

By Pinky

A CELEBRATION to ring in year 2107 on the Shan calendar was held in Kengtong in eastern Shan State from December 12 to 14, drawing up to 200,000 people to the jam-packed festival grounds where the lively sounds of long drums and gongs could be heard throughout the event.

"We didn't expect so many people to come for the celebration, but I think we had up to 200,000 visitors," Sai Sam Tip (Tiger), secretary of Shan New Year Celebration Committee, told *The Myanmar Times* on December 14.

"We invited at least three representatives from every Shan subgroup in the country and from abroad. Almost every group came, and some appeared with big groups of 20 to 30 people," he said. "More than 100 people came from Tachileik. They even postponed their New Year celebration until December 16 so they could come here."

As a result, the event was almost "too big", especially since it was the first time the committee had called so many people to Kengtong for the event.

"We learned a lot from our mistakes this year, and we will make it better for next year," he said. "But it

was very impressive to see so many Shan people together. It's a sign of the unity of the Shan people."

Sai Sam Tip said similar celebrations will be held every year, with the venue rotating from city to city.

The opening ceremony on December 12 started at 9:09am, based on the belief among the Shan that nine is a lucky number.

Groups of Shan people started filing into the football stadium that served as the festival ground at 8am, with traditional costumes, dances and music adding to the cheerful atmosphere.

Around the festival grounds were vendors selling clothing, handicrafts and books from the different Shan subgroups. The Lahu booth, for example, displayed beautiful costumes that were black with red, green or yellow highlights and decorated with silver. Every piece of the costumes was handmade.

The evenings were filled with performances, presented on four stages: two for big singing and dancing presentations, one for traditional music, and one for all-night theatrical performances.

The main stage near the football stadium hosted dances from different ethnic groups, such as Tai Khuen, Tai Lue, Tai Long, Tai Lem, Lahu



A Shan performer attends the opening ceremony for the Shan New Year festival in Kengtong on December 12. Pic: Thandar Khine

and Tai Khamti. There were traditional deer dances and kinnara-kinnari dances from Taunggyi, as well as Shan singers from Chiang Mai.

Low temperatures after sunset didn't stop huge numbers of people from converging on the fairgrounds every night.

The most crowded was the New Year countdown night on December 13, with people of all ages wearing traditional costumes with jumpers, jackets, scarves and hats overtop. Some even wrapped themselves in blankets.

The crowd became more excited as midnight neared, and the sky filled with fireworks and small fire balloons. Thousands of people were waving small Shan flags, dancing and singing, and everyone joined in the final 10-second countdown, followed by shouts of "Mai Shoon Pi Mai Tai" (Happy Shan New Year).

With all such celebrations come good food, and few ethnic groups do it better than the Shan. There was sticky rice in bamboo, Shan noodles and traditional barbecue, sold all along the roadside and in the big open field across from the main festival area. It was a great place to take a break from the celebration, and to sit and relax while enjoying local food and drinks.

The New Year celebration was not confined to the festival area. On December 13, Kengtong City Hall hosted a seminar on Shan cultural heritage, which included short presentations by 18 scholars from Myanmar, Thailand, India and Japan.

Topics included the religious and cultural heritage of Ahom, a Shan subgroup living in India; Lanna textiles; traditional methods of capturing wild elephants used by the Tai Khamti; and the use of bamboo in daily life.

Most Shan people are Buddhists, so on New Year's Day (December 14) there were a series of religious ceremonies, including donations to monks at Mine Li Pain Shai Monastery, and awards given at Ho Kong Monastery to 75 monks who have earned master's certificates at overseas schools.

At the end of the festival, members of various Shan literature and cultural organisations met to start planning next year's celebration.

"We have not yet decided where next year's festival will occur," Sai Sam Tip said.

"Everyone will return to their hometowns and have discussions, and then we will all meet again to decide on the place. Then we will bring a Shan flag on a silver pole to the celebration place - the flag will be moved to the new venue every year, like the Olympic torch."

He added that in this way, "all different Shan groups will be connected to each other, and we will become only one Shan".

### 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](mailto: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:

[administration@myanmartimes.com.mm](mailto:administration@myanmartimes.com.mm)



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## Book Review

# Decrease the peace: UN bureaucracy lampooned

By Douglas Long

SOME of the English language's most inventive authors have written novels exploring alternate versions of history or reality: Philip K Dick, in *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), imagines the social and political landscape of North America following an Axis victory in World War II. Alan Moore's graphic novel *Watchmen* (1986-87) is set in a world where the existence of superheroes alters the course of the Cold War. *The City and the City* (2009) by China Mieville is an odd, noir-ish tale about two cities in Europe that occupy the same physical space but exist in separate, but often overlapping, dimensions.

*The England Operation*, by Yangon-based British author Peter Swarbrick, adds a different twist to the genre, offering a clever and very humorous reality based on a classic carnivalesque inversion of reality.

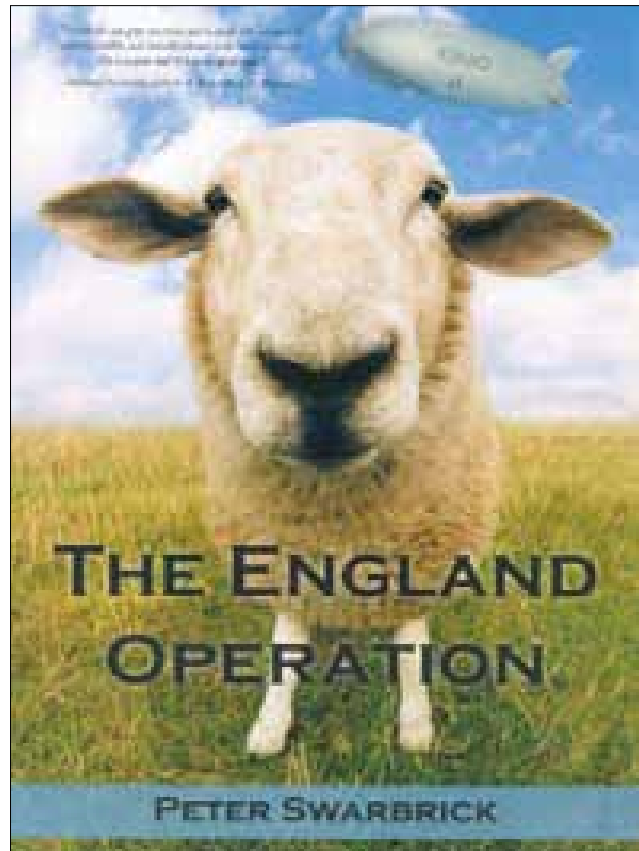
Whereas such reversals during carnival celebrations are usually social (the king becomes the fool, while the downtrodden peasant plays leader), here the exchange is geopolitical: In Mr Swarbrick's world, the wealthiest nation on the planet is the United States of Africa (USA), and Nairobi is the globe's pre-eminent metropolis, home to the best universities in the world. Islam is the dominant religion, with after-work drinks enjoyed at a restaurant called Thank Allah It's Thursday.

From the African perspective, Europe is the Dark Continent, and England, where most of the novel is set, is "cold, bleak, muddy, rainy, snowy, foggy, sleety, remote, roadless, godless, unfriendly, uncivilised, Christian, quarrelsome, unforgiving, profitless, backward". The North American Colonies are a place of discord, where ruthless pirates prey on yachts off the coast of Cape Cod.

These reversals require frequent reality (or rather unreality) checks while reading. For example, the term "US Marines" tends to evoke mental images of American soldiers fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan; in *The England Operation*, however, it refers to the elite, globe-trotting fighting force from the United States of Africa.

The author is also playful with people's names; a character named Saloth Sar (better known in our world as Pol Pot) is not the genocidal leader of an agrarian Southeast Asian country, but rather the special assistant to the head of the "world's premiere intergovernmental body", the Organisatio Nationorum Orbi, or ONO.

The plot of the novel revolves around the launch of a peacekeeping mission to England. Normans had invaded the country in 1066; it's now



1141, and there's civil war between two claimants to the throne, both of whom are descended from the original invader, William the Conqueror. ONO is sent in to protect the civilian population from abuses from both sides.

While the more advanced nations such as the USA, Nirvana (encompassing areas of Asia, including Myanmar and Cambodia) and Persia have developed motorised vehicles, firearms and airships that travel slowly from one country to another, England itself is stuck in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Outside influences have created a landscape that

spent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and is therefore well-placed to level criticism at the shortcomings of such missions: rewarding incompetence at the highest levels, deadlocking over how to interpret peacekeeping charters, holding redundant meetings instead of taking real action, spending tremendous resources on writing reports that are not only useless, but are also aimed at shifting blame from where it belongs onto others who are powerless to defend themselves against accusations - resulting in an inability, or unwillingness, to learn from past mistakes.

**'Most of ANGLONO's activity consisted in establishing, deploying, expanding, supplying, servicing, rotating, and catering to ANGLONO.'**

looks a lot like the Middle Ages with machine guns in the hands of the powerful and the privileged.

How this global state of affairs came about is never explained by the author, and it doesn't have to be. This is the world that is presented, and in its own odd way, it all fits together. All that's required is for the reader to buy into it and enjoy the journey. Mr Swarbrick provides more than enough imaginative - and often funny - detail to make it easy to do so.

At its core, *The England Operation* is a satirical critique of the United Nations and its culture of bureaucracy and inefficiency.

Mr Swarbrick is a veteran of UN peacekeeping missions to Cambodia and several African countries, including six years

other personnel officers to help them administer other personnel officers and, circumstances permitting, to join the logistics and finance sections. Finance officers ensure the regular payment of salaries and allowances to finance staff and, if in a benevolent mood, of logistics and personnel staff."

As the story progresses, a series of poor decisions and missteps results in the "peacekeepers" getting dragged into a widening circle of violence rather than presiding over an orderly situation. As civilians are attacked, raped and murdered by Norman-backed warlords, the peacekeepers indulge in circular arguments over what precisely is meant by the ANGLONO mandate to protect civilians from being attacked, raped and murdered.

At one meeting the head of ANGLONO, a man from Nirvana named Monivong, says: "The first thing to go once things start getting rough is some nice plan drawn up by people sitting round a table in a conference room." The response, as described by the author: "The people sitting around the table in the conference room nodded."

There are complex political undercurrents at play, one of the most prominent being the exploitation of England's sheep for an African wool company run by a "senatrix" with high political ambitions. The government of Normandy is complicit, and tries to shift attention away from its own involvement in the pillaging of sheep by urging ANGLONO to use force against the mysterious Sons of Hereward, a homegrown English terrorist group that might or might not actually exist.

This might sound like bleak material for a novel, but Mr Swarbrick's keen sense of humour goes far in keeping the mood light and satirical.

*The England Operation* is driven by the clever and meticulously developed premise, rather than by plot or character. There are nods to interpersonal affection or enmity between characters, but the personnel largely operate at the service of the premise. Their inner lives are explored mostly through their own memories of the past, which provides background but does not do much to reveal deep-rooted motivation.

The result is that, in a strangely appealing way, *The England Operation* is more like a history book than a work of fiction. But unlike "real" histories, this is one in which readers will not know how the story turns out until they reach the end of the book.

Peter Swarbrick's *The England Operation* is available at Monument Books, 150 Dhammazedi Road, Bahan township, Yangon; Tel (95-1) 537-805, 705-063; Website [www.monument-books.com](http://www.monument-books.com).

# A Scottish take on local curries

By Jessica Mudditt

WHEN Iain Murray took up the position of executive chef at the Governor's Residence in Yangon more than two years ago, the Scotsman spent months sampling Myanmar's diverse cuisine.

"It was completely new to me back then," said Mr Murray, who previously worked on the ultra-luxurious Royal Scotsman Train and the 21 Club in New York City.

He now heads a team of 21 chefs from Shan, Rakhine, Chin and Kayin states who have refined a wide variety of curries, salads and desserts, all of which are served up at the five-star Governor's Residence every night from 6pm to 10pm. The buffet-style Burmese Curry Table opened its enormous teak floors and open-air balcony to hotel guests and the public in October.

The dishes simply can't be faulted, though this is not to say that each mirrors the exact flavours of their origin. Mr Murray told *The Myanmar Times* that the aim of the experimentation process was to produce curries that are "not overly spicy or bland".

The duck and pickled tea leaf curry combined with a banana blossom salad - just two of more than a dozen choices - will most certainly leave the fussiest of palates contented. This is no doubt in large part because each curry takes two days to prepare: a meticulous process that begins by grounding the basic ingredients into a paste.

Mr Murray said he finds Myanmar cuisine "very interesting" and said it most closely resembles Indian, while remaining

wholly unique.

Vegetarians will enjoy the vast selection of vegetarian curries and salads, the latter of which include ginger salad, potato and vermicelli salad, and green papaya salad. For those better acquainted with the Western version, the almost translucent lentil soup, which is whisked out of a large traditional-style vat, tastes deliciously familiar while being less filling.

Nevertheless, if for some reason Myanmar food does not appeal to a guest in your party, it's possible to order a dish from the Mandalay Restaurant downstairs, which offers European specialities.

As for those concerned about the impact of the oil for which Myanmar curries are notorious, Mr Murray reassures, "Oil? We just take it off. We only use a little."

The chef explained that traditionally, the more oil a Myanmar dish contained, the more affluent the family was considered.

"This attitude is changing because people are becoming more health conscious," he said, before plunging into an enthusiastic overview of Myanmar's natural produce.

"We are lucky to have organic produce [in Myanmar]. Farmers don't use pesticides - there's a purity to the fruits and vegetables here. You can see that because tomatoes, for example, are smaller in size, as a result of being grown naturally."

In a candlelit setting that overlooks a lush garden and a swimming pool of an unusual shape - and at less than US\$50 a person for a buffet meal and a free flow of Dagon beer and green tea - this is an experience worth enjoying any night of the week.



Chef Iain Murray at work at Governor's Residence. Pic: Jessica Mudditt



## Phyo's Cooking Adventure

Phyo cuts through culture to reveal life's true taste

# Ice cream cakes, a delicious and versatile holiday treat

ICE cream is a favourite snack for people of all ages, and it makes a great after-meal dessert.

It is surprisingly easy to make, and there are many variations you can create.

I am sharing a very quick and easy recipe for ice cream cake, which can be made at very low cost. Once you have made the basic cake, you can experiment with cream, fresh fruit, dried fruit, flavoured liquors and other ingredients to make your own creations.

Be sure to line the tin in which you freeze the ice cream cake with ungreased paper or baking paper, so that you can easily lift the cakes out and present them beautifully. I bought ungreased paper at Orange Supermarket.

Don't forget to share your creations on the wall of my Facebook page. Wishing you all a Merry Christmas!

### Main Tips

Don't forget to use ungreased paper, so you don't destroy the cake when you remove it from the pan.

Prepare the liquor-flavoured fruit well in advance, so it is ready to add to the cake. Don't let the ice cream soften for too long. Serve immediately after the toppings are ready.

#### QUAFFING QUOTE

"We'll all have an ice-cream cake to celebrate! Except for we don't have a freezer!" — Kresley Cole, Dreams of a Dark Warrior

#### NEXT WEEK

Yummy pork ribs and rice noodle salad

### Red Wine

#### Chateau Lauduc Tradition Bordeaux Superieur 2009

This blend of merlot

(65pc), cabernet sauvignon (30pc) and cabernet franc (5pc) offers a slightly higher alcohol content than standard Bordeaux, but retains a smooth, deep flavour.



Ks 14,400

Score BOX

8/10

### White Wine

#### Jean Guillot Bordeaux Sauvignon Blanc 2010

When there's fish on the table, whether grilled with seasonings or prepared in a curry, this typical Bordeaux makes a harmonious and elegant accompaniment.



Ks 15,300

Score BOX

8/10

#### Ice cream cake INGREDIENTS

(6-8 servings)

- 1 tub of vanilla ice cream (I used Nestle)
- 1 tub of chocolate ice cream
- 1 vanilla or fruity Swiss roll or jam roll
- 1 chocolate Swiss roll or jam roll

#### PREPARATION

Remove the ice cream from the freezer and let sit in the fridge for 15 minutes, to allow it to soften.

Meanwhile, prepare three rectangular aluminium baking or freezing tray as a mould for the ice cream cakes.

Lay the ungreased paper on the base of each tray, with the paper measuring the exact length of the tray but long enough to cover both the bottom of the tray and double over to cover the top.

Slice the Swiss rolls or jam rolls separately. In a large bowl, mash a couple slices of the vanilla or fruity cakes, and mix with 1/3 of the vanilla ice cream.

Repeat the process until all the ingredients are used up. Mix well, making sure there are no lumps.

Prepare another



Pics: Htein Linn



bowl for the mixture of chocolate ice cream and chocolate roll.

Spoon the vanilla and cake mixture into the trays, dividing it evenly among the three trays. Spoon only enough to reach halfway to the top of each tray, and press hard to make sure there no air bubbles inside. Then spoon the chocolate mixture on top, filling each tray to the rim.

Press hard to mix the layer in the middle. Cut the ungreased paper to exactly cover the surface of the mixture. Bring the paper hanging at both sides together and fold it over the top of the mixture. Wrap with clear plastic wrap, and then wrap aluminium foil on the top.

Freeze the packages for at least 6-8 hours, or you can prepare one day ahead.

To serve, remove the cakes from the freezer and leave them outside for 3-4 minutes to soften. Then unwrap everything and unfold the ungreased paper. Pull the paper up, and the block of ice cream cake will come out.

Lay it on a plate upside down. Then you can add decorations and additional flavours. Fresh fruit can be sliced and placed on top of the cake, and shaved chocolate will be sure to impress your guests. Other suggestions:

#### Orange flavoured cream

- ½ cup of whipping cream
- 1 tablespoon of orange zest
- 2 tablespoon of orange juice
- 1 tablespoon of caster sugar

Whip the cream with the orange zest and juice until it turns into a paste. Add it to the top of a slice of ice cream cake, or decorate the whole cake.

#### Liquor-flavoured fruit

- ½ cup of raisins or dried fruit
- ¼ cup of brandy, flavoured liquor or cognac

Soak the dried fruit in coffee-flavoured or orange-flavoured liquor, brandy or cognac for half a day. This can be put on the top of the cake, or added to the mixture before freezing.



Pa Pa Win Khin @ Nescafe New Product Launch



Ms Tsuruoka Mimyu, Mr Sato Kuni Aki, Dr May Nyo and Ko Win Myint Zaw @ Nu Skin Cosmetic Product Launch



Ko Aung Win Than, Mr Uetachi Hiroaki and Ms Semamoto Manmi @ Nu Skin Cosmetic Product Launch



Thet Mon Myint and M Seng Lu @ She Shines Jewellery Design Show



Phyto Gyi, Sone Thin Par, Chaw Su Khin and R Zarni @ Sone Thin Par New Album Launch



Board of directors @ Yee Shin New Product Launch



Ko Shein Thu Aung, Scotty Latt, Kyaw Shine Myint and Ian Latt @ Silver Tiger Luxury Shop Opening



Tun Eindra Bo and husband @ She Shines Jewellery Design Show



Tin Moe Lwin @ Nescafe New Product Launch



Kyi Lae Lae Oo and Hla Myo Thinzar Nwe @ Nu Skin Cosmetic Product Launch



Thandar Bo @ Silver Tiger Luxury Shop Opening



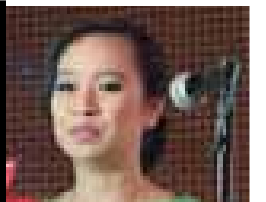
Ms Enakhi Chakma @ Yves Rocher Cosmetic Shop Opening



U Phone Win and U Myint Oo Kyaw @ E Mart Centre Opening



U Wai Lwin @ Silver Tiger Luxury Shop Opening



Daw Khin Wine Nyo @ Aekar Company Clean Water For People Occasion



Awn Seng @ She Shines Jewellery Design Show



Khine Hnin Wai @ YMCA Dinner Reception



Board of directors @ Yee Shin New Product Launch



Yu Thandar Tin and Nan Myat Phyto Thin @ Nescafe New Product Launch



Khin San Win @ She Shines Jewellery Design Show



U Aung Ko Latt and Ko Kyaw Zayya @ Nescafe New Product Launch



SOCIALITE WITH NYEIN EI EI HTWE



COLD evenings and hot afternoons could not keep Socialite from making her appointed rounds for the week, starting with the Silver Tiger Luxury shop opening on U Wisara Street on December 11. The next day she joined many local singers for the launch of Sone Thin Par's new album at Park Royal Hotel. After needing a day to recover from all the excitement (Socialite ain't no spring chicken), she was back at it again on December 14, attending the She Shines jewellery design show at Sedona Hotel. The next day was the Big One, featuring the Yves Rocher cosmetic shop opening near Shwegondine junction, E Mart electronic shop opening on Bo Aung Kyaw Road, Yee Shin new product launch at Chatrium Hotel, Nescafe product launch at Bahan township and, in the evening, a dinner reception at the YMCA. Socialite rounded out the week on the next day with the Nu Skin cosmetic product launch at Yangon International Hotel.



Aye Myat Thu @ She Shines Jewellery Design Show



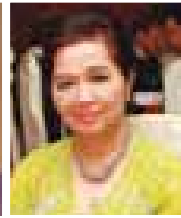
Ko Kyaw Shine Myint and Ma Poe Madi Tin Latt @ Silver Tiger Luxury Shop Opening



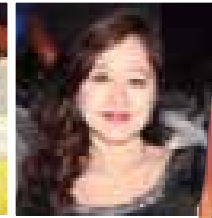
Daw Swe Zin Htike @ Nescafe New Product Launch



Nay Aung @ She Shines Jewellery Design Show



Daw Myint Myint Khine @ YMCA Dinner Reception



May Than Nu @ Silver Tiger Luxury Shop Opening



U Saw Tun Aung Mying @ YMCA Dinner Reception



Officials @ Aekar Company Clean Water For People Occasion



Zar Ni, Min Thway and Kyaw Kyaw Bo @ Nu Skin Cosmetic Product Launch



U Tin Latt @ Silver Tiger Luxury Shop Opening



Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein @ Sone Thin Par New Album Launch



Dr Thar Nyan @ YMCA Dinner Reception



Shwe Yee Phyo, Ei Wine Mon and Thandar Oo @ Yves Rocher Cosmetic Shop Opening



Ma Zar Chi Tin, Ma Su Su Tin and Ma May Thu Zaw @ Yves Rocher Cosmetic Shop Opening



Ma Sandra Lu Nee, Ma Nilar Mya and Ma May Myat Htwe @ YMCA Dinner Reception



Ko Kyaw Swar and Ko Min Ko Nay Myo @ E Mart Centre Opening



Daw Mar Lar @ Silver Tiger Luxury Shop Opening



U Kyaw Kyaw Hlaing @ E Mart Centre Opening



Nay Toe and Moe Hay Ko @ She Shines Jewellery Design Show

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# Tapas chefs in HK



Michelin-starred chef Sergi Arola in his new tapas bar, Vi Cool, in Hong Kong. Pic: Vi Cool/Dining Concepts

apiece was enough to satisfy our carnivorous cravings.

The goat's cheese sorbet was delicious, though my date said the peanut ice cream with mixed berries tasted even better during a previous visit.

The bill, without the standard 10 percent service charge in Hong Kong, came to HK\$1058.

The third leg of our tapas trifecta took us to Vi Cool, requiring us to navigate the endless corridors of Harbour City mall in Tsim Sha Tsui.

It's an odd choice of location for this first Hong Kong venue by Spaniard Sergi Arola, whose Gastro restaurant in Madrid has two Michelin stars.

He's unlikely to repeat that success here.

Apart from the good service and one truly excellent dish of sea bass, mango and avocado ceviche, our meal was just so-so.

The king prawns fried with garlic were too oily, and we actually left one (of six) on the plate uneaten. The

Catalan sausage pizza with ratatouille, grilled leeks, endive leaves and buffalo mozzarella was disappointing and the balsamic vinegar overpowered the fire-smoked eggplant dish.

The dessert of ricotta and

berries was about 80 percent cheese and 20 percent fruit, portions that should have been reversed. We left more than half the dish unfinished. Total cost with service came to HK\$938.

- Bloomberg News

## Dining Guide

22 Ships is on 22 Ship Street, Wan Chai; information: [www.22ships.hk/](http://www.22ships.hk/) or +852 2555 0722.

Boqueria is on the seventh floor of LKF Tower, 33 Wyndham Street, Central; information: [www.boqueria.com.hk/](http://www.boqueria.com.hk/) or +852 2321 8681

Vi Cool is at Level 2, Shop 2101-2, Gateway Arcade, Harbour City, Canton Road, Tsim Sha Tsui; information: [www.diningconcepts.com.hk/vi\\_cool/](http://www.diningconcepts.com.hk/vi_cool/) or +852 2735 7787

Average cost per person for shared dishes and a couple of drinks?

Vi Cool: HK\$500. 22 Ships: HK\$600. Boqueria: HK\$625.

Sound level?

Just the right amount of noise at 22 Ships, quieter at Boqueria, tomblike at Vi Cool on a Sunday night.

Inside tip? Avoid weekends at 22 Ships.

Will I be back? 22 Ships: Often. Boqueria: Yes, when I'm really hungry. Vi Cool: Unlikely.

Date place? Boqueria: Yes. 22 Ships: Definitely, the small space forces you into close contact. Vi Cool: Only if it's part of a shopping date.

## International Airlines



### Air Asia (FD)

33, Alan Pua Pagoda Rd, Ground Flr, Parkroyal Hotel, Yangon. Tel: 251 885, 251 886.

### Air Bagan Ltd.(W9)

56, Shwe Taung Gyar Street, Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 513322, 513422, 504888, Fax: 515102

### Air China (CA)

Building (2), corner of Pyay Rd and Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd, Hotel Yangon, 8 miles, Yangon, Myanmar. Tel: 666112, 655882.

### Air India

75, Shwe Bon Thar St, Pabedan Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 253597-98, 254758, Fax: 248175

### Bangkok Airways (PG)

#0305, 3rd Fl, Sakura Tower, 339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 255122, 255 265, Fax: 255119

### Malaysia Airlines (MH)

335/357, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Pabedan Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 387648, 241007 ext: 120, 121, 122 Fax: 241124

### Myanmar Airways International(8M)

08-02, Sakura Tower, 339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada Tsp, Ygn. Tel: 255260, Fax: 255305

### Silk Air(MI)

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### Thai Airways (TG)

Room No. 1101, Sakura Tower, 339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada Tsp, Ygn. Tel: 2554191-6 Fax: 255223

### Vietnam Airlines (VN)

#1702, Sakura Tower 339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon. Fax 255086. Tel: 255066/ 255088/ 255068.

## INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT SCHEDULES

Table with columns for Days, Flight, Dep, and Arr. It is divided into sections for various cities including Bangkok, Beijing, Frankfurt, Gaungzhou, Taipei, Kunming, Kolkata, Chiang Mai, Hanoi, Seoul, Siem Reap, Tokyo, Mandalay, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Yangon, and Mandalay. Each section lists flight numbers, airlines, departure times, and arrival times for different days of the week.

Subject to change without notice

# Was Jesus really born on December 25?

By Andrew Santella

HERE'S a thought for the harried among us who are unready for the arrival of another Christmas season: There was a time when some scholars argued that the holiday should be observed in the spring. Just imagine three more months of shopping!

It seems to us a matter of course that Christmas should come on December 25. But over the past 2000 years or so, the timing of Jesus' birth has generated considerable controversy. In fact, there has been enough uncertainty about when to celebrate Jesus' birthday that some Christians have chosen not to celebrate it at all.

The Bible offers little help in resolving the question: No dates are offered in the Gospel stories. There isn't even a reference to the season of the year. Some readers have thought they detected a clue in the evangelist Luke's mention of shepherds tending their flocks at night as they hear the news of Jesus' birth. To some, this suggests not a December birth, but one during the spring lambing

season, when the animals would be free to roam out of their corrals. But wait: Advocates for a December Nativity answer that sheep reserved for temple sacrifices would have grazed unfettered even in deepest winter.

Clearly, any dispute that hinges on knowledge of Middle Eastern livestock practices of antiquity is not going to be resolved easily.

The earliest Christian writers were more interested in Jesus' death and resurrection than in his birth. The oldest of the Gospels, Mark's, makes no mention of Jesus' birth. Later, Matthew and Luke offered extravagant detail — stars, wise men, mangers — but no specifics about timing.

This didn't stop others from making their own guesses. The theologian Clement of Alexandria, writing around 200, mentions some of the dates that had by then already been proposed as the true date of Jesus' birth. Spring Nativities were popular, with dates in May, April and March being proposed. December 25 was not mentioned as a possibility.



Palestinian officials and members of the clergy follow a cart carrying a wooden sculpture of baby Jesus in the West Bank city of Bethlehem on December 20. Pic: AFP

The church only settled on a December 25 Christmas in the fourth century. The standard explanation is that the early church conflated its celebration of the Nativity with pre-existing pagan festivals. Romans had their Saturnalia, the ancient winter festival, and northern European people had their own solstice traditions. Among the features: parties, gift-giving, dwellings decorated with greenery.

The reasoning goes that the growing church, recognising the popularity of the winter festivals, attached its own Christmas celebration to encourage

the spread of Christianity. Business historian John Steele Gordon has described the December dating of the Nativity as a kind of ancient-world marketing ploy.

But some put forward another, less well-known explanation for the December 25 date. According to these scholars, Christmas was set near the winter solstice not because of any pagan traditions but based on a series of arcane calendrical computations. This argument hinges on an ancient Jewish tradition that had the great prophets dying on the same dates as their birth or, alternatively,

their conception. Thus, to follow this peculiar assumption, the first step in dating Jesus' birth would be to date his death, which the Gospels say happened at Passover. The early Christian writer Tertullian calculated that the date given for Jesus' death in John's Gospel corresponds to March 25 in the Roman calendar. Many Christian churches came to celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation, marking the angel Gabriel's visit to the Virgin Mary to tell her that she would become the mother of Jesus, on this date. Adding nine months to this date produces a December 25 Christmas.

This alternative explanation is sometimes deployed to dismiss the notion that the holiday had pagan roots. In a 2003 article in the journal *Touchstone*, historian William Tighe called the pagan origin of Christmas "a myth without historical substance". He argued at least one pagan festival, the Roman *Natalis Solis Invictus*, instituted by Emperor Aurelian on December 25, 274, was introduced in response to the Christian observance. The pagan festival "was almost certainly an attempt to create a pagan alternative to a date that was already of some significance to Roman Christians". According to Tighe, the pagans co-opted the Christian holiday, not the other way around.

But even to some Christians, Christmas has always seemed like a version of a pagan feast — and therefore unworthy of observance. The early church father Origen argued against celebrating Jesus' birthday: "It is only sinners like Pharaoh and Herod who make great rejoicings over the day on which they were born into this world." The Puritans of 17th century Massachusetts famously banned the holiday, in part because they found no Biblical authority for celebrating the Nativity on December 25. Quakers, too, abstained from celebrating. Harriet Beecher Stowe has a character in her 1878 novel *Pogonuc People* explain why his family doesn't observe Christmas: "Nobody knows when Christ was born, and there is nothing in the Bible to tell us when to keep Christmas."

There is something familiar about all these erstwhile Christmas controversies. The holiday is still prime time for disputation. At this time of year, more than any other, the sacred and the secular spend a lot of time jostling for space, and eventually, accommodating each other. So, believers need not be threatened by Christmas' putative pagan roots. If the church repurposed the old solstice feasts, it only goes to show its power to bend the broader culture to its pastoral purpose. — *Slate*

## Events Flash

### Traditional arts

The "Living Life in Art" exhibition — featuring paintings by 10 artists including Thabye Myint Thein, Myat Soe, Hlaing One and Ko Soe — is being held at the Myanmar Traditional Artists and Artisans Organisation (187-192 East Wing, Bogyoke Market, Yangon) from December 26 to 30.

### Alliance exhibit

KZL Art Studio and Gallery (184/84A Thanlwin Road, Bahan township, Yangon) is hosting a 10-year anniversary show from December 25 to 31. The work of more than 30 artists is on display.

### Japanese film

Director Yasuo Furuhashi's film *Railroad Man, Poppoya* (112 minutes) will be screened at the Assembly Hall of the Japanese embassy in Yangon, on December 28 at 2:30pm. Free tickets are available at the embassy until the day of the show.

### 42nd anniversary 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.

### Final Exhibit 2012

Gallery 65 (65 Yaw Min Gyi Road, Dagon township, Yangon) is presenting its year-end show, the Final Exhibit 2012, from December 15 to January 15. The gallery will showcase paintings across a wide range of styles, from contemporary to traditional. Gallery 65 is open 10am to 6pm daily.

### 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)

Focusing your mind on acquiring social knowledge, and focusing your heart on finding love, will make your life much better. Wonderful changes are on the horizon, and performing good deeds will result in spiritual development. Family and social relationships will become smooth under a system of interdependence.

### Pisces

(Feb 19 - Mar 20)

The best way to communicate is to open your ears, observe closely and speak reasonably. Work towards ennobling your heart, and a positive change in your love life will be welcomed. Don't waste time on negative responses, but rather spend your time focusing on strengthening friendships and taking care of family responsibilities. Love yourself and learn to share your love with others.

### Aries

(March 21 - April 19)

Base all of your mental function on wisdom, and organise yourself to extend social communication into the realm of achieving your goals. Welcome old friends, and take them up on offers to lend their management skills and creative powers to your projects. Concentrating on being of service to others will help you discover the truth about yourself. Love and lust should be kept in good balance.

### Taurus

(April 20 - May 20)

Creating a state of love from a state of pleasure is simpler if you are able to examine your own emotions. You might soon be surprised by a hidden opportunity that will help fulfill your desires. Your wisdom is like a light: The brighter it shines, the farther it will reach into the shadows to destroy the darkness.

### Gemini

(May 21 - June 20)

Strive to turn the good into the better, and the better into the best, just as you endeavour to convert possibility into probability, and probability into certainty. Maintain smooth relations even with those who think differently. Your emotional blank spaces can be filled from afar by old acquaintances. A big change in your social circle could lead to opportunity.

### Cancer

(June 22 - July 22)

Allow wisdom to lead you. Listening music and walking in the garden can be important emotional outlets. A misunderstood development of

the soul will inevitably carry total psychological destruction. The pursuit of knowledge will help boost the quality of your mind and serve to clarify your thoughts. The energy generated from hope and courage can be used to overcome fear.

### Leo

(July 23 - Aug 22)

Don't start an unnecessary war that will destabilise your calm relationships with potential partners. Reconcile with all beings in your society and show compassion toward yourself. Use wisdom to extinguish emotional suffering from your mind, and keep on the lookout for new and good ideas. Life and love are big matters that require deeper exploration.

### Virgo

(Aug 23 - Sept 22)

True love is rooted in the recognition of the moral and mental qualities of the beloved person. Know that compromise does not mean cowardice. It is true that one should give for the sake of giving, and not just to receive something in return. Become aware of your moods and don't allow yourself to be fooled by the low. Use your heart to add value to your relations.

### Libra

(Sept 23 - Oct 22)

Nothing and no one belongs to a flirtatious person. Don't forget to pay more attention to your old friends, and make plans to discover hidden opportunities with their help. You are in a good position to develop matters of love.

### Scorpio

(Oct 23 - Nov 21)

Attain more knowledge about the value of a clean conscience. Eliminate all that is vulgar and uncouth before you take on big challenges. Sharpen your intellect and increase your wisdom through concentration and meditation. Accommodate the needs of your relatives as much as possible.

### Sagittarius

(Nov 22 - Dec 21)

Take responsibility for developing your own character and integrity. You should be motivated by wisdom and appreciate the value of your role in politics. Understand the difference between self-promotion and selfless promotion. Invest in the vision of love, which will not fail as physical needs do.

### Capricorn

(Dec 22 - Jan 19)

The law of conscience is higher than the law of government. Know that the devil exists behind the cross of morality. Accept words of wisdom from old friends and as well as from the young. You should seek love rather than physical beauty.

For a personal reading contact Aung Myin Kyaw, 4th Floor, 113, Thamaing Bayan Road, Tamwe Township, Yangon. Tel: 0973135632, Email: williamaste@gmail.com







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**Lemon Day Spa**

No. 96 F, Inya Road, Kamaryut Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 514848, 09-732-08476. E-mail: lemondayspa.2011@gmail.com

**Spa & Boutique Fashion**

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Nandawun Compound, No. 55, Baho Road, Corner of Baho Road and Ahlone Road, (near Eugenia Restaurant), Ahlone Township. tel: 212 409, 221 271. 214708 fax: 524580. email:info@myanmarbook.com

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**Cafe de Angel**

No.24, Baho Rd, Ahlone Tsp. Tel : 703449.

**La Brasserie (International)**

PARKROYAL Yangon, 33, Alan Pya Phaya Road, Dagon Tsp. tel : 250388.

**INYA 1 Restaurant & Bar**

INYA 1 Restaurant & Bar No.(1), Inya Road, Kamayut Tsp. Tel: 01-527506 email: inyaone@gmail.com www.inya1.com

**Traders Café**

Traders Hotel, Yangon. #223, Sule Pagoda Rd. Tel: 242828 ext: 6519

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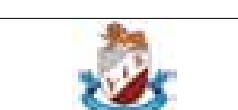


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# TIMESSPORT

## Ye Myat Min given lifetime ban by MFF

By Aung Si Hein

Royal Land FC's Ye Myat Min has been handed a lifetime ban by the Myanmar Football Federation Disciplinary Committee for attacking an opponent on the pitch.

The incident occurred in the final match of the Myanmar Football Federation (MFF) futsal season on December 15, when Royal Land took on

ACE FC. The ban was issued on December 19.

In the second half, after falling behind and having one player sent off, Ye Myat Min expressed his frustrations by kicking ACE FC player Aung Lin Maung repeatedly in the neck. At the time he was given a red card.

Defending Champion ACE FC had sealed their position as MFF AYA Futsal League champs with two games remaining in the season by putting an insurmountable

seven points between themselves and runner-up Yangon City FC.

Despite already claiming the title, ACE still had to finish off their scheduled matches. They kept true to form with an 11 - 2 drubbing of the hapless Royal Land FC.

The match was thrilling at the start with both sides constantly attacking but it was easy for the experienced ACE FC to outplay Royal Land.

Having clinched the AYA Knockout Cup in July the futsal title is the second of the year for ACE FC, a double they enjoyed last year as well.

ACE FC's dominance has left some futsal fans disappointed by the level of competition in the domestic game.

However, U Tin Maung Htay, ACE head coach, said that futsal players are improving, making it harder to win major tournaments.

"Futsal games are more competitive now because the players from futsal clubs are playing much better than before. The players are more technical and have international experience. We took the time to prepare ourselves throughout the year. This pushed us towards the title. Sometimes our opponents made it difficult during the first half and we knocked them down by exploiting their

weak points in the second half," U Tin Maung Htay said.

ACE pocketed 6 million Ks, while second place Yangon City FC took home half that.

Zin Lin Aung from Linsdown FC was named player was honoured as the year's best player. Pyae Phyo Maung (Pisi) of Yangon City FC was the league's top goal scorer. Yangon City FC received the fair play trophy.

## Barca coach vows quick return from cancer surgery

BARCELONA - Barcelona coach Tito Vilanova faced cancer surgery December 19 and six weeks on the sidelines but vowed to return soon to the Spanish league leaders.

"I won't be away for a while but I will be back soon," Barcelona sports newspaper Mundo Deportivo quoted Vilanova as telling his players after doctors told him he needed surgery for cancer that has returned to his salivary gland.

Vilanova, 44, has led Barcelona to their best league start ever but the club said he will be in hospital for four days and then need up to

six weeks of chemotherapy or radiotherapy.

"We will have to try to go on as normally as possible but there will not be total normality because Tito is the coach and now for a few weeks he will not be there," the club's president Sandro Rosell said late Wednesday.

But he insisted: "Tito is very strong and we are convinced he will come back to us soon."

The news came at a dramatic moment for Barca, flying nine points high at the top of La Liga while their fierce rivals and title holders Real Madrid are suffering a malaise.

Jose Mourinho's Real are 13 points adrift in third place and rattled by reports of internal squabbles. Atletico Madrid are in second place, nine points behind Barcelona.

Barca's sporting director Andoni Zubizarreta said assistant coach Jordi Roura would stand in for the time being, acting as coach when the side travels to Valladolid for a league game on December 22.

Barcelona gave no indication Ton December 19 of when the surgery would take place and when it would next give details of Vilanova's progress.

Messages of support poured in from sporting stars and even occupied the front pages of the fiercely partisan Madrid sports press.

"We're all with Tito," said Marca, the leading pro-Real daily.

Zubizarreta rejected speculation that Barcelona's previous coach Pep Guardiola who left last season would step back in.

"Tito is the coach and continues to be the coach. Jordi Roura will be in the dugout at Valladolid but the trainer is Tito," he told a news conference.

"What we have to do is pick ourselves up and keep on working."

Real Madrid joined various sporting figures in Spain and abroad in wishing Vilanova well.

"Tito, everyone is behind you to beat this-- the strength of football and people. It's impossible you will lose this match," Real skipper and Spain international



Barcelona's coach Tito Vilanova speaks at press conference after a training session at the Sports Center FC Barcelona on December 4. Pic: AFP

keeper Iker Casillas wrote on his Facebook page.

Vilanova has been Barca manager since the departure of his long-time comrade-in-arms Guardiola in April.

Vilanova underwent an operation to remove a tumour on his parotid gland -- the largest of the salivary glands -- on November 22, 2011 and was back at work as Guardiola's deputy just two weeks later.

One of the world's most successful football teams, Barca are riding high largely thanks to Argentine hitman Lionel Messi, who has taken his goal tally for the calendar year to a record-breaking 90.

Vilanova played only briefly as a professional in Spain's top flight, notably with Celta Vigo, before turning to coaching at the end of his career and finding his way back to the club of his youth. - AFP

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Last 16 draw

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	Arsenal	-	Bayern Munich	
	Shakhtar Donetsk	-	Borussia Dortmund	
	AC Milan	-	Barcelona	
	Real Madrid	-	Manchester United	
	Valencia	-	Paris St Germain	
	FC Porto	-	Malaga	

Source: UEFA

AFP

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