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A new fizz inside the bottle as Pepsi returns after a generation

Last bottled in Myanmar in 1997, the first cases to roll off the production lines last week marked Pepsi's return to the marketplace – as well as a milestone in the country's reformation from a military-led junta to a bursting, warts-and-all democracy. Only bottles are currently being made, but aluminium cans will be available soon, and a company spokesperson said the newly opened factory is the first of many the soft-drink giant plans to open in the future.

'Damaged dignity' sees Times writer guilty of defamation

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A senior reporter from *The Myanmar Times* was found guilty of defamation and fined K10,000 after a 10-month legal battle in Mandalay.

Ko Si Thu Lwin was found guilty by the Madaya Township Court on March 28 on charges filed over allegations that his coverage of a power line dispute in Mandalay Region "damaged the dignity" of electricity department officials.

He was given the option of serving a one-month prison sentence or paying the fine.

The verdict was originally delayed from February 21 to March 7, and again from March 18 to March 28. He attended 22 hearings over the course of the case.

Ko Si Thu Lwin wrote a series of articles for *The Myanmar Times* last year covering a conflict over the installation of power lines in Madaya. Residents argued the lines should bypass the town, rather than be run down the main street, for environmental and safety reasons.

The controversy was first reported in the paper's Myanmar-language edition on May 24. On May 29, Madaya township electricity engineer U Nyan Htun submitted a complaint to police alleging Ko Si Thu Lwin's article contained "some words that damaged the dignity of the electricity department and its staff".

The *Myanmar Times*' Editor-in-Chief Ross Dunkley said the company would pay the costs of the fine and take immediate steps to lodge an appeal, saying that the company believed its reporter was acting entirely within the law.

Tensions on the rise in Sittwe

An 11-year-old girl was accidentally killed and her mother injured by police who were attempting to stop mobs from attacking the offices and homes of UN and NGO workers in the Rakhine State capital. **NEWS 3-4**



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THE INSIDER: The local lowdown & best of the web

Paradise lost

An article from the Associated Press on developers' ambitions for the untouched Myeik archipelago last week offered an unsettling glimpse of things to come, with Singaporean group Zochwell's website being cited as announcing the intention to turn one particular island into "The Next Phuket".

Presumably, in order for this vision to be achieved, Zochwell will need to have the Myanmar government extend visa concessions to Russian passport-holders and establish direct flights from Vladivostok and Moscow to the new tropical haven.

Developing "The Next Phuket" would be no small undertaking as the pristine island beaches,

at present, have no waterfront pools by which people can sun their oiled-up, bloated, beet-red Speedo-clad bodies.

The island also reportedly does not have any ATMs, 7-Elevens or Top Charoen Optical stores.

The labour force of the archipelago – and the south in general – has also been somewhat depleted in recent years, and a significant repatriation scheme will need to be put into place.

While no one knows just how many Myanmar workers there are on "The Current Phuket" (some estimates put the number at over 100,000), this could be a suitable site for recruiting efforts.

It is also not yet established which island will be designated

"The Next Koh Phangan", and the government has yet to open a tender on the supply of glow sticks, buckets, and low-grade meth-heavy ecstasy.

Networks engage in billboard wars

Telenor's record-breaking 5km single-slogan billboard on Sule Pagoda Road has been replaced by an Ooredoo one, which has made innovative use of the space by *dividing it into sections and using pictures*.

Vale, car cemetery

Anyone who had ridden Yangon's circle train in recent years would be familiar with the car cemetery that was visible from the carriage somewhere out near Insein prison. The site, a military-owned enterprise, had been home to what looked like thousands of scrap cars piled over 20m high. However, a visit to the site in recent weeks revealed that almost all of the vehicles have been removed, and – according to the security guard – moved to the Thilawa Special Economic Zone. So, if you'd planned to go and explore the car cemetery, don't bother: it's gone.

IN BRIEF:

Extended power cut a welcome relief to household with window adjacent to monastery speaker

Tourist expresses disappointment with Yangon's club scene following ill-fated visit to JJs at Mingalar Zay

NEXT WEEK:

Census brings about identity crisis for multi-passport-holding UN employee



May Myat Noe
for **NOW!** magazine.
Photo: Pyae Han (ColorMax)

**Style
Statement
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Protestors lash out over Dhaka newspaper op-ed

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DEMONSTRATORS gathered outside of the Bangladesh embassy in Yangon on March 26 to voice their anger over a recent article published by the *Dhaka Tribune* newspaper suggesting that parts of Rakhine State join Bangladesh.

Zeeshan Khan wrote an opinion piece entitled “A Referendum in Rakhine State?”, which was published by the English-language daily on March 20.

In the piece, Mr Kahn said that he believed holding a referendum to separate Sittwe and Maungdaw from Rakhine State and have them join Bangladesh’s Chittagong division was a possible solution for the ongoing plight of Myanmar’s Rohingya Muslims.

Mr Kahn argued that there is a historical precedent for such action, citing examples like Scotland’s upcoming referendum and Russia’s support of Crimea’s succession from Ukraine.

“Historical arguments, similar to the ones made by Russia regarding Crimea, can also be made for

incorporating parts of Rakhine, once known as Arakan, into Bangladesh,” Mr Khan wrote.

He also described to Myanmar as “xenophobic and oppressive” in its treatment of the Rohingya.

The protesters that marched outside the embassy accused Bangladesh of meddling in a domestic issue. Many carried placards calling for the Bangladesh embassy staff to leave the country. Others accused the staff of being terrorists.

“I have to discard the garb of the religious order and hold a gun to fight. Bengalis have snuck into Myanmar across the border and asked for self-administration,” said Magway Sayadaw Ashin Parmaukha, a Buddhist monk who joined the protest.

“Any person, regardless of his nationality or religious belief, must follow the existing laws in Myanmar. I will protect my country with my people,” he said.

U Nay Myo Zin, a member of Social Life Development Network, said that if Bangladesh attempted to interfere in Myanmar’s domestic issues again, there would be a high chance of violence.



A monk protests outside the Bangladesh Embassy in Yangon on March 26.

“We never forgive foreigners and different religious groups who attempt to intimidate our country when it is in a weak condition,” he said.

Members of the Rakhine Youth Network who took part in the protest wrote an open letter to the Bangladesh embassy requesting that the Bangladesh Ambassador to Myanmar, Anup Kumar Chakma, be recalled because of the article and the potential unrest it may cause.

The protestors were not alone in their anger.

The article prompted outrage from Myanmar’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which on March 24 issued an aide-memoire to the Bangladeshi Ministry of Foreign Affairs and summoned Anup Kumar Chakma to discuss the issue.

Following the meeting Anup Kumar Chakma told the *Dhaka Tribune* that the article did not reflect the position of the government, but that Bangladesh supports freedom of the media and the author’s right to express his personal views.

Also on March 24, the Myanmar Journalist Association denounced the article in a statement.

The group said that the article was based on “fabricated and distorted historical background and facts with intent to incite religious and racial hatred and conflicts in Myanmar”, and called the piece a violation of journalistic ethics.

The Bangladesh embassy requested that questions pertaining to the protest be submitted by email but did not respond to those sent by *The Myanmar Times*.

Girl killed as police disperse Sittwe riots

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THE death of an 11-year-old girl during riots in Sittwe on March 26 has brought home the brutal consequences of pre-census tensions.

The child, who died from blood loss in Sittwe Hospital, was hit by a stray bullet fired by police who were attempting to disperse a mob of about 300 people attacking foreign aid properties in Rakhine State.

The incident occurred at the girl’s home near a United Nations World Food Programme warehouse that was targeted by rioters, according to police officials and government representatives.

A government spokesperson told *The Myanmar Times* on March 28, “An 11-year-old girl and her 33-year-old mother came to hospital after being shot by accident. The girl died from blood loss when she arrived in hospital. Her mother was shot in her stomach, but her condition is not serious, though she is still in the hospital.”



Relatives mourn an 11-year-old girl who was shot and killed by police in Sittwe on March 27. Photo: AFP

Myanmar Times of their fears after seeing a mob armed with swords, knives and hammers on the streets on March 27.

President U Thein Sein’s office has launched an investigation into the riots, which will be headed by Major General U Maung Maung Ohn, deputy minister of Border Affairs.

The incident prompted increased calls from rights organisations for the census to be postponed.

“The government should suspend the census until it can ensure adequate security and a fair process for everyone involved,” Brad Adams, the Asia director of Human Rights Watch, said on March 29.

“The census is a technical project that has taken on major political overtones and risks inflaming an already tense environment, with particular potential to spark violence against Rohingya Muslims and the foreign aid workers trying to help people in desperate need,” he said.

On March 28 the United Nations Population Fund, which is supporting the first census to be held in Myanmar in 30 years, released a statement saying the organisation was “very concerned” about the attacks but would

retain essential staff in Rakhine and move forward with the census.

The census has been cited as a potential tipping point for ethnic conflict across Myanmar. Feelings against international organisations were already running high in Rakhine amid growing resentment over allegations that they were giving preferential treatment to the Rohingya Muslim population in the region.

State government ministers told *The Myanmar Times* last month that the decision to order Médecins Sans Frontières to halt its medical aid work in Rakhine was partly due to fears that the presence of the group’s 500 or so staff would lead to community violence around census time.

The withdrawal of international organisations has prompted fears that vital medical services to tens of thousands of IDPs and those living in remote rural communities, which are already stretched beyond capacity following the MSF ban, will be further damaged.

Malteser was among the organisations that were continuing to provide medical relief in Rakhine.

Although state officials had been stepping up medical services in the

of the organisations that were now being forced to leave.

Around 140,000 people, mainly Rohingya Muslims, are trapped in IDP camps in Rakhine following community violence that first broke out in 2012, and are heavily reliant on foreign aid. International organisation have also been supporting ethnic Rakhine in remote regions of the state.

However, U Win Myaing, the information spokesperson for the Rakhine State government, insisted that the UN and INGOs do not support IDP camps in Sittwe.

“The government already supports development in the state, so there will be no impact if UN organisations like UNHCR leave. The UN did not work for the Rakhine people,” he said.

A state government source told *The Myanmar Times* on March 28 that following the girl’s death there was mounting anger among the Rakhine community against staff from other parts of Myanmar.

“The Rakhine people are very angry about the case of the 11-year-old girl who was shot dead by police,” he said.

“Rumours are spreading with people saying that police did not shoot Muslims [during riots in Buthidaung in June 2012], so why did they shoot a Rakhine girl? Now nobody wants to rent to Burmese NGO staff.”

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Military spending still dwarfs education and health

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DESPITE years of falling allocations, defence spending remains a prominent feature of the budget recently adopted by parliament. For the 2014-2015 financial year about to begin, the government will again spend more on the armed forces than on health and education combined.

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approved the K19,291 trillion budget on March 25 for the financial year that begins on April 1. The budget total represents 29.15 per-

cent of GDP, and includes a K2753 billion deficit, amounting to 4.16pc of GDP. Nevertheless, according to analysts, the budget deficit this year will be smaller than the K2,917 trillion, or 4.94pc of GNP, in 2013-2014.

Spending on the military will account for 12pc of the total national budget, double the amount to be spent on the education sector, with just 3pc devoted to healthcare, so that defence spending is bigger than both education and health spending put together.

Budget critic Daw Khin Mhway Lwin, Pyithu Hluttaw representative for Min Kin constituency, after reviewing budgets since 1992, says this has always been the case. Speaking in the budget debate on March 21, she told hluttaw: "I found that expenditure

on education and health is the lowest among the ASEAN countries, but surprisingly [our] defence expenditure is [proportionately] the same as the USA," she said.

According to the figures of Asia Development Bank in 2012, Myanmar's education spending was 0.6pc of its GDP and its health spending 0.2pc, with 4.8pc going to defence. By contrast, Cambodia spent 5.7pc of its GDP on education, 2.6pc on health and only 2.4pc on defence, said Daw Khin Mhway Lwin.

A survey by Action Aid Myanmar showed that Myanmar had the lowest education expenditure and the third-lowest healthcare budget among ASEAN countries despite what it said was widespread public approval of higher

education and health spending.

In previous years, President U Thein Sein's administration has raised education and healthcare budgets while slimming down military spend-

'I found that expenditure on education and health is the lowest among ASEAN countries.'

Daw Khin Mhway Lwin
Pyithu Hluttaw representative

ing. In 2011-2012, education accounted for 5.2pc of the total budget, increasing to 7.5pc the following year. This has now slipped back to 6pc. In the health sector, spending rose from 1.3pc in 2011-2012 to 3.8 the next year, but reverts to 3pc this coming year.

Defence has suffered a series of cuts from a high of 19.2pc of the 2011-2012 budget financial year down to the 12pc allocated for 2014-2015.

The latest budget law will allow a K100 billion fund, previously available only to Union-level ministries, to be used by state and regional governments, and establishes a K33 billion development fund. It also raises civil service salaries by K20,000, and raises pension and other allowances.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun

Intl community condemns Sittwe violence

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MEMBERS of the international community have condemned attacks on international aid and UN operations in the Rakhine State capital of Sittwe and are calling on the Myanmar government to insure the protection of aid workers in the restive area.

US Department of State deputy spokesperson Marie Harf said in a press briefing on March 28 that the US embassy was in discussions with the government to reinforce security.

"We continue to encourage the Burmese Government to work towards a durable solution that addresses the underlying causes of conflict in Rakhine State and to create the conditions for sustainable peace and development. And the United States stands ready to assist in these efforts," she said.

"Our Embassy in Rangoon is in contact with Burmese officials discussing steps to reinforce security. Unhindered and regular humanitarian access to communities in need and the safety and security of humanitarian aid workers to ensure the effective delivery of these services is critical," said Ms Harf.

A senior diplomatic official in Yangon told *The Myanmar Times* the government was dispatching a senior



Damaged goods sit inside a UNHCR warehouse that was ransacked in Sittwe. Photo: AFP

lieutenant-general to take responsibility for the security situation in Sittwe.

The official added that a curfew put in place yesterday appeared to have temporarily quelled violence.

The US embassy in Yangon said in a statement on March 27 that they were "deeply concerned" with the violence that has targeted the homes and offices of INGOs and UN staff. At least three Americans were working in Sittwe, according to the embassy.

Caroline Vandenabeele, the head

of office of the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator told *The Myanmar Times* the agency was in the midst of negotiations with both state and national government authorities about the security situation, but would not provide details of the negotiations.

Police confirmed on March 27 that 14 properties had been destroyed after violence broke out on March 26 at night and continued the next morning.

Mobs began destroying offices and

residences after a confrontation between staff of the humanitarian aid organisation Malteser International and Sittwe residents on March 26 night over the removal of a Buddhist flag from outside the Malteser offices.

Diplomatic sources said the Malteser International has close coordination with the German embassy in Yangon. Officials from the Germany Embassy were unable to be reached by *The Myanmar Times*.

"Despite some efforts by local au-

thorities to ensure the security of humanitarian workers, we remain deeply concerned about the continued lack of adequate security forces and rule of law on the ground in Sittwe, and Rakhine State more broadly, to prevent the outbreak and spread of violence and to protect aid workers, their offices, and other vulnerable populations in the area," the statement said.

The US concerns were echoed by the British government.

"It is a basic principle that humanitarian workers must be able to operate safely and without hindrance," the British Embassy in Yangon said.

Kristalina Georgieva, EU Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, and Andris Piebalgs, EU Commissioner for Development, issued a joint statement calling for the people of Sittwe and authorities "to restore the safety of relief workers and the security of international assistance operations".

Toily Kurbanov, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Myanmar, said that despite the targeting of UN operation, the group and its partners, "remain determined to continue providing life-saving humanitarian assistance".

"I reiterate concern that any reduction of humanitarian presence could negatively affect the protection of vulnerable people," Mr Kurbanov said. - Additional reporting by Bridget Di Certo



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CENSUS

Panthay Muslims protect their name

Members of the Chinese Muslim group in Mandalay hope that holding their own census will prove to the government that they should be officially recognised as one of Myanmar’s ethnic groups and help them to bolster their unique identity

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MANDALAY’S Panthay Chinese Muslim community is nearing completion of an internal count of its population as part of an effort to gain recognition as a separate ethnic group with the launch of the Myanmar’s nationwide census.

The government-organised and UN-supported nationwide census began on March 30. The census forms lists 135 separate ethnic groups, but does not provide a category for a population of ethnicities that are not officially recognised by the government. Individuals who feel their ethnicity is not reflected in the list may select code 914, “other”, and write in their ethnic group name.

The Panthays are one of these “914” groups, but community leaders say they are keen to gain official recognition for their ethnic group, claiming a unique heritage and at least 150 years of history in Myanmar.

U Moon Chi Wei, imam at the Mandalay Panthay mosque, said official recognition of the group could lead to its broader awareness and strengthen the confidence of Panthay identity.

He claimed nearly all Mandalay Panthays hold full Myanmar citizenship and thus are less concerned about politics and consequences from the census than other groups in a more tenuous situation. Rather, the Panthays see official recognition as important to maintaining their identity.

“If the government accepts our ethnic group, future development will be easier,” he said.

The Panthays generally define themselves as culturally Chinese but religious followers of Islam, and claim their ancestors have inhabited Myanmar since at least the mid-19th century.



U Moon Chi Wei, imam at the Mandalay Panthay mosque, stands in his wholesale noodle shop. Photo: Jeremy Mullins

Imam U Moon Chi Wei presides over the Panthay mosque, which was completed in 1868. It is the second-oldest of about 50 mosques catering to different ethnicities in Mandalay, according to U Maung Maung Lay, emeritus associate professor of international relations at the University of Mandalay and himself an ethnic Panthay.

A book he authored titled, *The Emergence of the Panthay Community at Mandalay* claims the community had been granted the land by King Mindon after the community swelled due to the late-19th-century warfare in China’s Yunnan province between local Muslims and the central Imperial government during the era of the Taiping rebellion.

References to Panthays periodically show up in early British accounts of Myanmar.

Colonial-era official Sir James George Scott mentions communities of Panthays living in northern Shan State in his comprehensive *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States* published in 1900-01, claiming the group generated income primarily through trade with China.

While they may no longer be able to muster the large mule caravans Sir Scott credited as a key to their success, an entrepreneurial spirit is still much alive.

Many Panthays are prominent local businesspeople. Indeed, U Moon Chi Wei is not only imam of the local mosque and a religious instructor in Pyin Oo Lwin, but also presides over a wholesale noodle business in the downtown core.

While the Panthays may have a long history in Mandalay, their relative paucity means many Myanmar people are familiar with them primarily through popular dishes such as Panthay noodles.

U Maung Maung Lay believes there are between 30,000 and 50,000 Panthays in Myanmar. He is one organiser of the Mandalay census conducted by the Panthay community of its population, which had counted about 1500 individuals from 270 families as of March 21, with about 70 families remaining uncounted.

While the Panthay-organised census is presently confined to Mandalay, likely the largest home of Panthays in Myanmar, U Maung Maung Lay said he encouraged other cities with substantial populations to organise their own.

While the group had been recognised during the British administration, its status disappeared in the intervening period.

“We want our name back,” he said. “We have to bring up the status of the group back again.”

Panthay community leaders are also encouraging their fellow Panthays to fill out code 914 on the census rather than simply selecting “Myanmar” ethnicity.

U Thaug Zaw, director of the Mandalay Region Immigration and Reg-

‘We want our name back. We have to bring the status of the group back again.’

U Maung Maung Lay
Emeritus associate professor of international relations at the University of Mandalay

istration Department, said the Union government plans to re-assess the list of recognised ethnic groups in the months following the census. Ethnic groups aiming for recognition can then also petition the government through a letter written by community leaders during that period, he added.

U Maung Maung Lay said the Panthays plan on writing to government officials if they are not recognised following the government census, though

added there is no intention of seeking political representation for the group.

The unofficial census conducted within the community could also be used to bolster the case for recognition in the months following the census.

“The Panthay name is already familiar. It shouldn’t disappear,” he said.

Although Panthay identity is unique, it is not homogenous.

There is a traditional divide between the “pure” and the “mixed” Panthays in Mandalay, meaning those who keep with Chinese culture and those who intermarry with Myanmar people.

While many “pure” Panthays associate closely with Chinese culture, watching Chinese films and maintaining close ties with the Chinese communities, many “mixed” Panthays cannot speak the language and may identify just as strongly with Myanmar people.

For his part, U Maung Maung Lay has a Burmese, a Chinese and an Arabic name.

He used the Burmese language name during his term working for the university, while his Chinese name was gifted by his father, and his Arabic name is used for religious purposes, the name he believes that Allah calls him with.

The Panthays claim they follow religious practices quite close to those of other Islamic groups, but culturally the differences abound. Imam U Moon Chi Wei said that mealtime reveals several differences between the Panthays and other Muslims.

“We eat rice with chopsticks, while other Muslims eat with spoons or their hands,” he said. “We also prefer Chinese curries over other types.”

Still, Panthays are not entirely culturally Chinese.

The Panthays also generally do not take part in Chinese New Year, and while members often claim to be culturally Chinese and religiously Islamic, it is also clear they would like to steer their own course.

Although Mandalay Region has been the scene of tension between the Buddhist and Muslim communities, such as the violence in Meiktila one year ago, U Maung Maung Lay downplayed concerns that anti-Muslim prejudice affects the Panthay community.

He said the residents of the Panthay quarter on 80th Street worked hard to keep good relations with their Buddhist neighbours, and added that much of the anger ostensibly directed against Muslims was in fact aimed at ethnic Indians.

“There have always been frictions between the Indians [and the Myanmar],” he said, adding the Panthays managed to stay outside the fray.

“The new generation is proud of Panthay culture,” he said. “I call myself Panthay, but my heart is with Myanmar and the Panthays.”



The Mandalay Panthay mosque opened in 1868. Photo: Jeremy Mullins

PEN International president meets with Ye Htut, Suu Kyi

BY BILL O'TOOLE
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GLOBAL writers’ group PEN International has urged senior government officials to introduce laws that improve government transparency and protect freedom of expression, especially for minority languages and culture.

The delegation was led by Pen International president John Ralston Saul and included members of its Myanmar chapter, which was established in September. It met National League for Democracy leader Daw Aung Sun Suu Kyi, presidential spokesperson U Ye Htut and Minister for Information U Aung Kyi in Nay

Pyi Taw in March.

In their meeting with U Ye Htut and U Aung Kyi, Mr Saul said the group raised a variety of pressing issues, including the need to amend laws that restrict freedom of expression and the situation in Rakhine State.

“We had a very active and open discussion about [these issues]. They didn’t necessarily agree but they listened to it and took it on board so we’ll see what happens,” said Mr Saul, who is also an essayist and the author of several works of fiction.

In particular, they urged U Ye Htut to ensure the government adopts a more transparent approach to investigations into communal

conflict. Ultimately, this would benefit the government, Mr Saul said. “The answer to a situation where you believe you have been misrepresented is that you become transparent and you get rid of the misunderstanding.”

PEN International was founded in London in 1921 as a support network for European writers and intellectuals following World War I. It has since grown to include chapters across the globe and focuses its efforts on advocating for freedom of expression, especially in the arts and public discourse.

Myanmar’s PEN chapter opened in September, largely thanks to the efforts of award-winning author and former political prisoner Ma Thida

(Sanchaung), who took part in last week’s meetings.

At Ma Thida’s suggestion, the PEN delegation pushed for the drafting of an access to information law, which Ye Htut signalled he was interested in pursuing.

U Ye Htut could not be reached for comment on the meeting.

In the meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi talks focused on protecting the languages and cultures of Myanmar’s many minority groups.

For many minority students “there is no such mechanism for learning their own languages at the school. They really don’t know ... We need to invest in their language, but also their literature,” Ma Thida said.

Mr Saul, Ma Thida and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi agreed on the need to preserve the oral storytelling traditions of ethnic groups. As Ma Thida pointed out, groups like the Chin have more of an oral than a written literature.

Both Ma Thida and Mr Saul said they hoped that PEN could one day conduct a project to record these stories and translate them into Myanmar and other native languages.

However, Ma Thida stressed that the centre does not yet have the resources to complete such a large project, which makes collaboration with politicians and other groups all the more important. “We don’t even have an office yet,” she said.

Pyin Oo Lwin demonstrators call for constitution changes

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LWIN



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PYIN Oo Lwin, home of the Defence Service Academy, was the site of protests last week as demonstrators demanded changes to the 2008 constitution, including reducing the provision of 25 percent of military representatives in the hluttaw.

Demonstration organisers applied for permission to protest with 500 people on March 23, but authorities only granted permission for 200 people to take part.

"We've got permission to protest to amend the constitution but only 200 people were allowed to join even though we applied to protest with 500 people. We had to travel to Mandalay to make placards. We couldn't do anything in Pyin Oo Lwin, so there were some obstructions," said U Ko Gyi, an organiser who submitted the application for the permit to police.

Despite the smaller size than they had hoped for, around 200 demonstrators who did partake made their demands known as they carried signs calling for a "real president elected by people", and said that they rejected section 436 of the constitution, calling for it to be scrapped.

"We are protesting to open peoples'



Demonstrators protest in favour of changes to the constitution on March 23 in Pyin Oo Lwin. Photo: Si Thu Lwin

eyes. This is not just for our benefits. We are protesting for the people and in the interest of the people," said Ko Thar Gyi, a protest leader.

Section 436(a), as it currently stands, gives the military, which holds 25pc of all seats, an effective veto over constitutional change, as it states that amendments need the support of at least 75pc of MPs to be approved.

A police captain overseeing the demonstration said that there were no problems reported at the demonstration and that the event went "peacefully".

Chair of the National League for Democracy Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was in Pyin Oo Lwin on the day of the protest to meet with prominent writers following a trip to Mogok and spoke briefly about possible

constitutional amendments, stressing that changes should not focus on her.

"Amending the constitution is not for me to be president. Most people think that. I thank all the people who love me and depend on me, but I don't want a situation that relies on only one person. It is not good for the people or for me and the country," Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun

IN BRIEF

Man stabbed during fight on bus

A man has been charged with causing grievous harm with a dangerous weapon after stabbing a fellow bus passenger.

U Than Aung boarded the number 105 bus travelling to Pabedan township on March 22.

When the bus stopped in Tarmwe township, U Than Aung opened a window.

A fellow passenger sitting beside U Than Aung objected and the two began arguing.

The other passenger then stabbed U Than Aung with a 4-inch (10-centimetre) knife.

U Than Aung was admitted to Yangon General Hospital for treatment.

Tarmwe police are handling the case.

- Toe Wai Aung, Translation by Thiri Min Htun

Man killed by falling concrete

A Tarmwe resident was killed by falling concrete pieces while visiting a tea shop.

U Min Aung, 58, was declared dead by doctors at Yangon General Hospital on March 24, a day after being struck in the head by falling building material.

He was drinking tea in Tarmwe at around 7:30pm on March 23 when the blocks fell from an apartment belonging to Daw Tin Than's apartment, located on the fifth floor.

Tarmwe police are handling the case.

- Translation by Thae Thae Htwe

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IN PICTURES

PHOTO: AUNG HTAY HLAING

Demonstrators take part in a candle light vigil on March 26 at Sule Pagoda to protest a proposed electricity rate hike that is set to take effect on April 1.

New weather radars set to be rolled out



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THREE sophisticated weather radars will be installed in Myanmar within the next three years with assistance from the Japanese government, according to an official with the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology in Nay Pyi Taw.

There will be 30 automatic weather measurement instruments by each radar. The first radar will be installed in Kyaukpyu's Min Pyin village in Rakhine State. The second radar will be installed in Yangon's Kabar Aye meteorological office. The third will be installed in Mandalay's Chan Mya Tharsi township office compound.

U Chit Kyaw, director general of the department said the total cost of the project is US\$38.7 million.

"We have now signed an MoU, and the bank account has been opened," U Chit Kyaw said.

"When I studied in Japan in 1986, I told the Japanese government to give us a weather radar. Although they had a plan to give us radar, we didn't get it. After Nargis, a Japan commission came to Myanmar, and asked us how many radars we need. We told them two to use in the

Yangon office and to replace the broken one in Kyaukpyu township office. Later, we told them three because we need to install one in Mandalay because we want to forecast the floods according to hydrology."

When the installation process in Kyaukpyu is halfway finished, he said work will begin to install the second radar in Yangon. The same process will be followed for the final installation in Mandalay. The project is expected to be completed in 2017, U Chit Kyaw said.

Since Mandalay is far from the typical area where storms strike, the radar in Mandalay will be able to issue flood warnings in advance when heavy rains suddenly occur.

"When it floods because of heavy rain, the bridges are destroyed, the soil eroded and the railway lines are moved. The damage caused by such kind of flooding is bigger than with normal floods. We will detect the

intensity of rain to be able to forecast the floods," U Chit Kyaw said.

The radar in Mandalay will have a range from Myitkyina in Kachin State to Taungoo in Bago Region. The department will be able to issue sudden flood warnings when they detect various levels of rain. They will also be able warn the public about the likelihood of flooding, and where strong rains are expected to fall, he said.

After Cyclone Nargis struck in 2008, the UNDP and World Meteorology Organization recommended Myanmar purchase new radars to detect storms.

To properly install the radar, Japan will provide technical assistance in two areas: meteorological and engineering. Staff have been appointed to take part in the process in Kyauk Phyu, Yangon and Mandalay. They will be sent abroad for job training.

"Japanese engineers will also participate [in the installation process] with Myanmar engineers in installing the radars so they can know what is to be installed where," U Chit Kyaw said.

Myanmar installed its first radar in 1979 in Min Pyin village in Kyaukpyu Township, for K5.7 million. The cost was shared by the World Meteorological Organization. The technology was considered largely outdated by 1997.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun

3

Weather radars to be installed in Myanmar over as many years with Japanese assistance

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Views

Political will and the peace process

There are positive signs from the peace process, but does the Tatmadaw have the political will for real change and a lasting solution?



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MYANMAR'S peace process is gaining new momentum with the recent formation of a joint technical team comprising nine members from each side: for the ethnic groups, from the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT); and for the government, the Union Peace Working Committee (UPWC). However, many players in the process still question the political will, sincerity and eventual goal of the state, especially the Tatmadaw. As the most powerful government institution, and one that wields real decision-making power, its commitment is essential for the success of the talks.

The purpose of this joint technical team is to produce a single document to be used as the basis of negotiation on a nationwide ceasefire agreement and replace the two current versions that have been proposed. For NCCT leaders, one of the major encouraging signs from the March 9 and 10 talks in Yangon was the active participation of the high-level officers from the Tatmadaw. The participation of senior military figures in the discussion minimises the lingering doubt that the Tatmadaw is not supportive of the peace process.

“One positive thing that I [took away from] our meeting is that we are now dealing and negotiating directly with senior generals who represent the military institution and have real decision-making power,” said NCCT head Naing Han Tha.

Though a real political negotiation on substantive issues has not yet begun, in terms of sequencing the process is heading in the right direction. But the outcome and exact timing of the talks has in the past proven difficult to predict. Even those who closely follow the negotiation process missed the mark by calculating that the nationwide ceasefire agreement would be signed in November 2013. If the process moves forward steadily, without any major setbacks, it would be safe to expect that political negotiations will continue beyond the 2015 general election.

But is this protracted negotiating period a problem? Lian H Sakhong, one of the NCCT team members and principal drafters of NCCT text, argued that this was not the case. “We have got the chance to brainstorm, debate, discuss, adopt and explain our positions clearly to ourselves and our leaders. I would like the government side to do the same to be well-prepared so that we do not make any mistakes when we are attempting to resolve our political conflict, one of the longest-running political conflicts in modern history. Moreover, it is so critical that the government side comes to negotiate with us with one collective voice as well.”

The success of the negotiations will depend on whether both parties have the political will and commitment to make it a reality. So far, many sceptics do not believe that the Tatmadaw has the political will to resolve a political con-

flict. The fact that fighting is still taking place in some parts of the country, including the Kachin area, feeds into their inherent suspicion and growing distrust in the process. Even though President U Thein Sein during his trip to Kachin State once again articulated his commitment to bringing about peace, stability, and national reconciliation in Myanmar through political dialogue, the reported cases of combative moves and constant edging of territorial control by the government soldiers seriously undermine his clarion call.

In fact, the historical precedents of reneging on the promises by the previous governments mean that simply delivering a well-written speech will not create the impetus to persuade some of the more sceptical leaders of ethnic armed organisations to buy into the peace process. Until two years ago, the bilateral ceasefire agreements signed were actually all gentlemen's agreements with no written texts – the exception being the KIO's agreement. Looking at this trend, it is essential that both the executive branch and the Tatmadaw demonstrate their political will and prove

So far, many sceptics do not believe that the Tatmadaw has the political will to resolve a political conflict.

their sincerity, seriousness, and commitment to finding a negotiated settlement to the political crises with tangible actions. These deeds simply require complying with the terms and conditions of the agreement. The absence of practical action to curb moves perceived as aggressive from the government side will only deepen the lack of trust in the process.

But the collective leadership of the ethnic armed organisations also have to clearly show their desire for a mutually acceptable compromised solution to the conflict. This means not only avoiding knee-jerk reactions to all government undertakings but showing cooperation whenever and wherever possible. Certainly they must avoid acting in a way that could result in them being labelled as antagonists.

The signs are positive. Both sides appear to accept that there can be no military solution to Myanmar's conflicts. The latest meeting also seems to indicate that they have the resilience and political will to travel the long journey required to secure lasting peace that benefits all.

Zaceu Lian has been a commentator on Myanmar politics for a decade and is following the peace process closely. You can reach him at liansalai@yahoo.com.



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing takes part in an Armed Forces Day ceremony in

Optimism on but to varyin

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I recently made a month-long research trip to Myanmar to meet with the country's political elite – nationals and foreign – regarding the democratic transition and the prospect of peace and reconciliation.

During my lectures and throughout the course of my research there was one question that continued to be raised by myself and others: Can the ongoing democratic transition be sustained and successful? The general impression among the different political stakeholders is optimistic – that the process is unlikely to revert back to an authoritarian regime or another military coup.

Among others, I sat down with the country's former Prime Minister General U Khin Nyunt, the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) vice chair U Htay Oo, and the former vice chair of the National League for Democracy (NLD) U Tin Oo. I also met with NLD spokesperson U Nyan Win and diplomats from the United States, Great Britain, Canada and India.

There are two groups of people – one group which has greater optimism regarding the success of the democratisation process and the other group which is cautiously optimistic. The first group sees that there is no chance of retreating back, while the second group questions the sincerity of the government, particularly the role of military.

Both groups also recognise the importance of resolving minority problems, but there remains an element of mistrust between the majority Bamar population and the country's minority groups.

U Htay Oo, vice chair of the USDP and a former cabinet minister in the military-led State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), stated that the government is not turning back.

On the other hand, minority

leaders such as U Sai Nyunt Lwin, general secretary of the Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD), and leaders of the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF), which is an umbrella organisation of 20 ethnic-based political parties, are not fully convinced that some former military leaders are sincerely committed to establishing a genuine democracy that would address the concerns of ethnic minorities.

There is also a lingering concern among ethnic minority leaders that the Myanmar military may use the nationwide ceasefire to neutralise non-Bamar ethnic armed groups then occupy their territories and later exploit the natural resources.

While a lack of trust toward the Bamar ethnic group and the military institution remains in other ethnic populations, there has been a visible shift in general perceptions among the Bamar population, including the military, that there cannot be peace and progress without the cooperation and participation of ethnic minorities.

The majority Bamar population has also come to a gradual realisation that there is a need for greater representation of ethnic minorities in all branches of the government – legislative, executive and the judiciary. One other positive development is that the military-backed USDP party has expressed a willingness to work toward achieving the ethnic minorities' demand for a federal union.

For a political dialogue to begin, government representatives and ethnic armed groups have met a few times to reach a nationwide ceasefire agreement. To this end, the ethnic groups' Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) and the government's Union Peace Working Committee (UPWC) announced March 10 that they would form a committee to draft the text for a ceasefire pact.

While there is a common interest to address the long-standing



Nay Pyi Taw on March 27. Photo: AFP

Myanmar, g degrees

issues of ethnic minorities, evidently there are also military hardliners who would like to retain their inherent power and influence for as long as possible. Further, within the rank and file of military elites, there are still security and safety concerns which suggest that the military would be hesitant to transfer absolute power to a democratically elected civilian government.

Equally important, if not more, is the amendment of the 2008 constitution. For example, Article 261(b) of the present constitution gives the country's president the power to appoint state chief ministers. The state and regional chief ministers are responsible to the president. There is also a challenging task to be sorted out as to how resources would be shared between state governments and the federal government.

Before the election, the NLD also wants an amendment of Article 59(f), which prohibits party chair Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from becoming the country's president due to her children's foreign citizenship.

There is an immense curios-

There is also a lingering concern among ethnic minority leaders that the Myanmar military may use the nationwide ceasefire to neutralise non-Bamar ethnic armed groups.

ity as to how the 2015 elections will play out and how the military would react if the NLD and other opposition parties win a landslide victory and vice versa. Moreover, accommodation of different political parties and groups in the run-up to the 2015 general election will be crucial for the success of democratic transition.

A nationwide census began last month that will be an important step toward the upcoming electoral process.

It is evident from the nature of political transition that the government is pursuing a gradual or incremental change systematically through its seven-step roadmap which the former Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt introduced in 2003.

Though there is optimism that the ongoing democratic transition would be successful, it is still premature to draw a firm conclusion before a concrete solution to ethnic minority problems emerges.

For Myanmar to see a smooth and successful democratic transition, and possibly consolidation of democracy, there needs to be mutual trust between the government and the opposition groups, particularly ethnic minorities. In order to build such trust, the government and the military must demonstrate its sincerity and seriousness.

Meanwhile, ethnic minorities and other democratic forces must extend all possible support and cooperation to the government's initiatives. If this unprecedented opportunity of reconciliation and peace is missed, it would be a tremendous loss for Myanmar and its people.

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Nehginpao Kipgen's research focuses on the politics of South and Southeast Asia with a specialisation on Myanmar. His book, titled *Democracy Movement in Myanmar: Challenges and Problems* is scheduled for publication this month.

Plane talk, no poppycock



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IT'S not easy arguing with an old chum if he drops in unexpected, but I have the advantage over him of having covered the region for the past quarter-century and more.

Besides which, said I, rummaging for a corkscrew, I actually lived and worked in Kuala Lumpur for six years and was even arrested, jailed and genitally abused there - well, at least verbally.

But my chum Morven, unstoppable and a tad riled, bore supporting notebooks and thought he'd got it nailed and could banjax the expert.

I resisted, but being a gent I let him have his say, as one must of returning prodigals bearing Malbec wine and a cartwheel of Brie cheese, not to mention the wild boar pâté and a ponytail.

With nary a breath for a big black garlic'd olive, he claimed the MH370 incident showed just how much Malaysia had deteriorated.

He really let rip. Asian misvalues, world's highest personal debt rate, bent and inefficient police, communal and religious strife, co-opted judiciary and press, political instability - and haze, ha, ha, ha, ho!

He quoted Malaysian novelist Tash Aw: "Skyscrapers and luxury malls cannot mask the widest gap between rich and poor in Southeast Asia, persistent ethnic tensions, a fraught democracy and a wave of high-profile violent crimes."

Wow. Malaysia Boleh (Malaysia Go!) is a veneer, he trumpeted, a charade purveyed by a state-mollycoddled media, now exposed as bollock-naked and toothless by this month's Sherlockian catastrophe.

He spouted MH370 analyst Jessica Trisko Darden: "Southeast Asian nations are incapable of monitoring, let alone controlling, their airspace and poor at mount-



Malaysia's acting Transport Minister Hishammuddin Hussein talks during a press conference in Kuala Lumpur on March 28. Photo: AFP

ing a swift, coordinated response to disaster. They excel, however, at blaming each other."

She has a point. After all, did ever a politician act more like a proverbial deer in the full beam than Malaysia's acting transport minister Hishammuddin Hussein, one of the nation's gravest thespians?

Two m's and two d's, he always told me, for I knew him long before he took up play-acting; though he was a shyster even then, a lawyer to be precise, po-faced and ready to plunge a dagger in anyone's back.

Hisham's youthful dalliances were over by then, though they may reappear in 100 reasons why he cannot be PM, along with his affection for cow's head satay; but not beer, not since his varsity days in Wales.

But I retorted that Hisham is an honourable man, a Pahang blueblood, a former player of the purple oboe, and despite his wayward ministerial career, we should not gloat when he's spiked by a lost airplane.

After all, his boss and cousin, Prime Minister Najib Razak, is hardly setting them alight in the stalls, what with voters deserting his government and the Islamist Perkasa brigade, led by the nutcase Ibrahim Ali, ascendant.

Seeking to appease his Malay ground, Najib has banned Christian bibles from referring to Allah and has agreed to consider introducing huddud law, widely known as stonin', whippin', and beheadin'.

Splutter if you must, said Morven, most folks did when KL's lickspittle judges genuflected and sentenced opposition leaders Anwar Ibrahim and Karpal Singh to the clink just days before the plane vanished.

And they get away with it, at least until the world's press descended on the Sama Sama Hotel - aptly, as reviews say, "in the middle of nowhere", just like MH370 - and began grilling Hisham until his 'tash quivered.

Now, said Morven, two things will happen: Najib and Hisham will be further undercut from within, and more oppositionists will land up in court charged with sodomising goats or saying nice things about Singapore.

But wait a mo, said I, you've given your forceful castigation of a country I know well and now it's my turn to rebut. Yes, he says, wearily. Yes, go ahead. Well?

Well. At least George Clooney was not on the plane, I said. It was the best I could do under the circumstances. I mean, I had no transponder to turn Morven off, lah.



Relatives of passengers on missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 protest outside the Malaysian embassy in Beijing on March 25. Photo: AFP



Participants speak on stage at the Myanmar Civil Aviation Development Conference at Traders Hotel on March 24. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

IFC helps to boost tourism

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THE International Finance Cooperation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, is lending US\$80 million to subsidiaries of Shangri-La Asia Limited to expand its hospitality business in Myanmar, the IFC announced on March 26.

According to the statement released by the IFC, the loan will improve the country's business and travel infrastructure by providing international standard rooms and conference facilities.

IFC's investment will be used to complete the renovation at the Traders Hotel Yangon and also increase its capacity from 270 to 485 rooms. IFC's investment will also be used to complete construction of the Shangri-La Residences Yangon, a 240-apartment building.

Both projects are expected to be finished in 2014.

"The projects' key locations in the central business area of the country's most populated Yangon city, along with Shangri-La's quality, will set a benchmark and raise the quality of services available locally," said Madhu Rao, chief financial officer at Shangri-La.

The statement said IFC will work closely with Shangri-La to ensure international environmental, health, and safety standards are adhered to at the sites. The renovation and construction projects are providing jobs for more than 1000 local workers.

About 600 permanent employees of whom about one-third are expected to be women are being hired and trained in hospitality to operate the properties.

"At a time of growing economic interest in Myanmar, it is crucial to increase access to much-needed business enabling infrastructure to attract more investors and travellers, as well as helping place Myanmar on a par with other commercial hubs in the region," said Vikram Kumar, IFC resident representative in Myanmar.

Myanmar aims to become regional aviation hub

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WHILE Myanmar looks set to become Asia's next aviation growth market, the Ministry of Transport revealed last week that it also plans to transform the country into the region's main aviation hub.

Minister of Transport U Nyan Htun Aung said the government has "set a vision that aims at making Myanmar the major logistics hub in Asia."

"For fulfilling this vision, we have defined a mission that will drive us to develop and strengthen the safe, secure, efficient, sustainable and environmentally friendly aviation industry in the country," he said.

He said the ministry plans to implement four strategic plans to achieve its goals: pursuing liberalisation of economic regulations, establishing new air linkages to worldwide destinations, promoting national airlines and improving infrastructure.

U Tin Naing Tun, the director general of the Department of Civil Aviation (DCA), said the ministry will first conclude air service agreements with new bilateral partners and revise some old agreements with more liberal provisions.

"Then we will establish new air linkages in line with the second strategic plan. We have linked to some emerging economies like India, China and Japan at present. In the foreseeable future, we will expand our air route networks to access worldwide destinations, especially to Europe, the US and Australia," he said.

Meanwhile, the ministry will foster the capabilities of national airlines in terms of safety standards and service quality to compete with other airlines in the region.

"As the last strategic plan, we will upgrade, in a timely manner, our air transport infrastructure to become qualified ones. We do recognise the importance of aviation safety and capacity building for the development of our aviation sector," U Tin Naing Tun said.

In order to speed up the plans, he said the ministry is launching a public-private partnership scheme

"in accord with the country's economic trends".

"We have started a public-private partnership for international airports and have recently taken further steps to do the same for domestic airports," U Tin Naing Tun said.

"These steps are supported by our new foreign investment law paving the way for foreign investors to make investments in 20 air transport service sectors, including airports and air carriers."

According to DCA statistics, total passenger traffic was 6.49 million in 2013, a 16.5-percent increase from 2012.

"There has been a significant increase in the number of international air travellers to and from

Myanmar, as well as the number of regional and international airlines operating to Yangon and Mandalay international airports," U Nyan Htun Aung said.

"From the regulatory perspective, air transport liberalisation has been carried out both in the ASEAN context as well as in bilateral relations in line with international trends."

Although current legislation provides for air transport services to be carried out only by state-owned enterprises, U Nyan Htun Aung said private airlines are allowed to be set up through the exercise of relevant waiver clauses for the benefit of the state.

"Such regulatory reforms in the aviation sector, together with our restructured investment laws, are now offering opportunities for both domestic and foreign private participation in the sustainable development of aviation in Myanmar," he said.

The number of international airlines operating to Myanmar has increased over the years from 12 airlines in 2009 to 28 airlines in 2013. Of those 28, eight are low-cost carriers. In the domestic market, Myanmar has seven airlines operating scheduled services with a few aircraft.

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International airlines operating in Myanmar

Senior monks observe govt and international schools in Singapore

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PRINCIPALS of monastic schools, senior monks and project officials from the Monastic Education Development Group (MEDG) as well as officials from the Ministry of Religious Affairs had their own learning experience when they visited two Singaporean schools between March 17 and 22.

In total 30 people made the trip primarily to view United World College South East Asia (UWCSEA). A private school with nearly 5000 pupils across two campuses, it is part of the United World College (UWC) movement which itself has 12 schools and colleges across five continents.

This is the first overseas visit for the MEDG which conducts teaching methodology training for monastic school teachers in 17 venues across Myanmar, including in Kachin, Tanintharyi, Rakhine, Sagaing and Mandalay.

"The purpose of this trip is to begin to understand the principles of international education," said U Nayaka, chair of the MEDG and principal of Phaung Daw Oo monastic education high school in Mandalay.

"We invited these senior monks to



Monks attend a presentation at the UWCSEA in Singapore. Photo: Aung Shin

influence their approach to delivering education. It is very important to develop our monastic education."

The monks visited UWCSEA for three consecutive days and also took time to visit a government run school. They said they were impressed by UWCSEA and its holistic approach to education that includes not only academia but also outdoor and personal and social education.

UWC delivers the International Baccalaureate Diploma system to

its students in grades 11 and 12. The monks said they were most impressed by the high level of motivation in the students at UWCSEA despite the lack of an exam system in the lower grades.

The MEDG was formed by the Monastic Education School Supervising Committee under the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2011. It is funded by the Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) which in turn receives grant aid from the Australian and British governments.

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ANALYSIS

Military showcases troops in media blitz

WA LONE

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FOR decades Myanmar's armed forces avoided publicising anything about its training programs or the war games it held to practice military maneuvers.

Demonstrations of troop formations and military hardware have generally been limited to the annual Armed Forces Day on March 27, during which a televised parade is held in Nay Pyi Taw, and army propaganda films and music are played on state television.

In the past couple of years, however, officials affiliated with the armed forces, known domestically as the Tatmadaw, have started creating officially sanctioned websites about internal military affairs and weaponry.

In February, Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing oversaw a series of ground-based military trainings in Meiktila featuring coordination among land troops, armoured battalions and the Air Force, images of which were officially shown on television, newspapers and social media.

The media blitz continued on March 22 when the navy held coastal training exercises that included the firing of missiles from ships, while last week's 69th Armed Forces Day parade in Nay Pyi Taw featured an



Members of Myanmar's military march in formation during a ceremony to mark the 69th anniversary of Armed Forces Day on March 27. Photo: AFP

unprecedented display of tanks, howitzers and missile launchers.

Observers say the media campaign shows that the Tatmadaw are aiming to gain more acceptance

internationally.

Journalist Bertil Lintner said the military "don't want to be known as a brute force that gunned down demonstrators in Yangon and is raping and

killing civilians in non-Bamar ethnic areas".

"I think all of this is part of the Tatmadaw's efforts to promote a better image for itself," he said.

But Naing Han Tha, the chair of the New Mon State Party, said the military's public displays of strength are occurring at a sensitive time during which the government peace committee and ethnic armed organisations are trying to forge a nationwide ceasefire agreement.

"The Tatmadaw's training programs at this time seem intended to put pressure on us, but we can't say for sure without discussing it with them," he said, adding that he hoped the military would play a bigger role in ceasefire talks in the future.

Myanmar political analyst U Yan Myo Thein said the Tatmadaw has been working to build stronger military relations with the United States, Great Britain, China, India and Pakistan, as well as with ASEAN members like Thailand, Vietnam and Laos.

Last August, the US Defense Institute of International Legal Studies held a training program for 20 officials from the Tatmadaw and the Ministry of Defence in Nay Pyi Taw on US military traditions, respect for and defence of human rights, and the advantages of a civilian-led government.

In January, British Foreign Office Minister Hugo Swire said his country would work to re-establish military-to-military ties with Myanmar.

The report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar released in March recommended that the Tatmadaw be brought under civilian control and oversight, which would require amending the 2008 Constitution.

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Got something to say?
The Myanmar Times



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New visa on arrival restriction impact tourism, industry

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AN abrupt change in the rules for prearranged visas-on-arrival for package tourists has caused consternation among travel experts in Myanmar, who say the decision will have a negative impact on the country's tourism industry.

In early March the Ministry of Immigration and Population suddenly announced that prearranged visas-on-arrival (VOA) would be limited to package tours with 10 or fewer people, effective immediately.

Previously, there was no limit on group size.

U Maung Maung Than, the ministry's director general, told *The Myanmar Times* last week that the change was made to meet standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).

"We wanted to adhere to ICAO standards, so we asked travel associations and agents to follow the new limits," he said.

"Immigration is directly connected to security concerns, and limiting the group size allows us to process the visas without rushing and without causing a mess at the airport."

On the positive side, U Maung Maung Than said the ministry was planning on introducing an electronic visa application system by the end of the year.

"To introduce the e-visa system, we need to work with many different ministries and departments. We will have meetings with other officials, and then we will invite bids from companies that want to implement the project," he said.

The ministry's Department of Immigration and National Registration introduced the VOA system in Myanmar on May 1, 2010, a move that was hailed as a breakthrough for the tourism industry.

For the first time, foreign visitors could apply for visas-on-arrival when passing through Yangon and Mandalay international airports without having to make any prior arrangements except a return air ticket.

But the program was suspended on



Yangon International Airport is the country's primary visitor gateway. Photo: Staff

September 1, just two months before Myanmar held its first general election in decades.

The VOA system was reintroduced on June 1, 2012, but only for business travellers, conference and workshop attendees, and transit visitors. Prearranged tourist visas were also allowed for package tours, with no limit on the number of people in each group.

U Phyo Wai Yar Zar, chair of Myanmar Tourism Marketing (MTM), said representatives from private tourism associations, the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, and the Ministry of Immigration held a meeting last week at Panda Hotel to discuss ways to avoid limiting the size of groups eligible for prearranged VOA.

"The Ministry of Immigration said immigration played a big role in the country's security. It seems that for now there won't be any changes in their decision to limit group sizes," he said.

However, he applauded the plan to implement an e-visa program, which he said was essential to realising the government's aim to attract 3 million tourists in 2014.

"It makes sense to stop the prearranged VOA program if e-visas are available to all potential visitors to Myanmar. But we are not ready to start

'This sudden announcement has damaged the reputation and image of the country.'

Daw Phyu Phyu Mar

Director of Seven Star Travel and Tour

due to the lack of banking infrastructure," U Phyo Wai Yar Zar said.

Experts in the tourism industry said the rule change limiting group sizes for prearranged VOA would negatively impact Myanmar's image as a tourist destination.

Edwin Briels, the general manager of Khiri Travel Yangon, said Myanmar's visa policies have resulted in his company receiving cancellations from clients from Argentina, Dubai, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Ireland, including some who were already on their way to Southeast Asia.

"They all cancelled their tours to Myanmar because they didn't have

Inland Water Transport needs to modernise to keep up

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OFFICIALS from the Inland Water Transportation (IWT) say that development of the country's water infrastructure is essential to improve the transportation of goods across the country's domestic waterways.

With Myanmar set for an increase of imports as the market opens, the IWT, a state-owned transport enterprise under the Ministry of Transport, said there is a pressing need to make sure that waterways and the boats that travel them can keep up with private shipping companies.

U Win Thein, an official from Inland Water Transport, said that development needs to be focused on four specific areas: the maintenance and upkeep of waterways, port infrastructure, ship safety and

construction of new ships that can navigate shallow waters that are encountered during the dry season.

"Ports should be built to ensure the safety of containers along the sides of the Ayeyarwady and Chindwin rivers, which are the main routes for transporting goods around the country," U Win Thein said.

"Additionally, new modern ships that can travel in shallow waters are being constructed for use during this time of year [dry season]."

U Shain Yaw, the secondary general manager of Inland Water Transport, said that ensuring the safety and livelihoods of the people who work Myanmar's waterways must be prioritised.

This IWT is comprised of seven departments and draws revenue from port taxes. The IWT currently employs around 10,000 people across the country, U Shain Yaw said, but added that thousands more benefit

from the goods they deliver and ports they use to load and offload.

The IWT fleet consists of around 423 boats, but officials told *The Myanmar Times* that 20 percent are currently in working condition.

U Thiha, a river area surveyor studying Myanmar's waterways, said that he hopes development will be aided by the Japanese, following a trip to Tokyo by the Minister of Transportation in November 2012 during which an MoU was signed to develop Myanmar's broader transportation network.

"For the development of the Inland Water Transport, I want to say Japan is going to help," he said.

"According to the MoU, Myanmar will cooperate with Japan; we are doing this work now. This master plan is to cooperate in developing Myanmar transportation as a whole."

- Translated by Hein Htet Aung

ctions officials



time to apply for a visa at a Myanmar embassy, or they were not able to send their passport overseas for a long time to apply for a visa,” Mr Briels said.

“Some clients from the US who tried to apply at the Myanmar embassy in Singapore were refused because the embassy there only accepts applications from people who live in Singapore,” he said.

“Besides that, we have had a few overseas tour operators who have taken Myanmar out of their brochures because they say it is simply too complicated to deal with.”

Daw Phyu Phyu Mar, the managing director of Seven Star Travel and Tour, agreed that the sudden limitation on VOA group sizes was a step backward for the tourism industry.

“We are just starting to experience a golden era for Myanmar tourism, and we have earned a good image around the world. This sudden announcement has damaged the reputation and image of the country,” she said.

“Luckily we are entering the low season, but for the long term it’s impossible to imagine growth in the industry without a good VOA system, unless we quickly introduce an e-visa system. I don’t think the ministry’s reasons for limiting group sizes for prearranged VOA are good enough.”

MoH ramps up anti-TB activities

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THE Ministry of Health has launched an expanded three-year program aimed at using anti-retroviral treatments to simultaneously target HIV and tuberculosis patients across Myanmar, Health Minister U Pe Thet Khin said on March 24.

A similar program was conducted in 2013 but reached only 28 townships throughout the country.

“We will implement expanded TB-HIV collaborative activities using ART [anti-retroviral treatments] from 2014 to 2016, and we will do it across the country,” U Pe Thet Khin said during a ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw marking World Tuberculosis Day.

He said the ministry will also scale up activities aimed at diagnosing TB in people living with HIV, providing isoniazid preventive therapy (IPT) to non-TB patients living with HIV, and preventing TB.

“We are implementing these TB-HIV collaborative activities to ensure that the needed treatment reaches TB patients living with HIV, and to prevent the prevalence of those two diseases,” he said.

The three-year plan is expected to cost US\$90.6 million, with financial assistance coming from the nonprofit Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

U Pe Thet Khin said at the ceremony that multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) was becoming an increasingly prevalent problem in Myanmar because many patients lack proper health knowledge and therefore fail to take their anti-TB medicine regularly or don’t complete the full treatment.

He said that globally there are about 450,000 MDR-TB new patients every year, about 150,000 of whom die.

“In Myanmar we can find and give treatment to only 25 percent of the estimated patients, and the rate of success in treatment is only 48pc,” he said, adding that according to a survey conducted last year, MDR-TB is found in 5pc of new TB patients and 27pc of long-term patients in Myanmar.

He said patients who have not had treatment must be found as quickly as possible, but to do so the ministry needs more health staff, human resources, technology and financial assistance. – *Translation by Thiri Min Htun*



An AIDS patient waits for treatment in Yangon. Photo: Kaung Htet



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OPINION

Keep the census process free from manipulation

CHARLES BO

newsroom@mmtimes.com

MYANMAR'S first census since reform measures were undertaken is occurring right now. Despite various apprehensions expressed by local people – especially ethnic communities – and by well-meaning foreign observers, we welcome this process. We hope that a sincere, transparent census process will offer a great opportunity for ushering peace into this long-suffering nation.

We understand that the census process paves the way for better planning in development and peace. We are sure that the government, with the help of the international community, has launched into this ambitious project with the intention of building a prosperous and peaceful future for every citizen of Myanmar, especially the most vulnerable and those who dwell in the margins. We urge the government to ensure the following:

The process should be totally transparent, strictly following international standards and allowing local and international monitors to participate.

The census teams should comprise men and women from all cultures.

The process should affirm traditional cultures and traditional patterns of holding resources, and should also protect all cultural symbols and meaning systems.

No attempt should be made to change the demographic nature of any area, and steps should be taken to ensure that all areas traditionally identified as ethnic areas are not diluted into other demographic patterns.

No attempt should be made to change the three pillars of people's existence: identity, culture and resources. These three form the constitutive element of the ethos of the people, and any attempt, overt or covert, to change them should be resisted in the interests of durable peace.

Community assets form the soul of many communities. As such, forests, water and land are resources that can provoke conflicts. Sensitivity to

Myanmar is a country of migrants and displaced people. They are the sons and daughters of this land [but] efforts have been made to wipe out their memory.

local perceptions will pave the way for peace.

Myanmar is a country of migrants and displaced people. They are sons and daughters of this land. Efforts have been made to wipe out their memory and their possessions, but every effort must be made to enumerate the details of these people and ensure that they return to their original lands.

The documentation process needs to be robust, meeting international standards and ensuring that all documents are completed at the grassroots level, without any chance for manipulation at later stages beyond the control of the people who underwent the census process.

Myanmar's march toward peace and prosperity is an arduous journey. The government and the international community should ensure that major events like the census are confidence-building measures that instill a sense of belonging to the nation, where justice and fair play guarantee the rights of the most vulnerable communities. The census offers a golden opportunity for peace.

Any myopic attempt to circumvent this opportunity is a recipe for long years of mutual suspicion and conflict. I do hope that sagacity and a vision for peace and prosperity guide us all in this moment of truth.

Charles Bo is the Catholic Archbishop of Yangon.

Partying with

In Magwe Region, a riotous nat festival celebrates the patron spirit of gambling and drinking

SI THU LWIN

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THE front of the boat is adorned with a basket full of bottles of alcohol of various brands, the back is festooned with bouquets of flowers, and the distance between them is filled with young men wearing identical, brightly coloured costumes and paddling with all their strength. They're not going anywhere in particular – in fact, they're going in circles – but they lean into each stroke as if they're being judged.

In a way, they are. Music blares from loudspeakers set up on the shores of the mighty Chindwin, where a crowd of people have assembled to watch. But the young men on the boat aren't competing for sport; they're doing it for two occupants of the raft they are circling around three times. It's a tough audience. One is them is a statue – literally – while the other is a colourful flurry of distracted dancing, waving sheets of cash in one hand while drinking whisky from a bottle in the other.

Despite the contrast, to onlookers the still and the very-much-not-sober are one and the same. The figure is a spirit medium, or *nat kadow*, which wears the costume of the nat, or spirit, which the statue represents and enacts the movements which the statue cannot. As the medium dances, the raft bobs too, nodding up and down in time with the waves and the weight of its two mismatched passengers, until the statue seems to be moving in time to the *nat doe* as well.

For residents of Ku Ni village, which straddles the Chindwin River in Pakkoku township, Magwe Region, the Pakhan Ko Gyi Kyaw Nat Festival is a chance to pay respect to a native son. One of the 37 major nats in the traditional Myanmar cosmology, Ko Gyi Kyaw is thought to have been born in Pakhan Gyi, a Bagan-era city which is also notable for being the location of a so-called "Buddha footprint" – an ornately decorated image of an oversized footprint, containing 108 Pali inscriptions.

"There is nothing to worship except Buddha," one reveller, Mammy Noe Noe, said. "But we have always

worshipped spirits according to our beliefs. If you believe strongly in Ko Gyi Kyaw and worship him, you will undoubtedly benefit in return, with extraordinary occurrences happening to you."

Celebrated each year from every first to 15th day of the waxing of Ta-bounin the Myanmar lunar year – roughly equivalent to the first half of March in the Western calendar – the Pakhan Ko Gyi Kyaw Nat Festival is a boisterous tradition. Ko Gyi Kyaw was reputedly a carefree man, who enjoyed women, gambling and cock-fighting, and the festival is celebrated in the same wild way, with a quintessentially Myanmar mix of reverent tradition and wild abandon.

The raft dance happens on the third day of the festival, when crowds reverently carry the statue of Ko Gyi Kyaw on a litter from his shrine down to the river for a bath.

"The day of the ceremonial bath

'If you believe strongly in Ko Gyi Kyaw and worship him, you will undoubtedly benefit in return, with extraordinary occurrences happening to you'

Mammy Noe Noe
Festival reveller

is the happiest time for locals and it gives a lively image of Ku Ni village," said one resident, Ko Min Zaw, as he pointed toward the statue over which young men were continuously emptying bottles of whiskey as it passed. "Look at this – what fun!"

The statue is placed on a red sheet of cloth that has been rolled out on the raft, then bathed in the river before



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FEATURE

the native nat of Ku Ni village



A spirit medium dances to *nat doe*, or traditional nat music, to propitiate Phakan Ko Gyi Kyaw. Photo: Si Thu Lwin

being brought back to the shrine. But first the raft may also travel up and down the river for all to see, and this is when the *nat kadaw* dances most.

“This year the *kadaw* is very happy so he rode the royal raft five times upstream to downstream without stopping,” Mammy Noe Noe said, before he too began dancing in his formal

double-length longyi to propitiate the Ko Gyi Kyaw spirit.

The bathing is only one part of the two-week-long ceremony. The next day, festival-goers gild the statue with gold at the shrine. The day after that, worshippers and other spirit mediums dance to the sounds of the *nat doe* around the shrine to give pleas-

ure to Ko Gyi Kyaw. On the sixth day, villagers come from as far as Myaung township in hundreds of arch-roofed ox carts to join the festival. The eighth day is the most crowded, as it is a sabbath day, but the day after that is one of the most well-loved: the cock-fighting day, held in the nat’s cock-fighting shrine.

Other nats – Taungbyone Ko Min Gyi and Ko Min Law, each reincarnated from those who knew Ko Gyi Kyaw in life, and celebrated in their own festival at Taungbyone village north of Mandalay in August – are welcomed on the 11th waxing day. The nat’s mother is welcomed on the 13th and 14th waxing days. And then, on the 15th waxing day, the festival draws to a close, with food being offered to monks and other good deeds carried out.

While thousands of spirit believers from around the country come to participate in the festival, some say it’s about more than just fun, and that they’ve made their journey because they’ve been told in their dreams to come and construct pagodas or other religious buildings.

“I’ve built 236 Buddhist pagodas,” said Mal Taw Gyi Mya Nan New from Shan State. “Now I am building two pagodas in the religious area of the Inle hotel zone. I’ve come here for the first time because of a dream.” He said he didn’t go to other nat festivals but had already planned to return again next year.

With the numbers of visitors growing each year, some residents said officials should use the festival as a prompt to boost local services for the well-being of locals and visitors.

“This is a big festival. So I wish the visitors to be happy conveniently in the festival. There is a small medical office but there is lack of effective medical service for visitors,” said Ko Zin Min Tun from Pakkoku, adding that the road toward Ko Gyi Kyaw’s

shrine is muddy and in need of repair.

The festival does do wonders for the nearby economy. Along the road to Phakan, locals greet visitors with homemade snacks. And many residents, especially ox-cart drivers and boatmen, find themselves flush with cash due to the influx of visitors.

“We have rowed boats for the bathing ceremony for generations,” said Ko Zaw Naing from Pakhan Nge village. “I took pleasure in spending all my earnings that Ko Gyi Kyaw gave away to me today.”

Fundraising efforts, usually for repairs of religious buildings, also do well at this time. But it is a tradition to avoid celebrating other communal events at the same time as the festival is going on.

“No nearby village dares to hold a wedding ceremony during the festival because we believe that Ko Gyi Kyaw doesn’t like to hear tunes apart from *nat doe*,” said Ko Maung Kan from Phakan Nge village.

Musicians tighten their repertoire during the festival, turning down offers from troupes to accompany *anyient pwe*, or traditional comedy productions, at this time.

“We don’t dare to perform music in other celebrations,” said U Myat, a musician from Magway who has performed *nat doe* at the festival for the past 21 years.

“Musicians believe in this festival. Those who ignore the Ko Gyi Kaw festival will find their lives gradually becoming worse.”

– Translation by Zar Zar Soe



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U Mann Nyein Maung on Myanmar's peace process and the future of the KNU

The KNU Central Executive Committee member discusses the Tatmadaw, a federal army and the hope of finally achieving peace for his people

YE MON

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In Senior General Min Aung Hlaing speeches, he always calls ethnic armed groups "rebels". Do these words impact the peace process?

They [Tatmadaw] have been talking like this regularly for 60 years. Maybe their lips have become stuck on these words, and their thinking also. But what I would like to say is that after we agreed on a ceasefire with the government, KNU members have been honestly striving to end civil war and make peace.

The ceasefire process has lasted over two years now, and its benefit is that our Karen people are now living peacefully in our land. That is very good. We are trying to be fair in this situation, and we are also determined to achieve peace.

Are there differences among Karen armed forces concerning ceasefire policy?

There aren't many discrepancies between the three Karen armed forces concerning the ceasefire policy. The reason is that at the Law Khee Lar conference there have been equal opinions on signing the nationwide ceasefire agreement.

Is it true that the deputy commander of bridge No 5 has different opinions from headquarters concerning peace?

Yes. In an interview with the media, he said that he did not trust

the peacemaking program being carried out by U Aung Min and his colleagues.

But we do believe the government and therefore we are working for a ceasefire.

To us, U Aung Min is a leader representing the government, and he is also vice chair of the Union National Peace Working Committee, so he is taking responsibility. Our relationship with him is closely connected. He is cooperative, negotiable, positive-minded, trustworthy and kind.

Will you accept a federal army?

I imagine that this affair cannot be accepted by the state as well as the Tatmadaw for the time being.

Another thing is that there will be different opinions in separately ruling one's areas - that is, A is to rule A's territory while B is to rule B's territory. Territorial ruling authority will be solved slowly and will take much time. It depends upon how much one's reliability is built up, and how much one's compassion is shown.

In principle, the federal army is agreed upon. A federal union must have a federal army. But I think we have to take time to organise a federal army in our country.

There has been a lot of conflict for 30 years between the government and various ethnic groups. It can't be easy to re-organise like this today in a country that has had a civil war for more than 60 years.

There needs to be reliability across the process. It needs a political process. As for a reliable process, though, we can't even make a nationwide ceasefire now. We can't even sign an agreement. We haven't even held political dialogue and we haven't solved



U Mann Nyein Maung. Photo: Boothee

any political problem.

In a situation like this, I think that to organise a federal army is not a good model for the existing situation. It's a "bullets-in-arms" situation still, and the triggers can be pulled any time. A "bullets-out-and-solve" situation hasn't been reached yet.

Let us say we have three rifles each from the Karen, Kachin and other ethnic armed forces. Then what will be the outcome? I believe that if we organise a consolidated ethnic army today, another civil war

could break out. Therefore in principle it is accepted but practically it can't be done.

Can the government and ethnic armed groups sign a deal this year?

I don't think so, because many attempts are being made during the negotiation. I'm not included in negotiation groups, also known as the NCCT [Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Committee]. But when I ask them they reply that there are many things to be done and that they cannot go forward.

What is the reason for the KNU, an armed force, to negotiate with the government? Are you better off?

I think this is a characteristic of our Karen people. They are honest and accept matters with trust and sincerity. The commander-in-chief of the Tatmadaw told the KNU's leader that the KNU's soldiers are obedient and well-disciplined. He acknowledges this fact. This is the perspective and opinion of the highest-ranking leader who has been in conflict with us all the time.

What will it take to combine all Karen armed forces?

Regarding the consolidation of Karen armed forces, meetings have been held three times. At least they have agreed to avoid any armed conflict against one another, and are also trying to achieve unity in the future.

Are you satisfied with the activities of the Karen state government?

Looking at the performance of the state government, we find it satisfactory but not fully so. The reason is that I think Karen State should be under the administration of the Karen people.

What's the KNU's position on amending the constitution?

When it is time to amend the constitution, and if KNU is invited, the amendment will be from section 1 through to the last section. Article 435 is also to be amended. The 2008 Constitution was not written by all the ethnic groups. It is not on behalf of the whole people. It is not written according to the real situation. It has to be amended in many parts.

Thingyan Holiday

We would like to inform all readers that
The Myanmar Times office will be closed from
April 12 to April 21.

There will be no publications for the April 14 edition of
NOW!, the April 18 of **The Myanmar Times** in Myanmar
and the April 21 edition of **The Myanmar Times** in English.

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International groups slam proposed inter-faith marriage law

BILL O'TOOLE



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HUMAN Rights Watch and the watchdog group ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights both released statements last week warning that Myanmar should scrap its proposed restrictions on interfaith marriages, saying the “blatant discrimination” threatens religious freedom and women’s rights.

Muslims, Christians and men of other minority faiths could face up to a decade in prison for marrying Buddhist women under a law being considered by parliament.

President U Thein Sein last month asked parliament to consider proposed intermarriage restrictions, after a campaign spearheaded by a hardline monk.

“There is no place in the future of this region for such a restrictive and discriminatory law. It is extremely concerning that it has even been accepted for drafting by the House Speaker in the first place, especially given existing inter-faith tensions in the country,” said

Eva Kusuma Sundari, APHR president and Indonesian member of parliament.

“This law would only further divide communities. As ASEAN looks to move forward and progress toward a unified, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic community based on similar principles of freedom, justice and equality, we are looking to remove such prejudiced laws from the books in our countries, not pass new ones. On this particular issue, Myanmar is quite clearly moving in the opposite direction to that which we should be heading.”

‘It is shocking that Burma is considering enshrining blatant discrimination in the heart of Burmese family law.’

Brad Miller

Human Rights Watch Asia director

While it is normally rare for other ASEAN member-states to openly discuss or even criticise the human rights policies of their neighbors, APHR has consistently raised the issue of minority segregation and persecution in Myanmar, as well as other member states.

Human Rights Watch echoed many of the same sentiments in their own statement.

“It is shocking that Burma is considering enshrining blatant discrimination at the heart of Burmese family law,” said Human Rights Watch Asia director Brad Adams.

“This law would strip away from women their right to freely decide whom to marry, and would mark a major reversal for religious freedom and women’s rights in Burma,” he said in a statement.

In a letter to lawmakers, U Thein Sein said the proposed legislation was to give “protection” to Buddhists marrying people of other religions.

Full details of the draft law have not been published.

But HRW said a version it had seen would mean that Buddhist women would only be allowed to marry Buddhist men.

The watchdog said it would also require men to seek permission



President U Thein Sein speaks to parliament on March 26. Photo: AFP

in writing from a Buddhist bride’s parents before marriage, “seriously jeopardising women’s autonomous decision-making”.

Myanmar is thought to be around 89 percent Buddhist, with Christians and Muslims each making up around 4pc – although experts largely believe the true proportion of religious minorities could be higher.

“In ethnically and culturally diverse Burma, government leaders are playing with fire by even considering proposals that would further divide the country by restricting marriage on religious lines,” Mr Adams said.

Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has slammed the interfaith marriage proposals as “a violation of women’s rights and human rights”.

Myanmar has already faced criticism over a “two-child policy” in some areas targeting Rohingya Muslims.

– with AFP

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FEATURE

The end of the road

German traveller tours Myanmar in the final stage of his 25-year drive around the globe

ROSIE
newsroom@mmtimes.com

SINCE 1989, Gunther Holtorf has travelled around the world in a Mercedes-Benz. The same Mercedes-Benz – which, appropriately for a German automobile, is named Otto. Otto never had a breakdown, Mr Holtorf says, not in any of the 221 countries they have visited so far. And now, as Otto and Mr Holtorf come into the final stretch of their two-and-a-half-decade world tour, he's hoping it will keep on going strong right to the finish.

Mr Holtorf, 76, is a retired airline CEO who has also worked in the mapping business. In 1989 he and his wife Christine set out to tour Africa in their 1988 G-Class. At nights they set up a hammock between the car and a tree while rhinoceroses, hippopotamuses, samburs and bison passed by. Some bridges they came to were so old and unstable the couple had to repair them with hammer and nails before driving over.

What started out as a few months in Africa turned into five years – and then, stage by stage, country by country, continent by continent, into the trip of a lifetime. Afghanistan; the world's largest salt pan in Bolivia; a pioneer crossing of the Guyana jungle; a visit to displaced Karen women in northern Thailand they connected up the countries of the world one by

one, either shipping Otto in a container when they needed to start fresh somewhere else or putting the car in storage abroad until they could rejoin it.

But in all this time, Myanmar remained one of the few countries they was unable to visit. That is, until March 3, when Mr Holtorf arrived overland from Myawaddy, making the country his 221st destination.

"Since from the military government's time, I have tried to come to Myanmar but didn't get the visa for the car," said Mr Holtorf. "I waited to get the visa for the car about six years and now I got the visa for me and the car also."

The car is literally a mobile home for Mr Holtorf. With a mattress in the back he can sleep inside – everywhere except North Korea, which he visited in 2011, and Myanmar, which doesn't allow foreigners to sleep



A Padaung woman poses in Gunther Holtorf's SUV in Thailand. Photo: Supplied

221

Number of countries visited by
Gunther Holtorf in his
Mercedes-Benz SUV, Otto

outside of guesthouses. The car has covered more than 800,000 kilometres, the equivalent of circling the globe more than 20 times at the equator.

It has also seen some important changes, inside as well as out. While Mr Holtorf and Otto are still on the road, in 2010 Christine passed away from cancer, after nearly 21 years of travelling together. Before she died

she told him, "Even though I am not with you anymore in this trip, please continue to travel and complete the tour on my behalf."

"So, what I am doing now is keeping the promise which I have given to my wife," he said, "and finishing the tour on behalf of my wife."

He is now trying to bring the journey to a close by visiting the few countries he hasn't yet seen, including Myanmar.

"When I looked at the map, I had travelled to all the other countries in Asia. I couldn't leave out Myanmar," he said.

Since his wife passed away, Mr Holtorf has travelled with a son and a mutual friend. For Myanmar, however, he chose an old friend, businessman Dietmar Lillig, who was eager to visit the country and is considering investing here.

On March 3, Mr Holtorf, Mr Lillig and Otto crossed into Myanmar at the Myawaddy border crossing. Diethelm Travel Group, which helped arrange their permits and places to

stay, met them and drove alongside. They arrived in Yangon on March 6, marking the day with a visit to Shwedagon Pagoda.

"When we arrived in Myanmar, we felt the country was so pleasant," Mr Holtorf said. And in Yangon, he said, "We were impressed when we toured around the city's lake. We went to one restaurant on the 20th floor and when we looked around the city from above, the city was green with so many trees. It's so beautiful in your city."

Local Mercedes representatives also came to interview him and see Otto, which still has its original engine, but Mr Holtorf makes a point of refusing any kind of sponsorship. He checks over the car each morning and night himself. When travelling he prefers to buy his food from local markets and prepare it in his car.

From Yangon he said, the group was driving north over the next three weeks to see areas such as Bagan, Mandalay and Inle Lake. If possible they intended to visit Mt Victoria in southern Chin State also.

"In those three weeks we will do as much as possible," Mr Holtorf said.

They left Myanmar across the Myawaddy border on March 22. Mr Holtorf plans to do one or two more tours this year to finish up the few countries remaining on the list before finishing up in July or August. After that, he may write a book – in which he says he'll have good things to report about his time in Myanmar.

What about Otto? The world's most well-travelled car will be put in the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Germany, where it will be given a well-deserved rest.

'When I looked at the map, I had travelled to all the other countries in Asia. I couldn't leave out Myanmar.'

Gunther Holtorf
World traveller



Gunther Holtorf sits on his SUV Otto after crossing into the Arctic Circle in Alaska. Photo: Supplied



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Civilians targeted by Tatmadaw, rights group

BILL O'TOOLE
botoole12@gmail.com

IN a report on published on 24 March, The International Human Rights Clinic used a close study of conflict in Kayin State to highlight the ways in which policies at all levels of military command continue to lead soldiers to target civilian populations.

"We believe that the attacks described in our memorandum both past and present are the result of longstanding policies and practices," said Matthew Bugher, an Advocacy Fellow at The Clinic, a project supported by students and faculty of Harvard Law School.

The report was based on interviews with over 150 interviews with civilians, porters and even former soldiers in Kayin State. While the questions were specifically about the offensive carried out by the Tatmadaw in rebel-controlled areas from 2005-2008, the clinic said these incidents are indicative of a larger, institutional problem.

As Mr Bugher explained during a press conference in Yangon last week,

in Kayin and elsewhere, the military use a coloured system to classify combat areas, wherein "white" territories are those controlled by the military, "brown" areas are contested, and "black" areas are under control of the opposition.

Under the military's current rules of engagement, "soldiers are not required to distinguish between civilians and combatants in black areas," said Mr Bugher.

"The orders that are given in black areas result in the worst forms of abuse, and many of the things we documented, this includes shootings, shellings and executions, there are also other abuses that are facilitated by the black area designation, including sexual violence, forced labour."

The report goes on to recommend a "nuanced and sustained" program of reform, which includes rewarding officers for good behavior and civilian oversight being introduced into the military justice system.

Additionally, Mr Bugher pushed for the national government to ratify

protocol II of the Geneva Convention, which is meant to protect civilians in domestic conflicts.

Whether or not the military will respond to these suggestions remains to be seen. "We have not had any conversation with the military about this," said Mr Bugher. "In terms of government, we have not had engagement on the level we want ... It would be irresponsible to talk about the meetings we have had, but we haven't had the meetings that we want."

Nevertheless, Mr Bugher said the IHRC is committed to engaging with the military on this issue, and said he believes change must come from the soldiers themselves.

When asked about the United States' recent efforts to engage with the Tatmadaw, Mr Bugher declined to comment specifically, but did say, "We believe it would be irresponsible for domestic or international actors to treat training [troops] as a single solution ... unless these are tied to more fundamental reforms."

The President's Office could not be reached for comment.



Daw Aung San Suu Kyi speaks to writers in Pyin Oo Lwin on March 26. Photo: Si Thu Lwin

Novelists and poets criticise new Media Law

KYAW PHONE KYAW
newsroom@mmtimes.com.mm

WRITERS have expressed concerns with the country's new Media Law, saying that including poets and novelists under the same law as journalists will hamper freedom of expression and allow the government too much control over what writers can produce.

The law, enacted on March 14, includes in section 2(g) that poets and novelists will have to abide by the journalists' code of ethics laid out in the law. If not they risk being punished.

U Kyaw Min Swe, the secretary of the Interim Press Council, said the government was overstepping by treating works of literature and fiction like news articles.

"Novels and poems are written only with the imagination and called fiction. That's why no law is needed to be enacted for these works. Every story from the imagination is automatically free from action of laws," he said.

U Khin Zaw, lawyer and chair for the writers association of Mayangone

township, likened the law to punishing individuals who had only thought about committing a crime, but never acted on the idea.

"Suppose that I am thinking about committing a bank robbery and I'll become rich. I can't be sued for thinking about robbing a bank, because it is just in my imagination. Now, they are imposing laws on imaginations. I don't understand that."

U Pe Myint, writer and editor at the *People's Age* weekly journal, tried to look at the law in a positive light and said that writers being punished under the media law were at least not being subjected to punishment under harsher laws that are on the books.

"This law did not go as we had originally desired," he said.

"At first, we asked for the press to be as free as possible. But we cannot change it now that the hluttaw has passed it."

Poet Nyi Min Nyo was blunt in his criticism of the law, "We didn't accept the law before and we don't accept it now."

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Business

No.	Blocks/Area	Selected Candidates
Shallow Water Blocks		
1	A-4	BG Asia Pacific Pte. Ltd. + Woodside Energy (Myanmar) Pte. Ltd.
2	A-5	Chevron (Unocal Myanmar Offshore Co., Ltd.)
3	A-7	Woodside Energy (Myanmar) Pte. Ltd. + BG Asia Pacific Pte. Ltd.
4	M-4	Oil India Limited + Mercator Petroleum Limited + Oilmax Energy Pvt. Ltd.
5	M-7	ROC Oil Co., Ltd. + Tap Oil Ltd.
6	M-8	Bertanga Holding B.V
7	M-15	Transcontinental Group (TRG)
8	M-17	Reliance Industries Ltd.
9	M-18	Reliance Industries Ltd.
10	YEB	Oil India Limited + Mercator Petroleum Limited + Oilmax Energy Pvt. Ltd.
Deep Water Blocks		
11	AD-2	BG Exploration and Production Myanmar Limited + Woodside Energy (Myanmar) Pte. Ltd.
12	AD-3	Ophir Energy Pte.
13	AD-5	Woodside Energy (Myanmar) Pte. Ltd. + BG Asia Pacific Pte. Ltd.
14	AD-9	Shell Myanmar Energy (Pte) Ltd. + MOECO
15	AD-10	Statoil + Conocophillips
16	AD-11	Shell Myanmar Energy (Pte) Ltd. + MOECO
17	MD-2	Eni Myanmar B.V
18	MD-4	Eni Myanmar B.V
19	MD-5	Shell Myanmar Energy (Pte) Ltd. + MOECO
20	YWB	Total E & P Myanmar



Energy Planning Department Director General U Pe Zin Tun explains the offshore bidding announcement on March 26. Photo: Pyae Thet Phy

Shell, Total among winners, government



AUNG SHIN

THE Ministry of Energy on March 28 announced the winners of the highly anticipated tender to explore gas and oil in 20 offshore blocks, a list that includes several global firms including Royal Dutch Shell, US-based ConocoPhillips and France's Total.

The Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) invited tenders for 30 offshore blocks in April, attracting interest from a total of 75 international oil and gas firms, but after the ministry released a pre-qualified list of 61 companies last July, only 30 produced proposals.

The final list, which includes both shallow- and deep-water blocks, includes BG Asia Pacific Pte Ltd and Woodside Energy (Myanmar) Pte Ltd, who submitted joint proposals and won four blocks; Oil India Ltd and Mercator Petroleum Ltd and Oilmax Energy Pvt Ltd, who together won three blocks; and India's Reliance Industries Ltd and Italy's Eni Myanmar BV, who won two blocks a piece.

"It took time as we very seriously considered each selection in the bidding process as top international oil companies were in the running," deputy minister U Myint Zaw said during the announcement ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw. "We just wanted to make sure every step was transparent."

Among the list of those who submitted proposals but did not win tenders are Korea-based Daewoo International Corporation, US-based conglomerate Exxon Mobil, Thailand's PTT Public Company Limited, Petro Vietnam and Canada's Stetson Oil and Gas.



A man walks past oil tanks at a site operated by China National Petroleum Corporation at an

Under heavy international sanctions, Myanmar's oil and gas industry was predominantly run by Thai and Chinese firms, though such firms have since been removed from the larger oil blocks. As a part of the latest tenders, international firms must agree to joint ventures with a local partner, though those partnerships have yet to be revealed publicly.

"All the companies have mentioned their local partner in their proposals. They will have to work together with at

least a local partner," said U Pe Zin Tun, director general of Energy Planning Department (EPD) under the ministry.

The winners are also required to invest at least US\$3 billion after production-sharing contracts (PSC) are signed with the MOGE, after which the winners will get 30-year licences to explore and produce oil and gas offshore.

Once that is completed, they must conduct environmental and social impact assessments within six months, which are then submitted to



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Illegal timber trade hits US\$6 billion

BUSINESS 26



Economists call on gov't for privatization law

PROPERTY 30

Exchange Rates (March 28 close)		
Currency	Buying	Selling
Euro	K1315	K1333
Malaysia Ringitt	K292	K294
Singapore Dollar	K756	K766
Thai Baht	K29	K30
US Dollar	K960	K970

ffshore block t announces



offshore block of Madae Island near the town of Kyauk Pyu in Rakhine State. Photo: AFP

the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC), who will decide whether or not to approve exploration activities, U Pe Zin Tun said.

“We are going to have detailed discussions with winning candidates for production-sharing contracts. Hopefully the contracts will be signed within the next three months,” he said.

With the PSC’s approved, the MOGE stands to earn a total of US\$226.1 million in signing bonuses from the winning firms, the highest

such lump bonus in Myanmar’s recorded history, he said.

Seven international oil and gas companies are already operating exploration and production projects in 18 of a total of 51 offshore blocks.

Government revenues from the offshore oil and gas industry reached just \$1.5 billion in the 2013-14 financial year through February, according to government data, while industry experts peg annual revenues from the entire sector to be around \$4 billion.

Indian demand sends bean prices upward

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GROWING demand for locally produced beans from India has increased the price of some beans 11 percent over the past month, experts said.

U Myat Soe, central executive committee member of the Myanmar Pulses, Beans and Sesame Seeds Merchants’ Association, said that India is now taking more than 70 percent of Myanmar’s total production of beans amid fears that possible droughts through the rainy season could stunt production there.

“The demand from India is high and also the local demand is high, so bean prices are up,” he said, adding that India’s bean production has remained low.

Dr Myan Linn, a local bean exporter said he has benefitted from the increased demand as the price of green gram beans have grown 8.42pc

to K103,000 per tonne, while pigeon peas have grown 11.11pc to K620,000 per tonne.

“Matpe fair average quality beans also rose in price per tonne from K580,000 to K625,000,” he said, adding that demand is expected to continue to rise as the Thingyan water festival approaches.

U Min Ko Oo, a bean seller in Yangon said he has been able to sell his matpe beans for 32.97pc higher year on year at K625,000 per tonne.

According to Ministry of Commerce statistics, Myanmar earned about US\$912 million from exporting 1,419,756 tonnes of beans in 2012-2013, to India, Singapore, China, Vietnam and 46 other countries.

The most popular kinds were black matpe, green mung, toor whole and chickpeas. Most beans are grown in Bago, Yangon, Mandalay, Ayeyarwady and Sagaing regions from November to February.

Joint venture deals no easy task in Myanmar, say experts

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THE process of collecting monthly accounting data, creating clear business units and traceable asset ownership are lengthy and complex – and a must for joint venture deals with international partnerships, experts said at a KPMG business forum on March 25.

The forum, titled “Creating Positive Business Partnerships”, focused on how local Myanmar companies can look at restructuring accounts, company business units and operating systems to pave the way for joint ventures with international investors.

U Win Aung, chair of the UMFC-CI, said in his opening remarks that Myanmar was entering a “new era of economic development” and that the rapid progress in the country is “new Myanmar blooming into its full potential”.

“But,” U Win Aung said, “there is a recognition that Myanmar can become more competitive through international joint ventures with locally-based companies.”

Bangkok-based KPMG executive director Ian Thornhill addressed the forum on common international investor concerns they had managed in Myanmar joint ventures.

These concerns pertained to accounting practices, asset management and legal obligations.

One of the challenges was the desire of international investors to review monthly accounting reports of a potential local joint venture partner, Mr Thornhill said.



Ian Thornhill, advisory executive director at KPMG Thailand, addresses a business partnership forum in Yangon on March 25. Photo: Supplied

“Statutory requirements are to submit an audited balance sheet of profit and loss every year, but even if those sets of accounts are 100-percent accurate and perfect, what happens if the joint venture partner wants to do a deal in November or December. That information is already six months out of date,” he said.

“The international investor likes to see monthly data so they can see trends and seasonality within the business,” he said, adding the water festival was a good example of seasonal impacts on a business’s profitability.

U Kyaw Soe Han, director at Shwe Taung Group and a member panellist of the forum, said that while the prospect

of restructuring accounting practices and opening a company’s books to the inspection of potential foreign investors, the undertaking had long-term benefits for Myanmar companies.

“By opening our bookies it means that we are very much open for the verification and clarification,” U Kyaw So Han said. “Pretty much if we are going for a joint venture and looking to go on the stock market, we have to be transparent.”

Mr Thornhill agreed with this approach and stressed the benefits of preparing in advance for possible by joint venture deals by “zeroing out uncertainties and restructuring accounting practices” along international standards.

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Myanmar teak logs are transported for export to China in 2013 at the Nong Dao check point, near Ruili along the north-west Myanmar-China border. Photo: Supplied

Timber trade reeks of corruption



BILL O'TOOLE **BRIDGET DI CERTO**

NEARLY three-quarters of Myanmar's timber trade is illegal, according to government figures analysed by the Environmental Investigation Agency [EIA] and released in a report on March 26, only days before the country-wide ban on log exporting came into effect.

Contrary to the official government line that timber smuggling is only endemic in rebel-held zones, the EIA report said that at least 20 percent of this illegal trade is occurring in government-controlled areas.

Official export figures from the Ministry of Environmental Conserva-

tion and Forestry for 2000-13 account for only 28pc of all recorded international trade in Myanmar logs - suggesting that 72pc of log shipments were illicit, the group said in its report.

The value of the illegal trade was estimated to be US\$6 billion, or four times the 2013-2014 national budgets for education and health combined, the EIA said.

"The Government's official data on forestry and timber exports reveals endemic illegal logging and timber smuggling - crimes only possible through institutional corruption on a huge scale," EIA forest campaign leader Faith Doherty said in a statement accompanying the report.

From April 1, the government will impose a ban on exports of raw Myanmar timber. The move is part of an effort to reform the country's lucrative timber industry. Currently all raw

72%

Timber exported over the past 13 years now claimed to have been done illegally

timber must be exported through the Myanma Timber Enterprise, a government commercial arm with a monopoly in the sector.

But experts say the ban will do little to stem widespread corruption in the sector.

"There appears to be very good intentions and political will for [the Myanmar government] to fully implement the log export ban," Kevin Woods, a

Yangon-based Transnational Institute researcher, told *The Myanmar Times*.

"However, given the level of corruption and the porous national borders, it will be very difficult to fully clamp down on the export of logs."

Ms Doherty agreed.

"By proposing a log export ban from April 1, 2014, the Government of Myanmar is acknowledging that vast amounts of the country's forests raw material in the form of logs have been looted and sold at less value than they are worth. The log export ban in itself is just not enough. More needs to be done," she said in the EIA statement.

"The clear concerns is that, regardless of wider political reforms, opaque and unaccountable forest resource allocations mean Myanmar still continues to hemorrhage valuable natural resources for the benefit of a small elite," the report said.

The rate of this "systematic looting" was almost that of one tree in two being lopped for illegal export.

Officials from the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry could not be reached for comment.

U Win Myo Thu, co-founder and manager of the environmental NGO Ecocodev, said that, alongside of the export ban, the government was collaborating with the European Union to implement a "Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade" program with pilot programs to launch in Kachin, Sagaing and Tanintharyi later this year.

"Solving the problem means ... co-ordination between all stakeholders," U Win Myo Thu said. "It's difficult unless you have a strong political will [and] political mechanisms to tackle the issue. Any area where this system is weak will lead to more logging."

British Intl School set to open in Yangon

British curriculum will provide alternative to US international schools

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A NEW international school, teaching to UK standards, will open its doors to students in August, the British School Foundation (BSF) announced last week.

The British International School, located on Yangon-Insein Road near Inya Lake, will accept 100 to 150 students in its first year and is aimed primarily at the children of the large number of expatriates who have recently entered the country as it pursues its political and economic reforms.

"For multi-national corporations, the shortage of high-quality international schools is already proving to be an important barrier to their investment in Myanmar. Some

multi-national corporations that have already made commitments to invest in Myanmar are struggling to fulfil these commitments, as they are unable to attract expatriate employees to build their business in Myanmar," said school director Ola Natvig. The school will follow the English national curriculum.

"The school will cater both to the expat community and to local residents seeking an international education for their children. The school has already received significant interest both from expat and local families," she said.

All BSF schools are registered with the UK Department for Education, are members of their regional British international school association, and are accredited examination centres with the Cambridge and Edexcel Boards, she said.



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New shipping rules with Thailand to ease trading

Eliminating cargo transfers will save money and time, say experts

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IN a step toward facilitating regional trade and cutting down on lengthy and expensive logistical processes, shipping firms have come up with a plan to allow goods containers crossing posts on the Thai border to continue through to their destination without having to be emptied and repacked onto domestic vessels, officials said.

“From the end of April, container goods should be able to pass through Myawaddy without being transferred to a Thai container,” said U Aung Khin Myint, chair of Myanmar International Freight Forwarders’ Association (MIFFA), adding that the plan had to go through both governments first but has been well received thus far.

The arrangement will would reduce transportation costs and speed up trade, he said, adding that the agreement with Thailand was the first step toward extending the arrangement to other countries, he said.

The agreement comes following conversations between several Myanmar associations, the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, customs brokers and the Thai Chamber of Commerce as well as the Thai International Freight Forwarders’ Association.

The plan may be extended to posts on the borders of other neighbouring countries, U Aung Khin Myint said.

‘From the end of April, container goods should be able to pass through Myawaddy without being transferred to a Thai container.’

U Aung Khin Myint
Myanmar International Freight Forwarders

“This plan not only speeds up trade between the two countries, but also influences transit trade with other regional countries. This is a must for the AEC, which will start in 2015,” said U Hnin Oo, vice chair of the Myanmar Fisheries Federation (MFF).

U Than Aung Kyaw, director of the Ministry of Commerce’s trade directorate department, said that his ministry would welcome any changes that make logistics easier and more efficient.

“Once they’ve got a licence, the traders can bring their goods in any way they want. If the Thai authorities agree the containers don’t have to be changed, that’s fine with us.”

A high-ranking customs official, who is not permitted to speak with the media, said the facilitation agreement was in line with the requirements of the ASEAN Economic Community though there were still some issues to be resolved.

“My understanding is there are still many things to be discussed, including checking whether the goods in the containers are consistent with the licences granted,” he said. “But we know this plan has to be implemented in the near future.”

Illegal trade resulting in loss of billions of dollars, say officials



CONTINUED poor law enforcement at the borders and an overall lack of resolve in tackling illicit industries has resulted in rampant smuggling that could account for annual losses of up to half a trillion dollars, the equivalent of 20 times Myanmar’s estimated total trade volume, officials said.

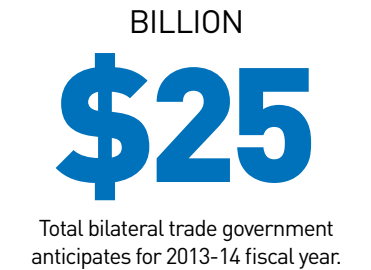
Despite recent efforts by the government to crack down on illegal trading, government officials and businesspeople claim that the country is unable to deal with chronic illicit activity at the borders as customs officials are in short supply and tend to falter to complex border practices and bribery.

“Border trade ways are unsafe and there are big problems with investigations [into illegal activity],” said U Ko Gyi, Union Solidarity and Development Party member for the Pyithu Hluttaw seat of Aung Myay Thar San in Mandalay, adding that corruption is so widespread that police officials aspire to a post with the customs department so

that they can collect on bribes. “I’ve heard a transfer to a border gate is like winning the lottery,” he said.

Though various goods, including alcohol and agricultural products, make their way in and out of the country illegally, the largest losses come from timber and gem exports, he said, adding that illegal trade revenues exceed formal trade 15 to 20 times over.

In conflict areas and at the major land trade areas, including the Myawaddy border in Kayin State and the Muse border shared with China, armed ethnic groups and gangs are known to negotiate bribes with customs officials on behalf of traders, he said.



“They guarantee traders will not have to pay taxes or undergo complicated export or import procedures,” U Ko Gyi said. “Most small and medium traders rely on them to get their products to the market cheaply.”

Ministry of Commerce deputy director U Soe Aung, who works at Muse trading zone, said that the bribes are costing the government trillions of kyat, as a trader might pay a K500,000 tax for a K3 million assessment, then bribe officers K200,000 each to wave trucks through the border without checking.

“Some government staff treat those traders hospitably. Corruption can be hard to reduce,” he said.

According to government data, Myanmar’s total annual trade revenue has grown some 30 percent, surpassing \$24 billion in the first 11 months of the 2013-14 financial year on its way to the \$25 billion government target for the year.

Still, investigators found that the gap between Thai and Myanmar trade figures at the Myawaddy-Mae Sot border was about \$1 billion a year, while the overall land trade between the two countries is officially \$400 million this year, said U Soe Aung.

“There is a billion-dollar gap at just one border post. Imagine how many

billions we’re losing every year,” he said, adding that no figures at all were available from posts on the borders with China and other countries.

At the Muse border meanwhile, raids by the Illegal Trade Prevention and Supervision Control Committee since November 2012 have seized another K5 billion in contraband.

With trade on the rise, the government has also attempted to reduce widespread smuggling by seizing billions of kyat worth of contraband motorcycles, telephones and jade since January, U Soe Aung said.

U Maung Maung Lay, deputy chair of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI), said corruption was hard to eradicate as the government currently does not have the means to provide training to officers nor has it secured the political stability essential to the resolution process.

“We have found that situation in other countries as well, but it’s worse in Myanmar,” he said.

“But it’s unlikely to change these practices immediately because they’ve been rooted here for so many years. The government needs the capacity to make good on its pledge of ‘good governance, clean government.’”



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PTTEP's gas project begins to show growth

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THAILAND-based PTT Public Company Limited (PTTEP) last week announced that its Zawtika project in the Gulf of Martaban has started producing natural gas and feeding into the domestic supply.

According to a release, state-owned PTTEP have been delivering 50 million standard cubic feet of natural gas per day (MMSCFD) since March 14 to Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise with the intention of doubling that amount come April in order to meet Myanmar's growing energy demand.

PTTEP's natural gas discovery in the Zawtika project, located in the M-9 and M-11 offshore blocks, occurred in 2007, starting production in this year.

Last year, Myanmar's natural gas demand was estimated to be 700 MMSCFD, with just 300 MMSCFD supplied, though the Ministry of Energy expect that figure to grow to 425 MMSCFD this year.

Earlier this month, PTTEP pledged to spend US\$3.3 billion over the next five years to develop gas projects throughout Myanmar, including on the Zawtika project.

New Pepsi bottling plant opens

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PEPSI-CO and LOTTE-MGS Beverage Co announced last week that for the first time since 1997, Pepsi is being produced and bottled inside Myanmar. According to a joint-statement, the newly opened factory is only the first of many the soft-drink giant plans to open in the near future.

While the group's factory is only producing bottled Pepsi at the moment, plans are in motion to produce aluminum cans in the coming months. A joint-statement released by the two companies describes the plant as "a key pillar in each company's long-term commitment to the consumers, customers and communities of Myanmar".

35%

Pepsi's global revenue that comes from emerging markets

"Pepsi-Cola is one of the world's most beloved consumer brands and we're delighted to be manufacturing it right here in Myanmar. We are deeply committed to Myanmar and are investing to build a world-class manufacturing and distribution system to support the future expansion of our business" said Byoung Tak Hur, managing director of LOTTE-MGS.

According to a statement released by the company, "PepsiCo continues to expand its business in developing and emerging markets around the world, which in 2013 accounted for 35 percent of the company's global net revenue."

BUSINESS PROFILE

India's TATA International making a splash in agro-trading and construction sectors

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BULLISH. That is how TATA International country manager Sunil Seth describes his attitude to doing business in what can often be seen as a challenging environment.

A business optimist, Mr Seth has been with the India-based global conglomerate for 30 years.

"In India it is an inspirational company to work for," he said from the Myanmar headquarters in Hlaing Township. "When I graduated from [mechanical] engineering I was recruited on campus."

Later, Mr Seth would go on to complete his MBA in France and spend time in Singapore, then-Czechoslovakia, and more recently five years in Thailand before making the move to Myanmar.

"Trading options and investment options for the whole group was the objective of starting the operation," Mr Seth said.

Since operations began on January 2013, Mr Seth has cultivated a new agro-trading vehicle for TATA that sees a concentration on beans and pulses from the



Sunil Seth. Photo: Zarni Phyo

Mandalay and Magwe regions being exported to India.

The venture was received with such high demand that, at the suggestion of the government, Mr Seth formed and now presides over the Overseas Agro Traders Association of Myanmar.

"This is an agricultural dominated country: Nearly 42 to 43 percent of GDP is contributed by agro and we knew that this was a good place for pulse sourcing and supplying to India," he said.

In addition to TATA's new agro interests the company is seeking to expand its construction investment, particularly in steel, concrete and power, including solar power - but a lack of regulations and building specifications mean the market is flooded with sub-standard building material and even products fraudulently branded as TATA, Mr Seth said.

"TATA has a very good name here, so people want that brand," he said. "But we have seen that

there is actually a lot of spurious TATA panels, which are coming in from other countries and we are quite concerned about that.

"We plan to educate the people and tell them what to look for in a genuine TATA product."

Mr Seth stressed the importance of more stringent building laws coupled with an education campaign so that consumers understand the importance of high-quality building materials.

"You can pay a low price, but at the end of the day it is a safety factor if you are only getting low quality steel. If you are engaged in a project ... use good stuff," he said.

"We need the right specifications in Myanmar so people understand what good quality steel is. I am very passionate about this because I worked for 30 years in the steel industry."

The problem is not unsolvable, Mr Seth said, but will take time.

"There is this whole issue of capacity building, which also takes time. And what is important is for the leadership to prioritise and say: look, these are the four, five things only which I will do and I will do them well, follow through and implement them."

CSOs sound alarm over EU investment treaty

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A "ONE-WAY street" is how 78 Myanmar civil society organisations have condemned the ongoing negotiations for an EU investor protection treaty that would provide scope for investor-state international arbitration.

The group of CSOs published the open letter to the European Union trade minister on March 21, alleging that the investor-state dispute settlement system being negotiated will favour the interests of investors over the interests of the nation.

"[Investor-state-disputes are] a one way system. It only gives foreign investors the options to sue at these private courts. Communities or governments cannot sue investors when their environment or human rights are violated at the same private courts," the letter read.

"Such a treaty might highly limit

future policy making in the public interest. It could also lead to the Myanmar government shying away from the planned policy if this might result in a claim by an investor."

The Myanmar Times has previously reported on the ongoing investor protection treaty negotiations between the Myanmar government and the EU, which has recently normalised trade relations and granted the country preferential status on the

78

Civil society organisations condemning the ongoing negotiations for an EU investor protection treaty

EU bloc's Generalised System of Preferences - a move paving the way for increasing EU trade and investment.

However, the preferred investor-state dispute settlement process of international arbitration commonly carries a multi-million-dollar price tag.

"The awards and the legal fees have to be covered by public budgets and often constitute a substantial part of the annual health or education budget of a developing country. The biggest claim so far is from Chevron against Ecuador and is over 3 billion USD," the groups said in their letter.

The 78 CSOs fear international arbitration - an opaque, extra-judicial dispute resolution process - will jeopardise the rights of communities negatively impacted by investment to lobby government for positive policy change.

Ma Khon Ja, a coordinator with the Kachin Women's Peace network,

one of the 78 signatories, said such concerns were especially pressing in Kachin State, where large-scale industrial projects have fuelled conflict.

Speaking to The Myanmar Times, Ma Khon Ja said reforming business and land tenure laws will be a key aspect of the peace process in Kachin, and that the EU investor protection treaty could halt that very important policy development work.

Myanmar is already a signatory to several regional pacts providing for investor-state dispute settlements. Investor-state disputes usually arise in the context of a government changing a policy that impacts the business of the investor in the country. Disputes are settled in international arbitration arenas where an arbitrator or arbitrator panel helps the parties debate their dispute and hands down an award that usually centres on monetary compensation.

BEIJING

Credit ratings need 'Chinese wisdom'

THE man behind Beijing-based credit ratings agency Dagong says "Chinese wisdom" will help it take on mighty Western names that failed by not predicting the global financial crisis.

"I think if you look at the entire picture of the international credit ratings sector, a lot of credit rating agencies have been influenced by the way of thinking of the Western ratings agencies," said the firm's chairperson Guan Jianzhong.

"So this is something that we need to change," he told AFP after making a presentation to Chinese and foreign media outlining the firm's "Guiding Principles of Credit Rating", in which he said Dagong wants to offer the world "Chinese wisdom" on ratings.

However, while Mr Guan is quick to promote his agency's superiority, he has had to bat away accusations it is anti-Western while pandering to Beijing and overlooking serious problems in China's

economy.

Dagong - founded 20 years ago - remains far less prominent than its long-established Western competitors, though it has begun making a splash in international media.

It hit the headlines in August 2011 when it cut its main rating for US sovereign debt from A+ to A, with a negative outlook, after a standoff over Washington's debt ceiling that led to fears of a potentially globally destabilising US default. Dagong - which can be translated as akin to "great fairness" - struck again in October, whittling the US sovereign credit rating to A- after another debt deadlock saw a two-week government shutdown.

Dagong's downgrades have come under suspicion as reflecting official concerns of China's government, the largest foreign holder of US Treasury debt that makes up part of the world's biggest foreign exchange reserves. - AFP



President Guan Jianzhong of Dagong Global Credit Rating delivers a speech at a press conference in Beijing in 2012. The man behind Beijing-based credit ratings agency Dagong says "Chinese wisdom" will help it take on mighty Western names that failed by not predicting the global financial crisis. Photo: AFP



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Yangon

The British Embassy in Rangoon is currently looking to recruit a highly motivated and energetic individual for the 6 month temporary position of **Corporate Services Officer Finance**.

For more information and details on how to apply please visit the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/british-embassy-rangoon/about/recruitment>

Dead line for submission of applications will be on **6 April 2014**.



British Embassy
Yangon

The British Embassy in Rangoon is currently looking to recruit a highly motivated and energetic individual for the 6 month temporary position of **Corporate Services Generalist and Import/Export**.

For more information and details on how to apply please visit the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/british-embassy-rangoon/about/recruitment>

Dead line for submission of applications will be on **6 April 2014**.



Chemonics International, a leading international development consulting firm, seeks qualified candidates for the anticipated USAID-funded Burma Accountability to All (A2A) project. The A2A program will support a broad range of civil society and media actors as they engage with each other, the people of Myanmar, and their government, in order to strengthen and deepen the democratic reforms. We are looking to fill the following positions. Unless otherwise noted, all positions will be Yangon-based.

- Chief of Party
- Deputy Chief of Party (Mandalay-based)
- Disabilities and Inclusive Development Advisor
- Civil Society Specialists
- Digital Media Specialist
- Organizational Development Specialist
- Training Coordinators
- Grants Manager

Application Instructions: Please send electronic submissions to ChemonicsA2ARecruit@gmail.com. Please include an updated CV and note the job title in the email subject line. Applications will be evaluated on a rolling basis. Applicants are encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Finalists will be contacted. No telephone inquiries, please.

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your **vacancy** here!

email us:

ads.myanmarimes@gmail.com

chantha.mcm@gmail.com



AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY YANGON

The Australian Embassy in Yangon is a medium sized diplomatic agency representing the Australian Government in Myanmar. It is staffed by employees of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Federal Police, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, the Australian Trade Commission and the Department of Defence. The Australian Embassy is seeking applications for the following position:

Expatriate Office Manager, Visa and Immigration Office

SALARY RANGE: USD 2,500 TO USD 3,000 PER MONTH

The position works closely with other senior DIBP staff in Bangkok and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Yangon.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) Office Manager position in Yangon reports to the Chief Migration Officer in Bangkok. The position is responsible for managing the day to day operations of the Visa and Immigration Office at the Australian Embassy in Yangon in a way that best achieves the goals and objectives of DIBP and the Embassy.

The successful applicant will have an excellent opportunity to work with an established organisation offering the opportunity to progress their skills and work experience.

QUALIFICATION AND EXPERIENCE:

The appointee will have the following qualifications and experience:

- Must be citizens of Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Canada or the United States of America and be entitled to work as a locally engaged staff member at a diplomatic mission in Myanmar.
- Demonstrated ability to be flexible and prioritise workload under limited supervision, in order to meet deadlines, in a team environment where there may be competing priorities.
- High level interpersonal skills and strong personal qualities including a demonstrated high standard of integrity.
- Must have initiative and the ability to handle conflicting priorities in a busy office environment.
- Excellent communication and liaison skills.
- Good knowledge of modern office procedures, practices, methods and equipment including use of standard computer software programs such as Microsoft Word and Excel.

The application form, selection criteria and duty statement can be obtained from the Australian Embassy, 88 Strand Road, or downloaded from the Embassy website at: <http://www.myanmar.embassy.gov.au> under "About Us/Job Vacancies".

Applications should be lodged at the Embassy or emailed to austembassy.yangon@dfat.gov.au together with a statement addressing the selection criteria and a copy of your CV with one recent passport sized photo.

The closing date: **4:00 pm on Monday 14 April 2014**.

Note:

1. The Australian Embassy does not discriminate in regards to race, ethnicity, gender and age.
2. Only those candidates whose qualifications and experience are of further interest will be contacted for an interview.
3. The successful applicant will be request to hold a visa allowing regular travel to and from Myanmar and to work in Myanmar.



The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) in Myanmar is inviting qualified candidates to apply for the following positions:

Sr.	Title and level	Duty Station	Position	Deadline
1.	Finance Officer- Capacity Building, Monitoring and Assurance (LICA-6)	Yangon	National	2 April 2014
2.	Senior Strategic Advisor – Rural Development (IICA-3)	Naypyitaw	International	4 April 2014
3.	Rural Development Specialist (LICA-7)	Naypyitaw	National	4 April 2014

The benefit package for the above positions includes an attractive remuneration, 30 days annual leave and 10 holidays per year, medical insurance (only for national positions), learning and development opportunities and a challenging work environment with 250 national and international colleagues.

All applications must be made through the UNOPS E-recruitment System. Please go to <https://gprs.unops.org> and click on the post that you are interested in applying for. If you do not have access to the internet, please contact UNOPS directly on the numbers below.

For any quires please do not hesitate to contact UNOPS at 95 1 657 281-7 Ext: 147

Property

BUSINESS EDITOR: Philip Heijmans | pheijsmans13@gmail.com

Privatisation law essential, say economists

Selling of public property and other assets has been plagued by unfair practices for years and experts believe that it is time for that to change



ZAW HTIKE

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PRESIDENT Thein Sein's chief economist, U Myint, is calling on the government to pass stringent privatisation laws amid concerns of continued cronyism and rent-seeking in the sale of government-owned property, services and other businesses.

U Myint, who was also senior economist to the United Nations, told reporters last week that until now the privatisation process of several entities has been carried out without a basis in law and could lead to serious repercussions for Myanmar as global entities increasingly look to do business here.

"There should be regulatory control of privatisation in the interests both of the public and the businesses concerned. Ensuring balance between the two needs

'Government ministries have the authority to manage state property as they please as there are no obvious rules or regulations.'

U Ko Ni
Political advocate



The former Yangon Region Office Complex on Strand Road is being developed into a hotel. Photo: Ko Taik

a strong law," he said, adding the parliament should make establishing a privatisation law a top priority.

"Otherwise, this could hurt the country's economy in the long term."

He said that transparency in such deals is one of the biggest issues in the sale of government entities as economic advisers in the government tend to know little about how much of the country's former assets have been privatised, while standard backdoor

dealings make it difficult to learn details.

"People are worrying that all the state-owned property went to cronies," he said, adding that he has continue to propose suggestions to fix the problem directly to President U Thein Sein, House Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann and National League for Democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

In order to deal with the issue, U Myint suggests that the entire process of selling government entities be made 100-percent transparent,

from the tender process all the way through the the transfer stage - this includes making available signed leases, concession paperwork, tender proposals and the various contracts and licenses that go into the sales process.

"In Myanmar, privatization is moving at a fast pace and a large number of state enterprises and assets have been sold or rented out to private individuals and firms," he said. "A lot more are going to follow, but information and data on what has been privatised, how

and why it was done, and outcomes both successes and failures are hard to come by."

The process of entrusting business to the individual is slowly reclaiming its place in Myanmar following more than 50 years of military rule, when private businesses were nationalised.

"Privatisation was not transparent then, nor is it now, and I think much of it was done as a form of rent-seeking," said U Hla Maung, an independent economist. "We need a better way. Nobody knows who is responsible for public property."

U Soe Tun, managing director of Wakhema Trading, which has competed for government tenders, told *The Myanmar Times* that potential investors are weary of such problems despite modest improvements to the government's tender process.

"There's more transparency in tenders than before, but there is still rent-seeking. It could be that rules and regulations for tendering were specially tailored to suit a person favoured by the tendering department. We need not only a regulatory framework, but also more honest people in charge of this issue."

Nevertheless, without rule or regulations in place, rampant corruption in the privatisation process is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

"Government ministries have the authority to manage state property as they please as there are no obvious rules or regulations," said political advocate U Ko Ni. "When the small claims court [Yangon Region Office Complex] building was sold off, nobody knew in advance. Now it has become a hotel. That was not proper or fair."



A luxury you can touch

This spacious luxury home, set in a large compound, is convenient for Ocean mall and Yangon airport. Set on a hilltop in Ma Soe Yein Street, 9 Mile, Mayangone township, the two-and-a-half-storey white house is fully furnished, with 12 air conditioners, three LCD TVs, refrigerators, Wi-Fi, land line and washing machine. It is fully renovated as new.

It also has a three-phase power meter, kennel, guard house and an underground water tank. Garage space is available for four cars.

- Myat Nyein Aye

Location : No 42 Ma Soe Yein Street, 9 Mile, Mayangone Tsp

Price : US\$6500 a month (negotiable)

Contact : Ko Aung Minn Tun (owner)

Phone : 09 5159194, 09 73156088

PHNOM PENH

Cambodia's Battambang sees boost in land prices on growing economic activity

LAND prices in Battambang, Cambodia, have increased this year, according to a local real estate firm.

Sorn Seap, general manager of Key Real Estate, said land prices in Battambang city, capital of the province of the same name, have increased by around 12 percent this year compared to the first half of last year.

"The increase in land prices in the town is due to people's improved incomes, and also the province's agricultural potential, which has been attracting investors," he said. "The province is close to the Thai border, which facilitates agricultural exports."

A study carried out by the company on land prices in Battambang divided the city into nine zones.

According to the study, land prices in Zone A, the city centre along National Roads 1, 2 and 3, Phsar Nath market, Boeung Chhok market and main road ranged from US\$1200 to \$1800 per square metre and from \$800 to \$1100 on the sub-roads. In Zone B, from the Ta Dambang Kronhong roundabout, prices ranged from \$300 to \$700 along the main road and from \$150 to \$200 on the sub-roads.

In Zone C, Phsar Ler market, along the main road, prices ranged from \$200 to \$400 per square metre and from \$120 to \$400 on the sub-roads.

"I think that Battambang land prices

have potential. They currently rank number four, after Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville, but the economy ranks number two after Phnom Penh," Seap said.

With improved economic growth, many markets are popping up in Battambang province in places such as Psar Nath, Boeung Chhok, Borey Mall, Psar Ler, Psar Thmey, while a major shopping centre will open next month.

Preparations for integration with the ASEAN Economic Zone are another catalyst that is expected to boost Battambang land prices, as investors look to rice cultivation and milling in what is the Kingdom's rice bowl.

According to government statistics, Cambodia exported 378,000 tonnes of milled rice in 2013 compared to 205,000 tonnes in 2012.

- The Phnom Penh Post



The roads leading to central Battambang. Higher incomes and agricultural prospects are boosting land values. Photo: The Phnom Penh Post

“Information and data on what has been privatized, how and why it was done, and outcomes-both successes and failures- are hard to come by.” — U Myint, President Thein Sein’s chief economist

Nostalgia for Suharto ahead of elections
WORLD 37

JERUSALEM

Settlers prepare move into key site located in East Jerusalem

RADICAL Jewish settlers are readying to move into a major property in the commercial heart of annexed east Jerusalem, overlooking the walls of the Old City, officials have told AFP.

A large part of the property, which also houses east Jerusalem’s main post office and an Israeli police station, was purchased last year by a radical settler group called Ateret Cohanim, which bought it from Israel’s Bezeq telecoms company.

Located on the corner of Salah al-Din and Sultan Suleiman in the busy centre of east Jerusalem just outside the Old City walls, the property is currently being converted into a Jewish seminary, or yeshiva, an Israeli official and Palestinian workers told AFP.

Ateret Cohanim actively works to settle as many Jews as possible in densely populated Palestinian areas in and around the Old City.

The purchase was first reported in Israel’s *Haaretz* newspaper, which published part of an email in which Ateret Cohanim’s executive director Daniel Luria contacted supporters

to announce the acquisition of more than 10,760 square feet (1000 square metres) in “a very large and strategic building” just outside the Old City.

Speaking to AFP, an Israeli official confirmed the group had bought parts of the property and was currently carrying out renovations in order to have it ready for occupancy before the week-long Passover festival begins in mid-April.

“They are now renovating it for the yeshiva and for a school to prepare Orthodox Jews for military service,” he told AFP. “They are trying to set it all up before Passover on April 13.”

Contacted by AFP, a spokesman

‘We work day and night. It is almost ready.’
Anonymous worker

for Mr Bezeq refused to confirm who was behind the purchase.

“We will not disclose the identity of the buyers,” he said.

Mr Luria declined to speak to AFP.

The building is currently being renovated by Palestinian workers under the supervision of Israeli technicians and engineers.

“We work day and night. It is almost ready,” said one worker who refused to give his name. Local shopkeepers said they had been aware of the plan for several months.

“We found out four months ago from the workers that settlers had purchased the property and are turning it into a yeshiva,” said Adel al-Sharbati, who owns a nearby mobile phone shop and spoke of a sense of powerlessness.

“They’re the strong ones here – who should we complain to?” he told AFP, saying it was likely to raise tensions in the area.

“The whole area will be affected negatively once they’re here,” he added.

– AFP



IN PICTURES A boat sails as the sun rises over a hotel building under construction in Phnom Penh on March 28. *Photo: AFP*



Unfinished units of the Bo Ba Htoo low-low housing project in North Dagon township last week. *Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing*

Bids for Yangon low-cost apartments reach 14,000

MYAT NYEIN AYE
myatnyeina11092@gmail.com

THE number of applicants of two large-scale, low-cost housing projects in North Dagon township reached more than 14,000 last week as the government prepares to announce the winners of nearly 1250 units, officials said.

The applicants are competing for apartments in the government subsidised Bo Min Yaung and the 114-acre Bo Ba Htoo housing projects, for which the application deadline has concluded for the first, while proposals for the latter must be submitted by March 31.

Though about 14,000 people applied for the 448 apartments of Bo Min Yaung, just 310 had applied for the 800 homes in the Bo Ba Htoo complex as of last week.

Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) deputy director of building engineering U Nay Win has told *The Myanmar Times* that unsuccessful applicants for Bo Min Yaung will automatically be considered for Bo Ba Htoo and need not reapply.

Altogether, YCDC plans to build a total of five affordable homes complexes, including those in Pin Lone, Ayeyarwon housing in Dagon Seikan and another estate at the University in East Dagon, he said. Work at Bo Ba Htoo is already some 20 percent complete, and is scheduled for completion in December.

“We will try to provide affordably

priced housing in Yangon as fast as we can to help people who need to live in Yangon. We’re inviting tenders for construction very soon,” U Nay Win said.

YCDC worked with Myanmar V-Pile Company in the construction of Bo Ba Htoo housing, said Ma Mya Sandar, who manages the 114-acre project.

“Foundations are complete and we’re up to the third floor in three of the buildings,” she said.

Bo Min Yaung apartments have 160 apartments at 961.5 sq ft (86 sq m), and 640 flats at 618 sq ft (56 sq m), pricing out at K37.4 million and K25.5 million respectively.

If successful, applicants retain the option of paying off the cost in three installments of 30pc and will receive a residential permit from YCDC after the final payment of 10pc once the building is complete.

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“Insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, and preparations for killing weeds and destroying vermin.” Class: 5

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for **SUMITOMO CHEMICAL COMPANY, LIMITED**
P.O. Box No. 26, Yangon.
Phone: 372416 Dated: 31st March, 2014

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Any fraudulent imitation or unauthorized use of the said trademark or other infringements whatsoever will be dealt with according with according to law.

U Kyi Win Associates
For **SUMITOMO CHEMICAL COMPANY, LIMITED**
P.O.Box No. 26, Yangon
Phone: 372416 Dated: 31st March, 2014

SEOUL

Hyundai to build fourth China plant

SOUTH Korea's largest carmaker Hyundai Motor said March 24 it will sign a preliminary agreement to build a fourth plant in China, as it looks to expand in the world's biggest car market.

Chairman Chung Mong-Koo will put his name to the deal, Hyundai said in a statement.

With an annual production capacity of 300,000 cars, the plant in the southwestern mega-city of Chongqing is scheduled for completion in 2016 and will mark a "new leap forward" in the country, Hyundai added.

The firm already has three car plants on the outskirts of Beijing that currently produce a combined 1.05 million units per year, as well as a commercial vehicle plant in Sichuan Province with an annual capacity of 160,000.

Hyundai's sister company Kia Motors has three plants in Jiangsu Province that can produce a total of 740,000 units a year.

"The construction of new plants is essential for Hyundai-Kia Motor Group to keep up with its current market share of near 10 percent in China," the statement said.

Chongqing has a population of 30 million and its economic output surged 12.3 percent in 2013. — AFP

WASHINGTON

US housing prices rise, but slowly

US housing prices rose in January, but at a slower pace than in previous months, the S&P/Case-Shiller index showed last week.

The index of prices across 20 leading metropolitan areas gained 0.8 percent in January from December, on a seasonally adjusted basis.

On an adjusted basis, all 20 areas showed gains.

However, without adjusting for seasonality, prices were down 0.1pc, the third straight monthly fall, suggesting that rising mortgage rates and harsh winter weather may have slowed buying.

13.2%

Increase in US house prices over the past year

On a non-adjusted basis, 12 of the 20 cities showed falling prices between December and January.

"The housing recovery may have taken a breather due to the cold weather," said index head David Blitzer in a statement.

"Twelve cities reported declining prices in January versus December; eight of those were worse than the month before."

Year-on-year prices were up 13.2pc, lower than the 13.4pc 12-month pace registered the previous month.

Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics suggested that the adjusted numbers were deceptive and that the non-adjusted figures better represented the trend.

— AFP



IN PICTURES

A man walks along train tracks behind a housing project in Yangon. Photo: AFP

FEATURE

African tycoon draws Nigeria, France into Senegal 'cement war'

ITS shimmering azure chimney stacks towering into the sky, the latest cement works launched by Africa's richest man lies idle in a Senegalese meadow – stopped in its tracks by legal action and cut-throat competition in a rapidly growing industry.

Nigerian industrialist Aliko Dangote's cement business has been flourishing elsewhere in Africa and the Senegalese project, first conceived four years ago, was due to start production in June.

But the west African nation's government is being taken to a regional arbitration court in Ivory Coast by French manufacturer Vicat, which claims that the plant represents a "distortion of competition" in a country where the market

is west Africa according to *Forbes* magazine, which describes Mr Dangote variously as "the richest black person in the world" or "Africa's richest man", with a personal fortune of US\$25 billion.

He has been expanding his empire outside of Nigeria in recent years – Dangote Cement now has operations in 15 African countries – but the Senegal project and the court case aiming to stop it may come to represent a frustrating inability to leverage his influence across the entire continent.

"A cement plant is dangerous. You need permits, prior authorisation and you also have to conduct an environmental impact study. That hasn't been done," Camara told AFP.

'A cement plant is dangerous, you need permits, prior authorisation and you also have to conduct an environmental impact study. That hasn't been done.'

Boubacar Camara
President of Sococim

is already saturated.

"This is the first time in the history of Senegal that we have seen a plant built in violation of all the rules," said Boubacar Camara, president of Sococim, a Senegalese subsidiary of Vicat.

Dangote, 56, made his first fortune in Nigeria more than three decades ago when he started trading commodities with a loan from his uncle.

His cement business is the jewel in the crown of the Dangote Group, the largest industrial conglomerate

The water-cooling technology involved in the \$630 million plant would require a daily withdrawal of 159,000 cubic feet (4500 cubic metres) of groundwater, a precious commodity in an arid Sahelian country like Senegal, according to Mr Camara.

"It's a race against the clock. Once production begins, it will be much more difficult to intervene," Camara said.

"Given the conditions in which he has installed his plant, Dangote could come and set whatever prices

he likes."

Mr Dangote has said the operation would create 4000 jobs and, in any case, the state has no power to oppose it, a source close to the Senegalese Ministry of Mines told AFP.

"Initially, there were certain procedural irregularities that Dangote fixed," said the source, adding that "the main problem was the environmental impact".

French President Francois Holland wrote to his Senegalese counterpart Macky Sall in January about the plant "in order to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by Sococim", according to a source in the Senegalese presidency.

Mr Sall responded to the effect that "the rule of law and the Senegalese courts" would must be allowed to decide whether the project could go ahead, the source told AFP.

It is not the first time that the controversial project has run into problems.

Senegalese courts ruled during construction that it encroached on a sacred forest owned by the descendants of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, a Sufi Muslim mystic and religious leader who was revered by millions of Senegalese.

Construction was only allowed to recommence when Mr Dangote offered the family a persuasive \$12.6 million in compensation.

Villagers in Galene, the tiny settlement on the doorstep of the cement works 30 miles (50 kilometres) from Dakar, say it has been installed on land once used by thousands of farmers and their animals.

"We fear that it is going to stop us growing and raising our animals," said Oumy Ba, the village chief.

Community leader Bougouma Thiongane said however that the project had been "welcomed with

open arms".

Galane and the surrounding villages have no electricity or tap water and Dangote promised to change that, while also raising employment prospects for every young person in the area, Mr Thiongane said.

The plant, one of the largest in Africa, will be ready to begin operating "within 90 days", Aramine Mbacke, the CEO of Dangote Senegal, told *Financial Afrik* magazine earlier this month.

It will produce 3 million tonnes of cement annually, three-fifths of which will go onto the local market, he said.

BILLION

\$25

Estimated net worth of Aliko Dangote, widely considered Africa's richest man

The operation is being launched amid increased competition between Sococim, which has a 65pc market share, and Ciments du Sahel, which makes up the rest.

"Both plants already have a combined capacity of 6 million tonnes for a market of two million tonnes. They produce below capacity. That explains the reason for this war," an official from the Ministry of Mines said.

"In the sub-region, everyone wants to make cement," he added.

The management of Dangote Senegal declined to comment. — AFP

Telenor becomes the first private company to connect out of Myanmar

NAOMI GINGOLD

ON March 8, a quiet revolution happened. The Norwegian telecommunications company Telenor became the first private company in Myanmar's history to establish an international internet link from the country.

Although many already expected the company to create such a link, the new Telenor connection is the first time that the government-baked Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications monopoly on the internet has been broken.

When reached for comment, Telenor responded by email saying, "We can confirm that we are leasing capacity out of Myanmar to run performance tests on our network and IT systems."

Although the company is working on its own international internet cables to increase capacity and stabilise the system, for the time being Telenor confirmed that they are leasing connectivity on Myanmar's only submarine cable SEA-ME-WE 3.

In a blog post last month, internet intelligence company Renesys classified Myanmar, along with countries like Syria, Ethiopia, and Yemen, "as being at severe risk of Internet disconnection, because of opacity of international Internet providers".

Doug Madory, its senior analyst, called Telenor's new small link "an important milestone in the development of the telecommunications sector in Myanmar and more broadly the opening up of the country".

Mr Madory went on to explain that Telenor is currently passing the "the smallest [amount] allowed for global routing". Although inadequate to support board mobile services in the country, Mr Madory said, "I would expect to see it grow in size in the coming months as they bring their new infrastructure online."

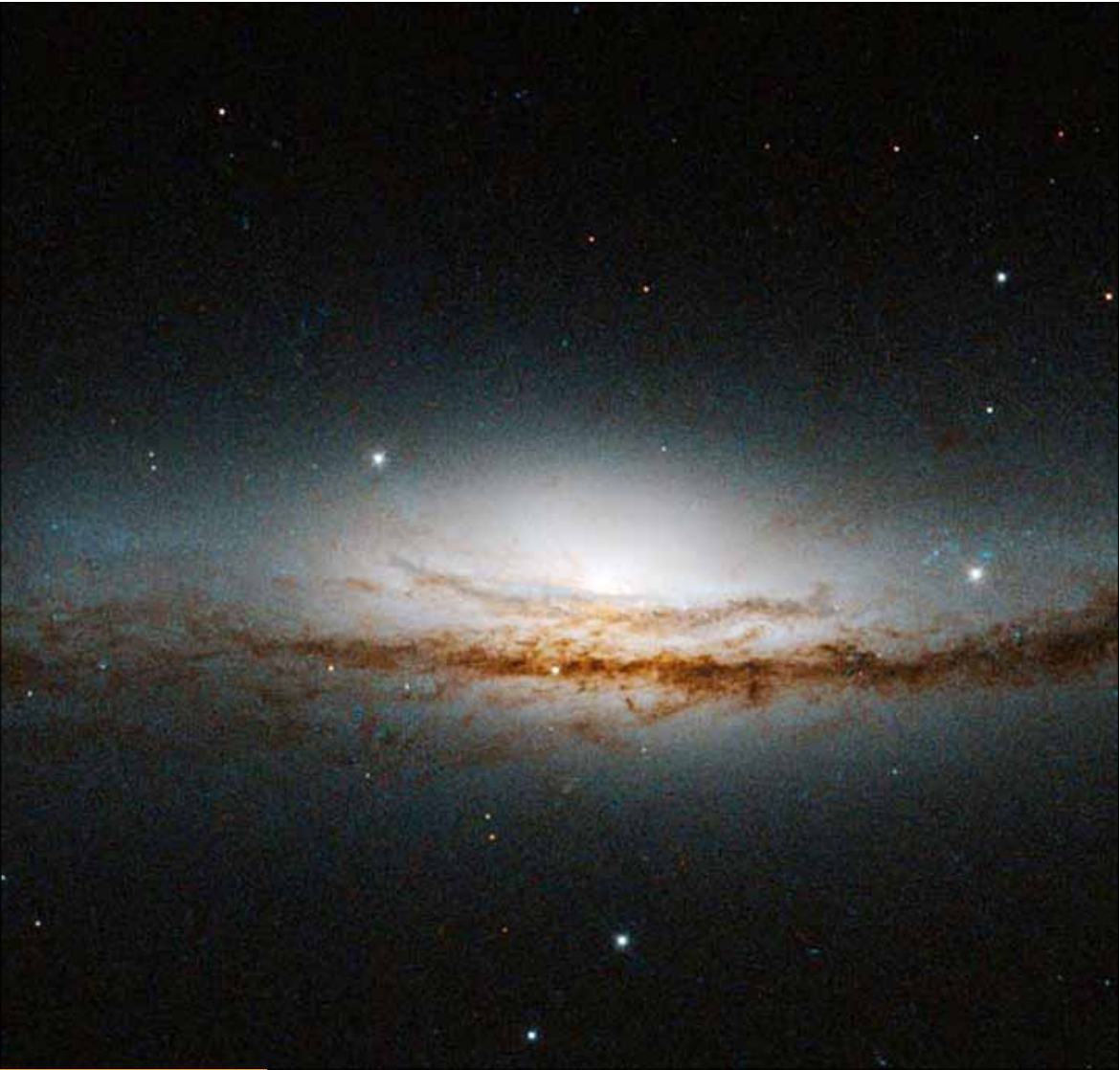
Last June Telenor became one of four companies awarded a highly sought-after licence to provide mobile internet service in the country; the other international company was

Ooredoo, a state-backed telecom from Qatar.

Two local companies also received licences: Yadanarpon Teleport, which Reuters reported as being in partnership talks with Thai Telecom True, as well as the incumbent Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (in collaboration with the military-backed Myanmar Economic Corporation) and another as-yet-unnamed international telecommunications company.

Both Ooredoo and Telenor have pledged to bring faster, more reliable service quickly to Myanmar, which currently only has an estimated 11-percent mobile penetration rate. But the companies have pushed their timetables for operation after numerous government delays, from the more than half a year it took to formally receive their licences to the still undefined regulations in the Telecommunications Law passed last October.

- Naomi Gingold is a freelance reporter based in SE Asia. Find her on Twitter @naomigingold.



IN PICTURES

A new Hubble image centred on NGC 5793, a spiral galaxy over 150 million light-years away in the constellation of Libra, shows this galaxy's two striking features: a dust lane and an intensely bright centre which is much brighter than that of our own galaxy or those of most spiral galaxies we observe. NGC 5793 is a Seyfert galaxy. These galaxies have incredibly luminous centers that are thought to be caused by hungry supermassive black holes — black holes that can be billions of times the size of the Sun — that pull in and devour gas and dust from their surroundings. *Photo: AFP*

Gadget Reviews

by Myo Satt



Belkin (FastFit keyboard case for iPad Mini)
This Bluetooth wireless keyboard case makes the iPad Mini perfect for doing work. Built-in Bluetooth version 3.0, and 7mm thick.
K9600



Belkin (Tunebase Hand-Free Aux)
Connecting to the lighter outlet in your car, it can charge your iPhone 5, 5S and 5C while you are driving. The device makes it easy and safe to use GPS on the road. Compatible with iPod Touch (5th generation).
K74,500



Belkin (MIXIT Charge Sync Dock)
This is useful for iPhone 5, 5S, 5C and iPod Touch (5th generation) as it serves as both a stand and a speaker. Available in many colours.
K53,000



Belkin (Sport-Fit Plus Armband)
Perfect for all you athletes out there; just strap it to your arm. Compatible with iPhone 5, 5S, 5C and iPod Touch (5th generation), and light and durable. It is designed for convenient use with earphones, and also has pouches for keys and cash.
K25,000



Belkin (Bluetooth Music Receiver)
A speaker that connects to all Bluetooth devices. You can control the volume from this device wherever you are in the room. Adapter and recharging cords included.
K47,000

Available: AiKON Apple Products Store & Services (Pansodan)
No. 262/C Pansodan (upper block), Kyauktada township
Phone: 01-249992, 01-385553

World

WORLD EDITOR: Fiona MacGregor

COLOMBO

Fury over UN war crimes inquiry

AN inquiry into alleged war crimes in Sri Lanka was launched by the UN Human Rights Council on March 27 in a move angrily rejected by Colombo as counter-productive.

In a 23-12 vote, the council backed a Western-sponsored resolution saying it was time for a "comprehensive investigation into alleged serious violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes by both parties in Sri Lanka".

Colombo has come under pressure over alleged war crimes committed in 2009 when it launched its final offensive to end one of Asia's deadliest civil wars.

The UN has said up to 40,000 Tamil civilians may have been killed during the last months of fighting against Tamil Tiger rebels and blamed many of the atrocities on government forces, a charge Colombo vehemently denies.

Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse, who has tightened his grip on power since crushing the rebels, said the UN probe would only do harm.

"We reject this," Mr Rajapakse told AFP in Sri Lanka. "This resolution only hurts our reconciliation efforts. It does not help."

Sri Lanka's UN ambassador Ravi-natha Aryasinha called the rights council's move a "serious breach of international law", telling the council it constituted "an infringement of state sovereignty and pre-judgement of the outcome of domestic processes".



Sri Lankan Foreign Minister GL Peiris attends a press conference in Hambantota on March 27. Photo: AFP

The proposal for a inquiry was put to a vote after failed attempts by Sri Lanka's supporters Russia, Cuba and Pakistan to use procedural grounds to block it.

And China's delegate called it an "example of the politicisation of human rights", saying Sri Lanka needed "time and space" to heal the wounds of the past.

But US Secretary of State John Kerry hailed the decision.

"Today's vote in the UN Human Rights Council sends a clear message: the time to pursue lasting peace and prosperity is now; justice and

accountability cannot wait," he said in a statement.

Amnesty International also welcomed it.

"The UN inquiry brings new hope for the thousands of victims of abuses in Sri Lanka," said David Griffiths, its Asia-Pacific deputy director.

"Now they have a fresh opportunity to restore some international credibility by cooperating with the investigation," he said.

Sri Lanka's critics also spotlight what they say are ongoing rights violations.

"The human rights situation in Sri Lanka continues to deteriorate, despite some areas of limited progress," US envoy Paula Schrieffer told the council.

She highlighted concerns over sexual violence, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture, violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and threats to judicial independence and the rule of law.

She also cited intimidation of and reprisals against human rights campaigners, lawyers and journalists, and attacks on minority groups, including Muslims, Christians and Hindus.

But Mr Aryasinha said such allegations were biased, and fueled by pro-Tiger activists around the world. The initial results of the probe are to be submitted to the council in September. - AFP



UNITED NATIONS

UN slams North Korean missile tests

THE UN Security Council has condemned North Korea's latest ballistic missile tests and agreed to quickly consult on an appropriate response.

"Security Council members condemn this launch as a violation of Security Council resolutions," Luxembourg's ambassador Sylvie Lucas, the council's rotating president, told reporters on March 27 after a closed-door debate of less than an hour.

The condemnation did not amount to a formal statement from the 15-member council. Instead Ms Lucas said members had requested that she read out the remarks as agreed by all participants.

"Members of the Security Council agree to consult on an appropriate response," she said.

In response to questions, she said panelists agreed this response "should

be given quickly".

The UN discussions, which included a report from the deputy secretary general for political affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, had been requested by the United States.

Pyongyang has carried out a series of rocket and short-range missile launches in recent weeks, sparking condemnation from Seoul and Washington.

On March 26, it upped the ante by test-firing two mid-range ballistic missiles capable of striking Japan.

The move came in response to President Barack Obama's hosting of a Japan-South Korea summit in The Hague.

The tests go against UN resolutions barring Pyongyang from any nuclear or ballistic activity.

Diplomats said the United States urged the council to condemn the

missile tests, calling for a swift and firm response.

Close allies Britain and France also demanded that the council react and send a clear warning to North Korea.

But China, a traditional ally of North Korea, was more prudent, arguing that reaction should be proportionate to Pyongyang's actions.

For Beijing, the priority should be to resume talks between the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States, which broke down in late 2008.

The negotiations had sought to put a stop to North Korea's nuclear program in exchange for economic assistance.

South Korea's ambassador to the United Nations, Oh Joon, said North Korea needed to be given a warning in clear terms.

"From South Korea's perspective we want North Korea to stop their provocations immediately and to stop slandering and to come back to the dialogue with us," he told reporters.

Earlier on March 27, a South Korean naval ship fired warning shots and seized a North Korean fishing boat intruding across the disputed Yellow Sea border, officials said.

Nearly 15,000 South Korean and US troops have kicked off a 12-day amphibious landing drill, the largest for two decades.

The joint exercise taking place off the country's southeast coast will last until April 7 and involve around 10,000 US troops.

North Korea views such exercises as provocative rehearsals for invasion and there is a risk they could further fuel already simmering military tensions. - AFP

KIEV

Up to \$18 billion

THE International Monetary Fund announced a US\$14-\$18 billion bailout for Ukraine on March 27 as the UN General Assembly refused to recognise Russia's annexation of the Crimea peninsula.

The vital economic breakthrough was reached just as Ukraine's presidential campaign heated up, with the announcement by opposition icon Yulia Tymoshenko that she would contest the race to replace the ousted pro-Russian regime that sent her to jail.

Washington and its EU allies hope the rescue and a mounting diplomatic offensive against Russia should keep Ukraine on a stable enough footing to conduct snap polls on May 25 that could help unite the culturally splintered country of 46 million.

But the pledge of Western assistance comes amid growing worries about a rapid Russian buildup at Ukraine's eastern border that one Kiev official said had now reached 100,000 troops.

In New York, the non-binding UN General Assembly measure passed with a comfortable majority in the 193-member body, with 100 votes in favour and 11 votes against. But 58 abstained and more than 20 did not vote.

Ukraine, which drafted the resolution, welcomed its adoption and called for a "stronger and more concrete" united, international front against Russian aggression.

However Moscow's UN envoy Vitaly Churkin claimed the vote was a "moral victory" for Russian diplomacy, saying that "almost half" the UN membership refused to support the resolution.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on March 27 she hoped the threat of further sanctions would keep Russia's expansionist ambitions in check following its annexation of Crimea - an incursion that has left the Kremlin more isolated from the West than at any stage since the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall.

Kiev's International Monetary Fund agreement - worth the equivalent of 10.8 to 13.1 billion euros - imposes tough economic conditions that will alter the lives of Ukrainians who have grown accustomed to the comforts of Soviet-era subsidies and welfare benefits.

But it also appears to herald a fundamental shift from a reliance in Kiev on Russian help to save a crumbling system, to a commitment to the types of free-market efficiencies that could one day bring Ukraine far closer to the West.

"This significant support will help stabilise the economy and meet the needs of Ukrainian people over the long term because it provides the prospect for true growth," US President Barack Obama said in Rome.

The Fund's "standby arrangement" will form the heart of

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Indonesian election campaign recalls Suharto regime

WORLD 37

Philippines Muslims win new homeland in peace deal pledge

WORLD 39



World's oldest death-row prisoner released in Japan

WORLD 40



IN PICTURES

A relative of a supporter of Egypt's ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi cries outside the courthouse on March 25 in the Egyptian city of Minya, during a session of the trial of some 700 Islamists charged with deadly rioting. The court the day before sentenced to death 529 alleged supporters of Mr Morsi. *Photo: AFP*

IMF bailout for Ukraine

a broader package released by other governments and agencies amounting to \$27 billion (19.6 billion euros) over the next two years. Western support became essential for Ukraine once Russia froze payments on a \$15 billion (10.9 billion euro) loan it awarded ousted president Viktor Yanukovych for his decision to ditch a historic EU trade and political relations pact.

‘Russian troops are not in Crimea only – they are along all Ukrainian borders.’

Andriy Parubiy
Ukraine National Security and Defence Council

Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk has now made sure that Ukraine will be getting even more money from the West after earlier signing the political portion of the EU deal ditched by Mr Yanukovych – moves that are likely to further unsettle the Kremlin. Many of the interim leaders, from Mr Yatsenyuk to acting President Oleksandr Turchynov, are either close allies or political proteges of former prime minister and opposition veteran Ms Tymoshenko.

The 53-year-old has remained one of Ukraine's most powerful but also divisive figures since the day she helped organise the 2004 pro-democracy Orange Revolution that first tried to shake Kiev's powerful links to the Kremlin. The woman known at home as “the iron lady” moved centre stage by announcing plans to run for the presidency she lost to Mr Yanukovych by a razor-thin margin in 2010. Her downfall after that vote was rapid and seemingly fatal. Ms Tymoshenko was convicted in October 2011 for abuse of power and sentenced to a seven-year jail term that Western nations denounced as a brazen show of selective justice. Central to the charges against her was a 2009 gas contract with Russia that many Ukrainians thought came at too high a price. But she emerged triumphantly from the state hospital in which she had spent most of her sentence under guard on February 22 – the day parliament ousted Mr Yanukovych for his role in the deaths of nearly 100 protesters that month. Polls suggest that Ms Tymoshenko may now have a tough time beating Petro Poroshenko, a billionaire also known as the “chocolate baron”, who stood at the barricades during three months of deadly Kiev protests against Ms Yanukovych's rule. “Her support has slipped significantly since 2010,” said Valeriy Chaly of the Razumov political

research centre. Meanwhile hundreds of Ukrainian far-right nationalists rallied outside the parliament building in Kiev March 27, smashing windows and demanding the interior minister's resignation, days after police shot dead one of their leaders, Oleksandr Muzytchko. Ukraine's efforts to resolve its worst post-Soviet political crisis through elections are coming against the backdrop of worries Russia may yet set its sights on more of its western neighbour's land. The United States in particular has been uneasy about the steadily growing presence of Russian soldiers at Ukraine's eastern border. The US is quietly blocking exports of sensitive dual-use materials and technologies to Russia. US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel noted on March 26 that “they continue to build up their forces” despite Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu's assurance that no broader invasion of Ukraine was planned. Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council chief Andriy Parubiy on March 27 put the figure of Russian soldiers around Ukraine at “almost 100,000”. “Russian troops are not in Crimea only. They are along all Ukrainian borders. They're in the south, they're in the east and in the north,” Mr Parubiy said. There was no initial response to Mr Parubiy's comments from Russia. – *AFP*

PERTH

Race to new search zone as jet signal deadline looms

PLANES and ships raced to a fresh search zone on March 28 after a “credible new lead” that Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 was flying faster than first thought before it plunged into the remote Indian Ocean. Ten aircraft from six countries – Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and the United States, – altered their flight paths to an area 1100 kilometres (685 miles) northeast of where they have been looking for a week, far off western Australia. Five Chinese ships and an Australian naval vessel were also steaming to the new zone of interest after the weather cleared following the suspension of the search on March 27 due to thunderstorms and high winds, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority said. “The new information is based on continuing analysis of radar data between the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca before radar contact was lost,” AMSA said. “It indicated that the aircraft was travelling faster than previously estimated, resulting in increased fuel usage and reducing the possible distance the aircraft travelled south into the Indian Ocean.” It follows Thailand reporting on March 27 a satellite sighting of hundreds of floating objects. Japan also announced a satellite analysis indicated around 10 square floating objects, although it was not clear if these were in the zones the new search would focus on. The Thai and Japanese sightings came after satellite data from Australia, China and France had also shown floating objects possibly related to MH370, but nothing has so far been retrieved despite a huge multinational search. The Boeing 777 mysteriously vanished on a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8 carrying 239 people. “This is a credible new lead and will be thoroughly investigated [immediately],” Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said. “As I have said from the start, we owe it to them to follow every credible lead and to keep the public informed of significant new developments. That

is what we are doing,” he added. The updated advice was provided by an international investigation team in Malaysia with the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) determining “that this is the most credible lead to where debris may be located”. The new search area is approximately 319,000 sq km and around 1850km west of Perth, Australia is re-positioning its satellites to focus on the zone. As the search intensifies, the United States said it was sending a second P-8 Poseidon, an advanced surveillance plane, to Perth, but would not be dispatching a warship. “We believe, and just as importantly the Malaysian government believes, that the most important asset that we have that we can help them with are these long-range maritime patrol aircraft,” said Rear Admiral John Kirby. Thailand's Geo-Informatics and Space Technology Development Agency said it had satellite images taken on March 23 of 300 objects, ranging in size from 2 to 15 metres. It said they were scattered over an area about 2700km (1680 miles) southwest of Perth, but could not confirm they were plane debris. Japan's Cabinet Satellite Intelligence Centre's study showed the objects it sighted on March 25 were up to 8 metres in length and 4 metres wide. Jiji Press cited an official at the office as saying they were “highly likely” to be from the plane. MH370 is presumed to have crashed after diverting from its Kuala Lumpur-Beijing path and apparently flying for hours in the opposite direction. Malaysia believes the plane was deliberately redirected by someone on board, but nothing else is known. The search suspension on March 27 caused mounting concern as the clock ticks on the signal emitted by the plane's “black box” of flight data. The data is considered vital to unravelling the flight's mystery but the signal, aimed at guiding searchers to the device on the seabed, will expire after roughly 30 days, around April 8. Seeking closure, anguished families of those aboard are desperately awaiting concrete evidence that might unlock one of aviation's greatest riddles.

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**IN PICTURES**

Anti-government protester leader Suthep Thaugsuban (left) collects money from supporters during a rally at Chinatown in Bangkok on March 28. Anti-government protesters have resumed daily marches through Bangkok to build up support after a general election held last month was declared invalid in a ruling from the Constitutional Court on March 21 following disruption by opposition protesters. *Photo: AFP*

BANGKOK**Yingluck denied defence extension**

THAILAND's anti-corruption authorities rejected a request on March 27 by Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra to extend a deadline to defend herself against negligence charges that could see her banned from politics.

Ms Yingluck has been summoned to appear before the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) by March 31.

Her legal team asked the panel for 45 more days to prepare its case, according to one of her lawyers, Norrawit Larlaeng.

"They did not allow it because they said our reasons were not logical and we have had enough time already," he told AFP.

Ms Yingluck has been charged in connection with a rice subsidy scheme, and could face an

impeachment vote in the upper house of parliament within weeks.

The NACC says that Ms Yingluck was warned of corruption allegations and financial losses linked to the flagship policy but failed to take action.

Mr Norrawit said the defence team had been denied the chance to review the evidence against her.

"The prime minister feels the investigation against her has been rushed and it is unfair as we cannot see the evidence," he said.

The kingdom has been deeply divided since a military coup in 2006 that ousted Ms Yingluck's brother Thaksin Shinawatra, a tycoon-turned-politician who lives in Dubai to avoid prison for a corruption conviction.

Supporters of the Shinawatra family, known as the "Red Shirts", have

warned they will not accept the removal of another democratically elected government.

The Red Shirts' street rallies against the previous government in 2010 resulted in bloody street clashes and a military crackdown that left dozens dead.

Ms Yingluck has faced nearly five months of street demonstrations by rival protesters backed by the anti-Thaksin royalist establishment.

The opposition demonstrators want to remove the premier from office and install an unelected "people's council" to oversee political reforms.

Last week the Constitutional Court nullified a February general election disrupted by the protesters, angering government supporters. No new polling date has yet been set.

SYDNEY**'Stolen' ancient statues to be returned to India**

AUSTRALIA is preparing to return two centuries-old statues to India, officials said, following allegations they were stolen from ancient sites and sold as part of an audacious art fraud.

The National Gallery of Australia's bronze sculpture of a dancing Shiva, purchased in 2008 from New York art and antiquities dealer Subhash Kapoor, was pulled from display in Canberra on March 24.

A lesser work also linked to Mr Kapoor, the Ardhanariswara idol held by the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, has also been removed, the Attorney-General's Department said in a statement on March 27.

India requested the works' return on March 21 and Australia, as a signatory to a UNESCO convention on the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property, will implement its obligations under its Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act, it said.

"The Indian government's request is being actioned in accordance with that Act," the statement said.

The request from India follows a decision by the National Gallery of Australia to sue Mr Kapoor, his firm Art of the Past, and former manager Aaron Freedman in New York's Supreme Court over the purchase.

The NGA has claimed that Mr Kapoor and his company "fraudulently induced" the Canberra-based gallery to buy the statue for US\$5 million through forged certifications about its provenance and history.

Mr Kapoor, who is in prison in India where he also faces charges, claimed the statue had been sold to him by the wife of a diplomat, the gallery said. He has pleaded not guilty to the charges against him.

In a statement published on its website this week, the NGA said it researched the work for a year before acquiring it and followed measures consistent with international

best practice for museums.

"If the allegations regarding Mr Kapoor are proven to be true, then our gallery, along with leading museums around the world, will have been the victim of a most audacious act of fraud," it said.

"If proven, this fraud has involved the elaborate falsification of documents by a long-established New York art dealer who had been dealing with leading international museums for almost 40 years."

The gallery said the Shiva was a superb example of Indian Chola-period bronze casting which originated in the Tamil Nadu region of south India and is dated to the 11th-12th century.

The statue is one of 21 items Australia's premier art gallery purchased from Mr Kapoor - comprising a third of all the India works on its books. The NGA said it was reconsidering its acquisition procedures in light of the case. - AFP

JAVA

Nostalgia for Suharto ahead of elections

OLIVIA RONDONUWU

PAINTED on the back of trucks and emblazoned across T-shirts, the smiling face of former Indonesian dictator Raden Suharto has become a common sight across Java 16 years after his downfall.

“How are you bro? Still better in my time, no?” runs a phrase commonly printed alongside the late army general, toppled following more than three decades in power when the Asian financial crisis tore into Indonesia.

As voters gear up for April’s legislative elections and presidential polls in July, disillusionment is running high with the country’s chaotic democracy, notorious for money-grubbing politicians and weak decision-making, while Suharto nostalgia grows.

Sympathisers have chosen to brush aside the glaring bad points of his regime, known as the “New Order” and widely regarded as one of the most brutal and corrupt of the 20th century.

Vote-seeking politicians play up their links to Mr Suharto, particularly from his former political vehicle Golkar, crowds flock to his tomb and a memorial has been set up in his birthplace in Kemusuk, in his heartland of main Java island.

“I like him because when violence erupted, he just crushed it,” said Sumarah, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, during a recent visit to the memorial in central Java.

“People lived in peace. There were no demonstrations like nowadays, which cost the economy a lot,” added

the 46-year-old, referring to the frequent protests that are now part of daily life in the nation.

Mr Suharto became president in 1967 when he was a young army general, shortly after putting down an attempted coup, and on the back of a bloody massacre of hundreds of thousands of alleged communists and sympathisers which was encouraged by the military.

His long rule was marked by severe repression and colossal corruption. Graft watchdog Transparency International ranks him as the most corrupt leader in history, estimating he embezzled between US\$15 and \$35 billion during his rule.

But a growing number look longingly at the Suharto era, praising him for bringing stability after Indonesia’s painful birth pangs that followed Dutch colonial rule and overseeing an economic boom.

In a bustling market in Yogyakarta, central Java, T-shirts at a stall show a picture of Suharto next to the words “Don’t you miss that long-gone era of food self-sufficiency and guaranteed security?”

Such sentiments tap into discontent with surging inflation and among many young people struggling to find a job each year in the country of around 250 million people led by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

On weekends up to 2000 people flock to the tomb of Suharto and his wife outside the Javanese city of Solo, which is set in manicured hills and packed with hawkers selling T-shirts

and framed pictures of the couple.

As well as the memorial in Kemusuk, where his speeches are played on loudspeakers and a small museum displays photos from his life, there is talk of turning his house in the capital Jakarta into a museum.

He spent the final years of his life there until his death in 2008 at the age of 86.

Politicians, particularly from Golkar, which was used by Suharto to give his iron-fisted rule a semblance of democracy but which is now a fully fledged party, believe they have a lot to gain from the nostalgia.

“This will certainly benefit Golkar,” Aburizal Bakrie, the party’s presidential candidate, told the *Jakarta Post* newspaper in a recent interview.

“The elite can say any type of negative things about the New Order, but [common] people wish to go back to that system.”

The party, which is the second-biggest in parliament and in the ruling coalition, is also fielding one of Mr Suharto’s daughters, Siti Hediati, as a parliamentary candidate at the April 9 polls.

“The daughter of Yogyakarta, the daughter of [Suharto] honest and to be trusted,” runs the slogan next to a smiling Ms Hediati on campaign billboards, with a picture of her father in the background.

“It was hoped the reform era would bring better conditions but that didn’t really happen,” Ms Hediati told AFP, adding increased interest in Mr Suharto was “genuinely from the people”



A poster bearing the portrait of the late Indonesian dictator Suharto with a slogan “How are you bro? Still better in my time, no?” is displayed in Karanganyar town in central Java island on March 9. Photo: AFP

and not instigated by the family.

However some believe the upsurge in nostalgia has been carefully orchestrated by those who want to see members of the Suharto clan return to power.

Observers say the trend is due in part to the authorities’ failure to punish members of the old regime or establish a national process to come to terms with the past.

Anti-Suharto activist Fadjoel Rachman said Indonesia should emulate countries such as Argentina with its truth commission to investigate crimes committed during a dictatorship or Cambodia and its UN-backed tribunal trying leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime.

He is among many who are horrified at the growing support for a dictator who relied heavily on the army to crush dissent and made hundreds of political prisoners.

Agung Kurniawan, a Yogyakarta-based artist whose works were inspired by the brutality of Suharto’s regime, said he would fight any attempt by members of the dictator’s clan to return to power. – AFP

“We have no discrimination. We consider the severity of the patient only.”

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Heartbeat of the Nation

MANILA

Historic peace deal paves way for new Muslim homeland in the Philippines

THE biggest Muslim rebel group in the Philippines signed an historic pact on March 27 to end one of Asia's longest and deadliest conflicts, promising to give up their arms for an autonomous homeland.

Following four decades of fighting that has claimed tens of thousands of lives, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) signed the peace deal with President Benigno Aquino's government at a high-profile ceremony in Manila.

"The comprehensive agreement on Bangsamoro is the crowning glory of our struggle," MILF chair Murad Ebrahim said at the signing ceremony, using a local term that refers to a Muslim homeland.

"With this agreement the legitimate aspirations of the Bangsamoro and the commitment of the government of the Philippines to recognise those aspirations are now sealed."

The pact makes the MILF and the government partners in a plan to create a southern autonomous region for the Philippines' Muslim minority with locally elected leaders by mid-2016.

"What is being presented before us now is a path that can lead to a permanent change in Muslim Mindanao," Mr Aquino said at the ceremony, attended by more than 1000 people.

The Bangsamoro region would cover about 10 percent of territory in the mainly Catholic Philippines. The planned region has a majority of Muslims, but there are clusters of Catholic-dominated communities.

Muslim rebels have been battling since the 1970s for independence or autonomy in the southern islands of the Philippines, which they regard as their ancestral homeland dating back to when Arabic traders arrived there in the 13th century.

The conflict has condemned millions of people across large parts of the resource-rich Mindanao region to brutal poverty, plagued by Muslim and Christian warlords as well as outbreaks of fighting that have led to mass displacements.

The conflict and poverty have also been fertile conditions for Islamic extremism, with the al-Qaeda linked Abu Sayyaf group and other hardline



Women with their faces painted with Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) flags attend a rally in support of the peace agreement with the government in Cotabato City, Mindanao on March 27. Photo AFP

militants making remote regions of Mindanao their strongholds.

The MILF, which the military estimates has 10,000 fighters, is easily the biggest Muslim rebel group in Mindanao, and the political settlement was greeted with relief and optimism in the south.

"I am really happy. In the face of all the hardship of our parents, we the next generation hope and pray that Christians and Muslims will have peace," Mona Rakman, 42, a mother of four who lives close to the MILF headquarters, told AFP.

The autonomous region would have its own police force, a regional parliament and power to levy taxes, while revenues from the region's vast deposits of natural resources would be split with the national government.

It would have a secular government, rather than being an Islamic state. The national government would retain control over defence, foreign policy, currency and citizenship.

There are about 10 million Muslims in the Philippines, roughly 10 percent of the population, according to government statistics. Most live in the south of the country.

However there are no guarantees the peace deal will be implemented by the middle of 2016, a crucial deadline as that is when Mr Aquino is required by the constitution to end his six-year term.

Mr Aquino needs to convince Congress to pass a "basic law" to create the Bangsamoro autonomous region, ideally by the end of this year to allow time for other steps such as a local plebiscite.

But even though Mr Aquino's ruling coalition has a loose majority and he enjoys record-high popularity ratings, there are concerns politicians could reject or water down the proposed law.

Powerful Christian politicians in Mindanao are regarded as potential deal-breakers, while others elsewhere may see political advantage in opposing the deal to appeal to some Catholics ahead of the 2016 national elections.

The deal is also likely to be challenged in the Supreme Court, which in 2008 struck down a planned peace deal the MILF had negotiated with Mr Aquino's predecessor, Gloria Arroyo.

Islamic militants opposed to the peace deal are another threat, and

could continue to create enduring violence in Mindanao.

Among the potential spoilers is the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, an MILF splinter group of a few hundred militants that has carried out deadly attacks in the south in recent years.

"We will continue to fight against the government of the Republic of the Philippines because we are for independence and nothing else," BIFF spokesperson Abu Missry Mama told AFP by phone from his southern hideout.

The MILF leadership has committed to working with the government to neutralise the threat of the BIFF.

However the MILF will not give up its arms or the identities of its fighters until the basic law has been passed, highlighting the fragility of the peace deal. – AFP

TIMELINE

From the 13th century to today: Philippines' Muslims

13th Century: Arab traders introduce Islam to the Sulu island group near the lower tip of a Southeast Asian archipelago, later to be called the Philippines.

1521: Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan, in a voyage to look for alternate routes for the vital spice trade, lands on Homonhon island on the Pacific coast, converts natives to Christianity and claims the archipelago for Spain.

1898: The Philippines is ceded to the United States as part of the settlement of the Spanish-American War, with the victors later mounting a bloody pacification campaign against Muslims in the south that lasts several years.

1930s: US authorities encourage Christians to migrate to the southern region of Mindanao, which was mostly populated by Muslims. The policy of Christianising the region is accelerated in the 1950s and 1960s after the Philippines wins independence. Muslims eventually become a minority in many parts of the southern Philippines, fuelling resentment

at rulers in Manila.

1968: Then-Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos recruits Filipino Muslims for a covert force to seize Sabah state from Malaysia. But when the recruits complain, Mr Marcos has at least 23 of them killed in what becomes known as the "Jabidah Massacre". The incident helps radicalise Filipino Muslims.

1969: Muslim scholar Nur Misuari establishes the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which begins an armed campaign to put up a separate Islamic state in the southern third of the country.

1972-1976: Fighting rages between government forces and the MNLF, which is supported by some Muslim countries. Thousands are killed with whole towns being destroyed in the violence.

1976: Under a deal brokered by the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), the MNLF signs an agreement with the Marcos administration to end hostilities in exchange for the government working to grant greater autonomy in Muslim-populated areas.

1977: Misuari's deputy, Hashim Salamat, leads a group of key commanders in splitting from the MNLF. They were unhappy with Mr Misuari's compromise and vowed to continue

23

The number of people known to have been killed in the 1968 Jabidah Massacre"

fighting for independence. Mr Salamat later officially formed the MILF. **1986:** Dictator Ferdinand Marcos is toppled and replaced by Corazon Aquino, who launches peace talks with the MNLF. The MILF declines to take part.

1996: The MNLF signs a peace settlement with then-president Fidel Ramos' government and wins limited self-rule over the most impoverished Muslim regions of the south.

1997: The MILF signs a ceasefire and begins peace talks with Mr Ramos' government, a process that is disrupted by outbreaks of major fighting.

2008: The Philippine Supreme Court blocks a peace deal with then-president Gloria Arroyo's administration that would have given the MILF control over a large area of the south, ruling it was unconstitutional. The decision triggers fighting that leaves more than 400 people dead.

August 4, 2011: President Benigno Aquino flies to Japan for a secret meeting with Murad Ebrahim, who had become the new MILF leader after the death of Hashim Salamat in 2003. It is the first direct talks between a Philippine president and MILF rebel leader since peace talks began. The meeting becomes recognised as a key breakthrough in the peace process.

October 15, 2012: The MILF signs a preliminary agreement at the presidential palace outlining a broad roadmap for peace, with the details on power sharing, wealth divisions and disarmament later agreed upon during negotiations in Malaysia.

September, 2013: Misuari's armed followers attack the southern port of Zamboanga in a bid to block the MILF peace deal that they fear would sideline the MNLF leader. The attack sparks three weeks of urban conflict with the military that leaves at least 244 people dead and 116,000 civilians displaced.

January 25, 2014: Government and MILF negotiators conclude talks in Malaysia on the details of the proposed peace agreement.

March 27, 2014: The government and the MILF sign the "Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro", which outlines a plan to create a Muslim southern autonomous region with locally elected leaders by mid-2016. In return, the MILF will give up its weapons and form a political party.

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Dated: 31 March, 2014

SEOUL**‘Blabbering peasant’ slight on S Korean head**

NORTH Korea issued a scathing personal attack on South Korean President Park Geun-Hye, accusing her on March 27 of breaking a moratorium on cross-border insults and behaving like a "blabbering" peasant woman.

The attack referenced a speech Ms Park made on March 24 at a nuclear summit in The Hague in which she voiced concern that Pyongyang's nuclear material could end up in terrorist hands, and warned of a possible Chernobyl-style disaster at the North's main Yongbyong atomic complex.

A spokesperson for the North's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea (CPRK) said Ms Park's remarks "violently trampled" on an agreement reached at rare, high-level talks last month for the two Koreas to stop "slandering" one another.

If Ms Park genuinely wants to see improvements in inter-Korean relations, "she first has to stop rambling recklessly and learn how to speak with discretion", the spokesperson said in a

statement carried by the North's official KCNA news agency.

"Even if someone else wrote the dumb speech for her to read from, she should at least know what and what not to say ... in order not to embarrass herself.

"She should realise she is no longer a peasant woman blabbering to herself in the corner of her room but the occupant of the [presidential] Blue House," he said.

North Korea has made similarly vitriolic attacks on Ms Park in the past, but this was the first since last month's agreement.

North Korea had pushed hard for the "no slander" clause, which observers said was always going to prove problematic.

North Korea insists it should extend to the media and private groups and individuals, while South Korea argues that it cannot restrict freedom of speech.

Seoul denounced the CPRK statement as "rude" and unhelpful.

"We find the comments that can't even be repeated ... deeply regrettable and lacking the most basic etiquette," a government statement said.

The row came at a time of simmering military tensions on the Korean peninsula.

The North on March 26 test-fired two medium-range ballistic missiles, as US President Barack Obama hosted a landmark Japan-South Korea summit aimed at uniting the three nations against Pyongyang's nuclear threat.

United Nations resolutions prohibit North Korea from conducting ballistic missile tests and the UN Security Council held closed-door consultations March 27 to discuss a possible condemnation of the latest launches.

"The North should immediately stop the acts of provocation that pour cold water on efforts ... to create peace on the Korean peninsula and the region," the South Korean government statement said.

**IN PICTURES**

Former boxer Iwao Hakamada (right), 78, who has been on death row in Japan for 48 years, is released from a Tokyo detention center on March 27. Mr Hakamada, believed to be the world's longest-serving death row inmate, was granted a retrial on March 27 after decades in solitary confinement, in a rare about-face for Japan's rigid justice system. *Photo: AFP*



IN PICTURES

A model takes to the catwalk at “WSM China Knitwear Fashion Design Contest 2014” during the bi-annual China Fashion Week in Beijing on March 27. Photo: AFP

MACAU

Asian film winners mourn stuntman on missing jet

MARTIAL arts fantasy *The Grandmaster* dominated the Asian Film Awards on March 26 with seven wins including best movie, as its emotional director mourned the film's stuntman who was on the missing Malaysian jetliner.

India's *The Lunchbox* was the only other film to win multiple prizes at the star-studded event at Macau's City of Dreams casino resort, winning awards for best actor and screenwriter.

The Grandmaster, inspired by the life of Yip Man, the mentor of legendary kung fu star Bruce Lee, scooped awards in most other major categories, including best director for Wong Kar-wai and best actress for Zhang Ziyi.

But despite the big wins a sombre mood hung over the film crew, with Mr Wong using his acceptance speech to ask Malaysia for greater transparency in the search for Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 which

went missing on March 8 with 239 people on board.

"One of our martial arts directors unfortunately is one of the victims of MH370, so here I hope the Malaysian government can try their best to address this issue by taking a more transparent attitude ... and to let us know the truth," Mr Wong said.

Malaysia has come under scathing criticism for its handling of the search, with relatives of the mostly Chinese passengers on board accusing the government and airline of a cover-up and a botched response.

Ju Kun, 35, was reportedly on his way to Beijing to visit his family.

"Today I am very emotional about [our] crew member and friend. We'll have to say goodbye to him forever," said Mr Zhang.

The Grandmaster, a stylised martial arts epic which was in production for more than six years, spans several decades of Chinese history and features lengthy battles between rival

kung fu masters.

Mr Wang said making the film was an "adventure".

"It started as a dream, later it became an obsession and finally reality," he said.

But Hong Kong actor Tony Leung Chiu-wai, who plays the eponymous "Grandmaster", lost the best actor award to India's Irrfan Khan, who played a lead role in *The Lunchbox*.

"I am grateful for the moment which give inspiration [to] my director and writer to write this script and to write this story," said Mr Khan.

The Lunchbox serves up a bitter-sweet romance between two strangers in Mumbai brought together by mistaken lunch deliveries.

The Asian Film Awards, organised by the Hong Kong International Film Festival, have been held annually since 2007, aimed at showcasing the region's movie talent.

Twenty-six films from 13 countries and regions vied for 14 prizes this year.

Top winners at the Asian Film Awards:

Best Newcomer: Jiang Shuying (*So Young*, China)
Best Supporting Actor: Huang Bo (*No Man's Land*, China)
Best Supporting Actress: Yeo Yann Yann (*Ilo Ilo*, Singapore)
Best Screenwriter: Ritesh Batra (*The Lunchbox*, India)
Best Cinematographer: Philippe Le Sourd (*The Grandmaster*, Hong Kong)
Best Production Designer: William Chang Suk-ping, Alfred

Yau Wai-ming (*The Grandmaster*)
Best Composer: Umebayashi Shigeru, Nathaniel Mechaly (*The Grandmaster*)
Best Editor: Shin Min-kyung (*Cold Eyes*, South Korea)
Best Visual Effects: Jang Sung-Jin (*Mr. Go*, Japan)
Best Costume Designer: William Chang Suk-ping (*The Grandmaster*)



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TAIPEI

Students protest leaders Chen Wei-ting (front left) and Lin Fei-fan (right) gesture during ongoing demonstrations against a trade agreement with China, outside the parliament in Taipei on March 27. Photo: AFP

Taiwan trade objectors step up 'war' over pact

TAIWANESE protestors opposed to a contentious trade pact with China vowed on March 27 to escalate their "war" with the government, calling for a huge weekend rally to increase pressure on President Ma Ying-jeou.

The student-led demonstrators who have occupied parliament for more than a week urged people to take to the streets of Taipei on March 30 after failing to reach an agreement with Mr Ma's Kuomintang government.

"Ma is not sincere. On the one hand he is willing to talk but the Kuomintang will not back down [on the trade pact].

"There is no meaning to hold a dialogue ... We invite everybody to take to the streets on Sunday," student leader Lin Fei-fan said in a press conference outside parliament.

"We want to tell Ma the people's opinions and tell politicians that they have to be responsible and face the people."

The pact, signed in July, is designed to open up further trade in services be-

tween China and Taiwan, which split 65 years ago after a civil war.

But the protesters say the deal will damage Taiwan's economy and leave it vulnerable to political pressure from China.

They are now demanding the agreement be scrapped and the passing of new legislation to monitor all agreements with China.

Mr Lin said the demonstrators were not going to give up until their demands were met.

"There is no finishing time," he said.

"The time we finish is when the Ma government bows its head. We are waging war on the Ma government."

The protestors occupied parliament on March 18 and swiftly drew a large crowd of supporters, with more than 10,000 congregated outside the building at one point.

A group of radical protestors on stormed the nearby government headquarters on March 23 but were dislodged by baton-wielding police and water cannon.

The violent dispersal of the protesters has added to the tensions while Premier Jiang Yi-huah has defended the use of force, saying the government "cannot sit back and disregard actions that jeopardised national authorities and social order".

Mr Ma and protest leaders said on March 25 they would like to talk, but failed to reach agreement on how the dialogue should be held.

Mr Ma has warned that failure to ratify the pact would be a grave setback to trade-reliant Taiwan's efforts to seek more free trade agreements and avoid isolation as regional economic blocs emerge.

The deal is a follow-up agreement to a sweeping Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement signed in 2010 to reduce trade barriers between China and Taiwan.

Mr Ma has overseen a marked thaw in relations with Beijing since he came to power in 2008. But China still considers Taiwan as part of its territory awaiting reunification. - AFP

BEIJING

School deaths activist freed

A CHINESE activist who investigated whether shoddy construction caused the deaths of thousands of children when their schools collapsed in a 2008 earthquake was released on March 27 after finishing a five-year jail term, his lawyer said.

Writer and campaigner Tan Zuoren was heading home to Chengdu, the capital of the southwestern province of Sichuan, his lawyer Pu Zhiqiang told AFP by phone.

Mr Tan, 59, was sentenced for "inciting subversion of state power" in connection with several articles he published online about authorities' brutal crushing of the 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests.

But he was arrested while investigating the deaths of thousands of children whose schools collapsed in a huge earthquake in Sichuan.

The 8.0-magnitude disaster in May 2008 left more than 80,000 people dead or missing.

But schools bore the brunt of the disaster, with 7000 badly damaged and 5335 pupils left dead or missing, according to authorities, fuelling angry accusations from parents that corruption had enabled low building standards.

Mr Pu, a prominent Beijing-based

rights lawyer who represented Mr Tan at his trial in 2009, said the activist may continue to face surveillance and restrictions, especially during sensitive times.

This June will be the 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown, and authorities routinely restrict the movement of activists during such periods.

"The country owes him five years," Mr Pu told AFP on March 26.

"First, this was a wrongful conviction. Second, given his circumstances his sentence was plenty long - the maximum sentence was five years, and that's what the court gave him. Third, he served the entire sentence, not one day less."

When Mr Tan was tried the high-profile Beijing-based dissident artist Ai Weiwei, who also investigated the school collapses, said he was detained and beaten by Chengdu police and blocked from testifying.

Mr Ai hailed the news of Tan's release Thursday but said, "He served every day, until the last day, and still now, he's under a kind of probation - he doesn't have the right to speak up. So, I think that really is a shame."

Mr Tan was a victim of "terrible judicial corruption", Mr Ai said, noting

that the court focused on his Tiananmen comments rather than the earthquake investigation.

"They know this obvious evidence points to the corruption and mishandling of the schools, which is the direct cause of the loss of the human lives of those young students," the artist said.

An appeal in Tan's case was rejected in June 2010 after a hearing that "only lasted 12 minutes", Mr Pu said at the time.

Rights groups denounced that ruling, with a top Asia official from Amnesty International calling it a politically-motivated outcome of "a grossly unfair legal process".

Searches for Mr Tan's name on Sina Weibo, a Chinese microblogging site, were blocked March 27, with users receiving a message that "according to relevant laws, regulations and policies, results for 'Tan Zuoren' are not displayed".

But Tan's supporters quickly spread the news of his release via Twitter, which is blocked by Chinese authorities but some people access through virtual private networks.

"He's such a fine man, very strong-willed and very determined, and he paid his price for the society he wants to help," MR Ai said. "He should know he has a lot of people supporting him."

COLOMBO

Monk seeks wild elephants for temple show

A SRI Lankan Buddhist monk led a procession of elephants on March 26, demanding authorities capture wild animals from the jungle to boost the dwindling number of the creatures in temples.

Patron of the Tamed Elephant Owners' Association, monk Maagal-kanday Sudaththa said temples faced a severe shortage of elephants for their annual pageant.

"There are only 130 tamed elephants in the country and only about half them are actually available for temple parades," said the monk, who led some two dozen elephants from parliament to the wildlife office a short distance away.

"We want the authorities to capture wild elephants and tame them for our cultural purposes," the monk told AFP.

There was no immediate comment available from the wildlife department where the monk staged his elephant protest, but environmentalists said the authorities for decades have not allowed the capture of elephants from the wild.

However environmental lawyer Jagath Gunawardena said they had no objections if the state released animals from the country's main elephant orphanage at Pinnawala, 90 kilometres (60 miles) northeast of the capital Colombo, for the temples.

"Animals in the wild are already threatened with the habitat shrinking," Mr Gunawardena told AFP.

"If you allow the capture from the wild, things will get worse for the animals. What we say is give elephants

from Pinnawala if you want, but don't allow the capture of wild elephants."

The elephant orphanage established in 1975 shelters more than 85 elephants, most of whom were abandoned or separated from their herds when they were babies. Many have also been born at the orphanage.

Asian elephant expert Jayantha Jayewardene noted many Sri Lankans wanted to own elephants as a symbol of wealth.

"It is prestige. It is a way of showing your wealth," Jayewardene said. "I fear the calls to allow the capture of wild elephants [for temple ceremonies] is just a ruse for people to freely own elephants."

Sri Lanka considers elephants sacred animals because of their association with Buddhist temple festivities. Pinnawala elephants have been presented as gifts to Buddhist temples as well as to other countries as symbols of friendship.

Elephants are also protected by law and there were fears that their numbers were falling, but a survey in 2011 found that Sri Lanka's elephant population remained healthy with 7379 in the wild.

The survey's results had been a welcome outcome for authorities who had believed the wild elephant population totalled just 5350.

The country boasted 12,000 elephants in 1900 but their numbers have been depleted by shrinking of habitat as farmers kill animals who stray onto their land.

- AFP



Sri Lankan elephants take part in a demonstration in Colombo on March 26. A Sri Lankan Buddhist monk is demanding authorities capture wild animals from the jungle to boost the dwindling number in temples, which he says face a severe shortage of elephants for their annual pageants. Photo AFP

MOSCOW

Astronauts trapped in orbit finally dock at ISS

A RUSSIAN spacecraft carrying a three-man Russian and US crew on March 28 docked successfully at the International Space Station after an unprecedented two-day delay caused by a technical hitch.

The Soyuz TMA-12M carrying Russia's Alexander Skvortsov and Oleg Artemyev and NASA's Steve Swanson docked at 3:53am Moscow time (11.53 GMT March 27), Russia's mission control said.

"The docking of the piloted spaceship has taken place to the ISS. All the systems are working normally," mission control announced as Russian television showed a live broadcast of the docking.

The trio were originally to have docked with the ISS early March 26, just six hours after launch from Kazakhstan, but their Soyuz spacecraft suffered a technical glitch on its approach in orbit.

The trio had to orbit the Earth 34 times before their rendezvous with the international space laboratory, instead of the fast-track route of four orbits originally envisaged.

The issue arose once their Soyuz capsule was in orbit and a thruster failed to fire to assist its approach for docking with the ISS.

US space agency NASA said in a statement on its website that the Soyuz spacecraft "was unable to complete its third thruster burn to fine-tune its approach" to the orbiting space station.

The Soyuz capsule later carried out three manoeuvres in orbit bringing it on the correct trajectory for the adapted two-day route to the ISS.

The head of the Russian rocket state firm Energia that supplies the Soyuz rocket that propels the craft into space however said that the origin of the problem was not yet clear.

"It could be mathematics, it could be a transmitter problem or that the engine choked. But most likely it was a mathematical problem," said Vitaly Lopota on March 26, quoted by the Interfax news agency.

This would imply that ground scientists failed to work out the correct altitude in orbit for the thruster to fire to take the Soyuz to the ISS.

A commission has been formed to pinpoint the cause of the error.

Russia first used a fast-track route for sending manned spacecraft to the ISS last year.

After the retirement of the US shuttle, NASA is for now wholly reliant on Russia for delivering astronauts to the space station on its tried-and-trusted Soyuz launch and capsule system.

The trio bring the ISS crew up to six by joining incumbent crew Koichi Wakata of Japan, American Rick Mastracchio and Russian Mikhail Tyurin, who are due to leave in May.

The new crewmembers are set to spend around five-and-a-half months in space. - AFP

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For a dream no wall

Arker Kyaw found 15 minutes of fame when he draw a graffiti portrait of Obama in Yangon. It's been a longer road getting to represent Myanmar in an international graffiti meet-up



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LOCAL street artist Arker Kyaw will attend the Meeting of Style (MOS), an international graffiti event on April 5-6 in Bangkok. It's the first time he will show his artwork internationally, so the invitation to participate came as a welcome surprise.

"I've got a big chance, and I'm very excited," said the willowy young artist, whose hands are always a mess of paint. "All the artists will be representing their countries. I'd like to show the people the culture of Myanmar."

At the MOS, more than 50 artists from around the world will aim to demonstrate their unique creative voices. Arker Kyaw intends to create Myanmar cultural imagery with his street-art approach. In preparation, he said he is practising sketches and researching the techniques of famous artists.

An organiser of the MOS, Aumnaj Ounjai, said that "MOS is unifying people through culture, colour and crews. It's not brands with commercial intent. It comes from the street, not a desktop."

Ounjai is also a graffiti artist - tag name Jesus103 - and he owns E12 graffiti shop in Thailand.

He said the participants have a chance to inspire cultural communication since graffiti is about responding to changing landscapes, especially derelict ones, and revivifying the history and soul of a place.

In Ounjai's opinion, the graffiti

scene in Myanmar is just beginning. He said the local artists need to study and train in order to come upon a style of presentation that reveals an identity and spirituality. He sees potential in Arker Kyaw, whom he met through business dealings related to painting equipment for the 2013 SEA Games.

Arker Kyaw was just 18 years old when he painted a graffiti portrait of Barack Obama in Shwegonedine in time for the president's historic visit in 2012. He was just a young man facing the struggles of an underprivileged life in Yangon. He hoped for "likes" from people who saw pictures of the portrait on his Facebook page. He went to bed and didn't think much about it.

The next day, local and international journalists started calling. Everyone was interested to know who was behind the Obama portrait. Thanks to that 15 minutes of fame, he now earns a living by drawing. He feels happy about that, and therefore finds it relatively easy to dismiss gossip that the portrait was just a gimmick to gain notoriety.

"Some people said I was just trying to be popular. They said I'm not a street artist, just a painter," he said. "But I don't have time to feel those words because I've had much bigger problems in my life."

Born in Dawei, the fourth child in a family of three boys and two girls, Arker Kyaw moved to Yangon with his parents when he was 7 years old.

"I really have to thank my dad. If he had not moved to Yangon, I'd have grown up in a small city," he said.

His father also taught him how to paint. "He wasn't famous, but he painted a lot"

Arker Kyaw started painting, and he got interested in graffiti art around age 15, while surfing the internet. Un-

til then, he had no idea what career to pursue.

Although he credits him with some things, his father's gambling addiction at that time eventually led Arker Kyaw and his brothers to leave home, taking their mother with them.

"He didn't have any other bad habits. Gambling was the only one. He'd fight with my mom, and people would come to our home asking him to pay debts. Some of our neighbours talked about us, and we felt ashamed. That's why we decided to separate our parents," said Soe Wai Htun, Arker Kyaw's brother and now manager.

"When I was a matriculation student, sometimes we didn't have money for tuition fees," Arker Kyaw added. "How bad is that?"

They moved to an uncle's home on 18th Street, but it wasn't to be a long-term solution. Life got harder, and they decided to send their mother to their grandmother's home in Dawei.

"If we'd gone back to our native town at that time, we would have a typical town lifestyle now. So, we three decided to risk everything and live in Yangon," Arker Kyaw said.

The three brothers tried to rent an apartment, and finally they moved to an apartment on 15th Street in Latha township. At that time, they had around K100,000 and the apartment cost K45,000 per month. They shared the eighth-floor flat with another family.

"The family had two children, and the home was too small for us all," Arker Kyaw said.

Soe Wai Htun added, "When we moved our belongings to that house, we carried all of them by ourselves, and then the owner asked that we move in one month because we owned so many things. He said that just after I carried the last package to the eighth floor. I was really disappointed."



er with a spray can Is too high or far



Dawei-born artist Arker Kyaw was invited to attend the Meeting of Style, an international conference of graffiti artists, held April 5-6 in Bangkok. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

At that point, the brothers decided that they didn't want to move from home to home anymore and would just have to make more money.

After the month was up, they moved to a hostel for boys on 15th Street. Arker Kyaw was a university student then, studying at the National Culture and Art University in Yangon with painting as his major. While his two brothers got jobs, he started drawing some graffiti pieces for his friends. The eldest brother worked at a public company in the trading department and Soe Wai Htun worked in the export-import department of a medical firm.

"Some friends of friends asked me to draw graffiti pieces for them, and I got some money from it. If Kandawgyi Park hosted an event, like Valentine's Day, I was there drawing postcards for K1500 each," Arker Kyaw said.

To boost his daily income, he also sold clothes in the street with his brothers. Sometimes he went to Sakyin village, Mandalay Region, to paint Buddha faces.

"My brothers advised me to work, but I didn't want to live as a salary worker. I'd already chosen to be an artist," Arker Kyaw said.

Soe Wai Htun said, "We weren't mad at Arker Kyaw because we are older. He also found work at that time, and did his best to listen to us."

Even if he wanted to do graffiti, however, he didn't have enough money to buy spray cans. Instead he asked his neighbours who ran a tea shop for some pieces of charcoal, which he used to draw on walls. He found motivation to carry on following his dream in something he'd read.

"I'm not into reading much, but I still remember this one sentence. The

author said every person owns one talent, and it's their job to find out what it is and develop it. I thought my talent was painting."

He heard that Yangon youth were getting crazy for tattoos, so he bought the necessary equipment and started inking to make some more cash. Among his initial clients were many Chinatown street-meat vendors, whom he knew from living in the community and chatting with them about tattoo designs.

One day he saw a foreigner painting on a wall near his hostel. He liked the work, and started drawing beside it with paint and brushes.

"The next morning, I'm sitting near that painting and some young guys ask me who drew it. After I told them it was me, they asked me to help make some graffiti in their tattoo studio. After that, I knew I wanted to draw with

spray paint," Arker Kyaw said.

From tattooing, he eventually saved enough to buy some spray cans, which he used to paint a portrait of President U Thein Sein on Kannar Road in Pabedan township.

"At that time, Thein Sein had been nominated for the Nobel prize. I just wanted to say congrats to him, so I painted. After that, I drew President Barack Obama to welcome him to Myanmar. That's all I intended, but that portrait changed everything," Arker Kyaw said.

Offers to do commissioned graffiti work flowed in, and these days he is busy with painting jobs. In March, he earned US\$10,000. He paints for foreigners, owners of bars, night-clubs and studios, and when he's not painting for profit, he's often painting for charity – customers just ask him to draw artwork and give him the

freedom to get on with it. He has donated his artwork to a Mary Stopes Organisation event, a campaign to help child soldiers, a World Vision project, an MTV Exit event in Yangon and Yangon Funeral Service.

He supports his parents, who have reunited and live in Dawei while Arker Kyaw works in Yangon with his brother. "To err is human," said Arker Kyaw philosophically about his family situation.

Arker Kyaw said he urged the new generation not to think too much but adopt a do-it-yourself attitude and pursue their desires.

He admitted that sometimes his success feels like a dream. "I'm afraid to wake up sometimes in case I find myself back on 15th Street."

If it's not a dream, he'll be at the Meeting of Style, laying down graffiti, the Myanmar way.

Q&A

Ko Cho speaks

An interview with Yangon's own master luthier

GREG HOLLAND

greg.c.holland@gmail.com

AUNG Cho Lwin – or “Guitar Man”, as he is often known – owns and operates Earth's Gift, a bespoke guitar workshop that has had many locations over the years but is now operated out of his home in Yangon.

Using only locally sourced wood from naturally felled trees for the bodies of the guitars, Ko Cho has been making instruments with great patience and incredible workmanship for the past 17 years. He creates instruments of simplistic beauty, breathing life into Myanmar's great mahoganies, rosewoods, teaks and cedars just as the wind once bent and passed through them.

Ko Cho understands the sound of wood and which type complements another's tone in order to create the resonance his instruments have become renowned for. In 1997 he started experimenting with cedar, a soft wood that has been overlooked by other guitar makers. He believed cedar held a more beautiful tone, persisted and has attempted to get international recognition for cedar as a guitar maker's wood. He now takes orders from international customers from as far as Japan and the US while still experimenting with new shapes and sounds for his instruments.

When did your love affair with guitars start?

I was 16. One day I could hear my neighbor playing a guitar in his back yard. So, after hearing him play for a few days I go and I ask him for a guitar lesson. He only knew three chords and only three songs, so it was easy to start. My neighbour doesn't play guitar anymore but I still see him. He started me on this journey.

How did you start building guitars and why did you want to build them instead of buying them?

I studied at Yangon University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in zoology in 1977. There was nothing to do here then – no jobs – so two years later I joined the merchant navy in Singapore. I got promoted to junior officer and moved to Hong Kong and spent five years at sea. It was in 1987, in the Gulf of California, there was a storm called Roslyn that lasted 36 hours. I sat in my cabin, scared and thinking about my future. When the storm broke I had made a decision to return home and build guitars out of all the woods Myanmar has to offer. But I was at sea for another 10 years before I came back to Yangon. I had picked up guitar books on my travels and I knew I wanted to build guitars when I came home. I wanted to live a peaceful life building instruments. I set up a workshop in downtown Yangon when I got home in 1997 and have been building guitars ever since.

But on May 2, 2008, Cyclone Nargis came and in the morning I went down

In 1987, in the Gulf of California, there was a storm called Roslyn that lasted 36 hours ... When it broke I decided to return home and build guitars out of all the wood Myanmar has to offer.

to my workshop in the downtown and everything was destroyed. So many people had died that night and the city was ruined. The mahogany trees had been ripped up and lay all over the road. I asked an official if I could take the wood and he said yes. So I cut the trees up into 4-foot sections and transported them back to my workshop. I have been using this wood to make special guitars. They are priceless because 200,000 people died



Photo: Greg Holland

that day and it makes me very sad. I will never forget this and will always think about the people when I make these guitars and I will keep some of this wood forever, for remembrance.

Where do you build your guitars?

I've had many workshops in Yangon. My last one was at Kandawgyi Lake but the rent kept rising and they wanted me to stay open long hours so I left. My workshop now is in my home at 16 mile on Pyay Road. I have

All your cats? How many do you have?

I have about 40 cats at the moment. Animals are living creatures with rights to stay in the world together with us, the human. The animals, all these things, are the live things and we share and stay living comfortably together. So we need to give something to them. So I think about this and the cats. If they are in the jungle, they can do anything, but in the city it is hard for them.

spending so much time looking out over the calming sea I don't like to be in busy places. I have a large music collection, which I started buying in 1983 when I was sailing around the world. I collected lots of classical rock and heavy metal and now I have a very big collection I can listen to at home. I can buy CDs from 21st Street in Latha township. They stock all the old music I like.

What's in the future for your business?

With the internet access, foreigners and visitors are coming into the country and we are the host. We can make good business with them with guesthouses and food stalls. Spending all those years on the ships, I never knew if the next chef would be any good, so I relied on myself to learn new ways to cook. I can cook Indian, Chinese, Burmese, European, American fast food; I make a really good burger! I want to create a better experience for visitors. In the future I am hoping to have an inn where I can host travelling people, cooking for them, and I will also have my workshop. They could stay in the country with me in 16 mile in the cottages and they can stay for two nights and peacefully sleep and I can cook for them. In my mind, I think about this for the future.

So I feed the birds, the cats and the dogs. Now there are so many cats with me at my home I cannot stay in the city. So I moved to 16 mile and brought them with me where I have my workshop.

Do you go out in Yangon to watch live music?

I do not go out to see live music – I don't like crowds! After spending all the years in the merchant navy and

a second home in Tarmwe township where my mother and father live but my small workshop and all my cats are at my home at 16 mile. It is so quiet, the only noise at night is the sound of the jungle, so I get to listen to my music loud and watch my TV and it disturbs no one. It sometimes takes an hour and a half to get downtown but it is worth the time. I can return to my peaceful workshop full of wood where I can experiment.

What's on

MARCH 31 – APRIL 6

Got an event?

List it in What's On!

Email: whatsonmt@gmail.com

ART

MARCH 22-APRIL 21 “Sparkle 2014: Volume 2” group show. KZL Art Studio & Gallery, 184/84A Than Lwin Road, Golden Valley Ward 2, Bahan

MARCH 26-APRIL 6 “Beyond the Itch”, Htein Lin solo show. River Gallery II, 33/35 37th and 38th streets, Kyauktada

FILM

Start times at **Mingalar 2**, **Shae Shaung (1, 2)** and **Nay Pyi Taw cinemas** are 10am, noon, 2pm, 4pm, 6pm and 8pm. Start times at Junction Square and Maw Tin are 10am, 1pm and 4pm daily and 7pm and 9:30pm on Friday and Saturday.

Nay Pyi Taw Cinema, near Sule Pagoda *Need for Speed 3D*. Directed by Scott Waugh. A blue-collar mechanic on a cross-country race proves that the underdog can

finish first.

Mingalar 2 Cinema, at Dagon Center 2, Myaynigone, Sanchaung *300: Rise of an Empire 3D*. Directed by Noam Murr. Based on Frank Miller's graphic novel *Xerxes*, a Greek general tries to unite all Greece by leading a charge that changes the course of the war.

Shae Shaung Cinema 1, Sule Pagoda Road, Kyauktada *Divergent*. Directed by Neil Burger. In a world where people are divided into factions based on human virtues, Tris Prior must find out what makes being “divergent” so dangerous before it's too late.

Shae Shaung Cinema 2, Sule Pagoda Road, Kyauktada *Need for Speed 3D*.

Junction Square Cineplex, Kamaryut *Machete Kills*. Directed by Robert Rodriguez. An ex-Federal agent hired by the president must take down a madman revolutionary and an eccentric billionaire

bent on spreading anarchy across the globe.

Need for Speed 3D.

Junction Maw Tin Cineplex, Lanmadaw

Need for Speed 3D.

MUSIC

MARCH 31 Live blues. Mojo Bar, 135 Inya Road, Bahan 8:30-11:30pm

APRIL 1 “The Big Rock Show” with We are the Waste, Illegal, Room 504 and more. Tickets K4500 at City Mart and 1876. Kandawgyi, Myaw Sin Island 6-10:30pm

APRIL 2 “Rock the Night.” Modern rock bands cover English hits and classics. Flamingo Bar, Yangon International Hotel, 330 Ahlone Road, Dagon 9-11:30pm

APRIL 5 The Jazzhouse Band “Roadshow Germany to Myanmar.” Myanmar traditional and film music with modern jazz. River Ayeyarwaddy Gallery, 134 35th Street, middle block, Kyauktada 5:30pm



Htein Lin, *Beyond the Itch*. Photo: River Gallery II

MISC

MARCH 31 Industry night for food, beverage and hospitality workers. TORI, 2nd floor, 135 Inya Road, Bahan

MARCH 31 Pub quiz. Free entry and prizes. 50th Street Café, 9/13 50th Street, Botahtaung 8-11pm

APRIL 1 Andre King, comedian. Tickets \$10 on sale at the venue. Union Bar and Grill, 42 Strand Road, Botahtaung 8-10pm

APRIL 1 NGO workers night. TORI,

2nd floor, 135 Inya Road, Bahan

APRIL 3 Quiz night. Cuba Bar, 66 Yae Kyaw, Pazundaung

APRIL 5 “Heat” summer party. Entry K3000. Flamingo Bar, Yangon International Hotel, 330 Ahlone Road, Dagon 10pm-late

APRIL 12-16 Coca-Cola Myanmar Summer Festival 2014. Water activities, adventure games, live music, food and a foam party. Free entry.



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Learning to fly: SXSW and

How a Yangon indie-rock band got to America's premier music fest, evaded disaster, found their Texas family and lived a dream

GREG HOLLAND

greg.c.holland@gmail.com

'Difficult times have helped me to understand better than before, how infinitely rich and beautiful life is in every way, and that so many things that one goes worrying about are of no importance whatsoever.'

– Isak Dinesen

IT all started with a phone call from Darko, the lead singer of Yangon's indie-rock quartet, Side Effect.

I'd come to know Darko from gigs and parties. We'd fervently discussed music, and he'd gotten me out of drumming retirement for a few Kulture Shock gigs.

"Hey Greg, we've got a problem. Our manager is being called away on business for two months and we need someone to help us get to South-by-Southwest [SXSW]. Can you help us?"

In the time I've been in Myanmar, I've come to know Side Effect as perhaps Yangon's hardest-working indie band. Life under a cruel regime had the effect of sparking dreams of elsewhere, and they had hopes of playing gigs in the United States from the start. They had applied online to play SXSW and, to their astonishment, they were invited.

SXSW is held annually in the United States in March in Austin, Texas, and has come to be known as "the" place where

music industry insiders, artists, musicians, filmmakers and tech-savvy entrepreneurs attend the world's biggest industry festival – putting it all on the line with the hope of being recognised for their talent.

Darko's request prompted a moment of pause, but the immediate lure of heading to the US for live music and BBQ fogged my better judgement.

"YES," I responded. "Definitely yes, but let me just think for a day!"

I knew helping four Myanmar musicians travel to the US would be a great deal of responsibility to take on-board, but an opportunity like that doesn't fall into your lap every day.

There would be meetings and phone calls, money problems, promotion, visas, flights, accommodations, equipment, merchandise and fundraising to deal with. All of this raced through my mind as I stared at the words "40 percent of your goal raised" on the band's Pledge Music campaign page, a website that helps artists crowd-source funds for projects.

Calculating the risks

We had a 3-month period to raise the funds. Would it be worth it? Should the band tour Europe in the summer instead? Should they finish their second album and buy new equipment to record with? Did I need to go? Should I send them on their own? I recalled the experiences of

my younger self, playing in bands, touring the UK, making petrol money whilst learning to pilfer sandwiches from service stations.

A few days after the phone call, we sat down for a tense meeting while I showed them their finances and tried to be as realistic as possible.

"Basically, if this were a business, you'd be investing this huge lump sum of money you currently don't have into a project with zero return. Currently, the numbers don't add up."

I felt like a parent telling a group of children that Santa didn't exist. In the silence that ensued, I was consumed by self-loathing.

Then the band responded. "This is our dream. We have been in this band for 10 years, and we've been asked to play SXSW in America. We never thought this would happen. We will be the first Myanmar band to make it there. We don't care how much money we owe, or how much debt we get in! This will never happen again. There is no next year. We have to do this now!" Darko said.

Tser Htoo, the drummer, had been with the band from the start and seconded the motion. Guitarist Eaddhi looked on sullenly while Hein Lwin's limited understanding of the English language left him momentarily in the dark.

I'll remember that speech for the rest of my days because it floored me, and in that moment I went from "dream-crusher" to "dream-



The band pose in front of Austin's famous mural on the last day of their visit.

facilitator". I'd forgotten who I was talking to. These guys had lived through a military regime, paid for gigs out of their own pockets, had their lyrics censored and played on borrowed and beaten-up equipment for years. No other band at SXSW would have a story like theirs, and no band deserved more to travel halfway around the world for America's most important music festival.

"Ok," I said, "I'll do it."

No one gets in the way of a dream

Small amounts of money rolled in via the Pledge Music page, but because of Myanmar's lack of online banking, local fans couldn't donate so we had to host a fundraising gig. With the help of Flamingo Bar and bands who played for free, Side Effect made just enough money to make the trip barely possible.

Everything was rushed: The flights were booked on Friday, March 8, so we'd be on time for the start of the music festival on March 12. Visas were picked up the next day, Saturday morning, and we met at Yangon International Airport on Saturday night. We'd be gone for 12 days. Teary-eyed family members waved us off as we walked into what would become the first in a series of roadblocks and nightmares to reach the other side.

We encountered our first challenge of the journey at the Yangon airport: It turned out that the band needed transit visas to get off the plane in Bangkok even though we had a connecting flight. We were told we couldn't board. If we missed our connection, that was it, we'd all go home and it would all be my fault. We were soon passed onto another airline that would provide transit visas. One last flight was available but reaching capacity, and we had 20 minutes to book it through a travel agent.

A long-time friend and supporter of the band, Susanne Kempel, came to our rescue and rang her travel agent. I paced the airport until the phone rang. The confirmation came through and we were rushed through to board, my palms still dripping but the nausea subsiding.

Once in Bangkok, I spent some restless hours on an airport bench constantly checking my phone for the e-tickets for our Bangkok to Austin flights, which still hadn't come in. We had the confirmation, but no e-ticket – something was off. We camped by the gate and spoke to the first person that arrived. Finally, an attendant arrived and pulled our flights up on the screen. "It seems your tickets have been cancelled due to possible fraud on the credit card," the lady at the departures desk said.

The nausea returned.

Darko and I launched a charm offensive. He sweet-talked a flight attendant. I cajoled the lady at the desk, who called a colleague. The last

five tickets were ours: We checked in 20 minutes to take-off. Four flights, several films and handfuls of Xanax later, we were in Austin.

A gig, a new family, a tragedy and our Texas "Mom"

Waiting for us on the other side was Karen – a Texan, a musician, a food-lover, a wonderful warm human being who (luckily for us) happens to also be an avid social media user. She'd heard the band's story on travel-show host Anthony Bourdain's CNN program *Parts Unknown*, which ran an episode about Myanmar. After many emails and tweets, Karen met us at the airport in Austin late Sunday night. She waited at the bottom of the stairs with a laminated Side Effect sign and squeezed every one of us like we were her long-lost sons. She took us to her home, cooked up some Mexican food and kept the cold beers coming as we stayed up and got to know each other. Karen had taken a week off work to drive us around Austin, feed us and look after us: This was Southern hospitality turned up to 11. We met her neighbours, her family, her friends, and they all wanted to hear about the band, and everyone wanted to feed us. It's hard to accept such kindness, but I was beginning to feel this journey swelling into something bigger than a rock show.

Our first morning out on Karen's porch proved entertaining for me as the band watched in startled silence as a garbage truck pulled up and grabbed a recycling bin using its robotic arm. The guys grabbed their phones and chased the truck, snapping pictures in fits of laughter. I was to become a mediator between East and West; explaining tipping and waiting for the walk sign – life-saving tips depending on which bar you are in or street you are on, which is no laughing matter considering what we witnessed on Wednesday night.

We were at a downtown venue and I'd become separated from half the band. I walked up the block to check if they were out for fresh air. I turned back to the venue to see sirens flashing and bodies lying all over the street. The nausea returned. A drunk driver had just plowed into 30 pedestrians. After a frantic search of the street I found the guys outside a pizza shop. "We told you we'd meet here at 1am. Didn't you hear us?" said Darko. Clearly not. Karen picked us up and we stayed up late watching the coverage on the local news. Two people were dead and 23 injured. By a minute, we'd missed being part of the disaster.

Thursday was the day of the performance. It was also Darko's birthday and it was the day Tser Htoo woke up to his very first drum kit. Karen and her cousin Lou had concocted a plan to hit up Austin's

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beyond with Side Effect



The Texas family from left to right: Eaidghi, Hein Lwin, Karen, Mary, Tser Htoo, Lou and Darko. Photos: Greg Holland

pawn shops and find one for the band. A classic, sparkling red Ludwig kit appeared in the front room that day like it was Christmas morning. Lou and his wife, Mary, became part of our ever-growing Texas family.

That afternoon, we headed down to the venue for the band's SXSW showcase. BD Riley's is a bar and club in the heart of Austin on 6th Street, at a major crossroads. It was impossible for this venue to not be packed. As we looked around, I realised it was full of Burmese people and travellers who'd visited Myanmar. Everyone knew us but we didn't know anyone. The performance went off without a hitch. Music fans outside leaned in the open windows while everyone inside the venue hung on every word and note. The crowd fell completely silent when Darko introduced the song "Meiktila", explaining the communal violence that has marred Myanmar's progress and apologising for the country's disgraces. The audience members overwhelmed the band with praise at the end of their performance.

It's not over...

The next few days proved to be a stressful blur as we tried to organise a last-minute show for the Burmese community in Houston. We also realised there was a problem with the guys' visas. In the rush of picking them up, I failed to see that the window of time requested had been denied and our visas would end two days before we flew home. Passports, paperwork, phone calls to the airline, emails to the embassy – I was in over my head but tried to downplay the nightmare so as not to ruin the trip

for the guys. We chose the cheapest option and rushed our visa extension. (We still didn't have confirmation when we left Denver for Tokyo four days later. Don't ask me how it all worked out.)

Meanwhile, the performance contracts from SXSW stipulated the band could face deportation if they played non-festival shows, which seemed at odds with the festival spirit of bands playing all day every day. American bands could get away with breaking the rules, but we were limited. Karen, our most gracious host, decided the band would play in her front room. Lou brought his PA rig from his ranch, we had a new drum kit and Karen lent us a guitar amp. She emailed her friends and neighbours, and on Saturday morning we played a breakfast show to a packed house. Everyone brought boxes of donuts, flasks of coffee and juice. A neighbour even turned up with some drum equipment for Tser Htoo to take home.

Afterward, some audience members gave us a lift to the only pagoda in Texas. The Houston Burmese community had sent word to Austin about our lack of transport and money, so a volunteer driver met us at the monastery. A couple of hours later we arrived at a gas station where we met our first Myanmar-Houston expat, Stephen. He rushed us to a church to meet some of the Burmese community who had gathered for a food drive. We were quickly introduced to the room and invited everyone to the show before being whisked off to set up for the performance at the Houston International Trade Centre.

It wasn't the US rock'n'roll event a band dreams of, but that night they played to a room full of Burmese families who had fled the regime over the past 30 years. Darko spoke only in Burmese between songs, and when the crowd danced and joined in on backing vocals, I knew the anxiety, the screw-ups and the expense had been worth it for this room of people to know that someone back home was succeeding and was afforded the opportunity to travel through their talent and their dedication to their art.

For the next two days the people who had shown us such warmth and hospitality indulged us. Our new friends and family showed us Austin. It was the calm after the storm. The night before we left we sat around the dinner table with Karen, Mary and Lou while the dogs – Butch and Elton Juan – did laps around the table looking for a sympathetic face.

Along with a new drum kit, jet lag and an indomitable attitude, the band brought back with them the torch of possibility for other musicians to participate in the international world of music. We were told by supporters and online fans to thank our spirits and gods for everything that happened, but it was the goodness of people that made this happen. Every step of the way, someone had wanted to help this band realise their dream. As we sat down for a beer at Bangkok airport on our return journey, we wearily raised our glasses to an unforgettable journey.

"Here's to finding a new tour manager," I said, "but it was an honour to share the ride."



Side Effect performs at BD Riley's (above) and Karen's front room (below).



Living well in Myanmar



Difficulty sleeping? Don't reach for pills right away

CHRISTOPH
GELSDORF, MD



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FOR various reasons, people sometimes have trouble falling asleep and staying asleep. Insomnia is a common problem for my patients in Yangon and California. Unaddressed, it can lead to fatigue, anxiety, depression and a short-temper.

In both Myanmar and the United States, doctors often quickly prescribe medications to help patients sleep. In the US the drug might be Zolpidem, which is not approved for long-term use and now carries a warning that advises people not to drive the day after

Use your bed and bedroom for sleep and sex only. No other non-sleep activities should take place in the bedroom. This means no watching TV, no using the computer, no eating, etc.

Don't sleep anywhere besides your bed. Avoid napping on couches or falling asleep in other rooms.

Make your sleeping environment comfortable. This can be difficult in Myanmar and very much depends on your socioeconomic status. A quiet space with low light and a comfortable temperature is best.

Identify a "wind down" technique that works for you. Attempt to take a break from everyday anxieties by bathing, meditating, listening to music or drinking herbal tea.

If you lie in bed and are struggling to fall asleep, or you wake up in the night and can't

every night, 2-3 hours before you go to bed.

Avoid caffeinated drinks after lunchtime. Limit alcohol to one glass per day.

A regular exercise routine can be helpful, but limit strenuous activity within 2 hours of bedtime.

When further intervention is required, the doctor and patient can consider a carefully planned program of sleep restriction. The idea is to use sleep deprivation to build physiologic pressure to sleep. For example, the patient might begin by restricting time in bed to 5 hours per night. Once they are able to sleep for 4.5 of those 5 hours, they would increase their total time in bed to 5.5 hours. The goal is to continue this pattern of increasing time in bed by about 30 minutes per week with the hope of eventually reaching an adequate amount of sleep.

Diazepam (Valium) causes problems with addiction and stays in the body too long. Rather than take pills, a healthier first approach to improving sleep is focusing on "sleep hygiene".

taking the medicine. In Myanmar, the most common sleep-aid seems to be Diazepam (Valium), which not only causes problems with addiction but also stays in the body too long to be a responsible sleep agent.

Rather than take pills, a healthier first approach to improving sleep is focusing on "sleep hygiene". Sleep hygiene involves changing behaviour to complement the body's natural circadian rhythm. Talk with your doctor first to make sure no medical conditions are compromising your sleep. Then consider the following ideas:

Go to bed at the same time every night. Choose that time according to when you feel slightly sleepy. The idea is to get your sleep cycle into a regular rhythm.

fall back to sleep, then get out of bed and do something non-stimulating. This could mean writing in a journal, reading an unexciting book or reviewing the warranty on your refrigerator. Be careful to avoid bright light. Don't lie in bed watching the clock and getting frustrated. Try to limit the amount of time that you're awake in bed. If you're not sleeping after 20 minutes, get out of bed and try a boring activity.

Establish a regular time to wake up each morning. Use an alarm clock and try not to vary the time by more than 1 hour. If possible, get daylight exposure within a few minutes of waking up in the morning.

Eat healthy and stick to regular meal times. Dinner in particular should be around the same time

These behaviours, if implemented consistently over several weeks, often get my patients sleeping better, leading them to thrive in other aspects of their lives as well. If you're at the point of wanting to discuss this with your doctor, a good start is to keep a diary in which you estimate how much of the night you're spending in bed and how much you're actually sleeping. The information will be a basis from which to start making behavioural changes.

Christoph Gelsdorf is an American Board of Family Medicine physician who has a health clinic in Yangon (www.gelsdorfMD.com). He is a member of the GP Society of the Myanmar Medical Association. Reader inquiries are welcomed.



ST PETERSBURG

Russian lawmakers ban children's beauty pageants

Lawmakers in Russia's second city of St Petersburg last week passed legislation banning children's beauty pageants as psychologically damaging to their participants.

The legislation was initiated by controversial lawmaker Vitaly Milonov, a prominent backer of a law banning the "propaganda" of gay relationships with minors.

"Taking part in such contests crushes a child's psyche," Milonov told AFP.

"I think people who hold such contests should be kept away from children. I grew up in a normal era and then no one compared children by their outer appearance, like dogs."

He estimated that about 3000 children's beauty pageants are held every year in Russia, with participants aged from four years old.

Some involve "a catwalk show in swimsuits", he complained.

The law says beauty pageants "could cause harm to the health and/or physical, intellectual, spiritual and moral development of those under 16".

The local law introduces a fine of up to 1 million rubles (US\$28,000) for the organisers of such contests.

Milonov, a Saint Petersburg lawmaker for the ruling United Russia party, is an influential crusader for conservative values who has sparred with British actor Stephen Fry over gay rights.

He introduced a law banning "gay propaganda" in Saint Petersburg in 2012 before a similar national law was signed by President Vladimir Putin last summer.

The legislation is designed to protect children from "propaganda" of paedophilia and LGBT rights

JERUSALEM

Stones plan first Israel gig, but urged to reconsider

The Rolling Stones announced plans last week for an Israeli concert in June, prompting pro-Palestinian activists promoting a boycott of the country to say that would be equivalent to performing in apartheid South Africa.

To jubilation from the Israeli media, a spokeswoman for the British rock icons said the band would perform in Tel Aviv's Hayarkon Park on June 4 as part of its forthcoming European tour.

But a spokeswoman for the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Committee noted that the Stones had been vocal opponents of racial segregation in South Africa, saying Israel also practises apartheid.

"Palestinian organisations urge the Rolling Stones to refrain from playing in apartheid Israel and not to condone Israel's violations of international law and human rights against the Palestinian people," Rafeef Ziadah wrote.

"The Rolling Stones were at the forefront of enforcing a cultural boycott of apartheid South Africa, but performing in Israel at this time is morally equivalent to performing in South Africa during the apartheid era."

After months of rumours of an impending first-ever visit by the band, Israeli media were jubilant.

"It's official! The Rolling Stones are coming to Tel Aviv," proclaimed Haaretz's website.

It said Israeli promoter Shuki Weiss, once quoted as saying he would retire after bringing the Stones to Israel, had guaranteed the band \$6.7 million (€4.9 million) for the one-night stand.

"Israelis finally get some satisfaction as Rolling Stones confirm concert date," was the *Jerusalem Post* headline.

"This is a historic and very meaningful visit," it quoted Weiss as saying. The *Post* said Weiss had been trying to tempt the band since 1988.

"The longest negotiation I ever conducted is coming to an end," it quoted Weiss.

A growing number of governments and international businesses have said they will not trade with Israeli firms with ties to Jewish settlements, highlighting the success of a Palestinian-led boycott campaign.

LONDON

Brazilian Helena Rizzo named world's best female chef

Brazilian chef Helena Rizzo, of the Mani restaurant in Sao Paulo, was last week named Veuve Clicquot's World's Best Female Chef for 2014.

Rizzo, who last year became the first winner of Veuve Clicquot's Latin America's Best Female Chef, will receive the award at a ceremony in London next month.

She takes the award from Italian Nadia Santini, who cooks at the three-Michelin-starred Dal Pecatore in Canneto sull'Oglio, Lombardy.

Rizzo apprenticed at Spain's El Celler de Can Roca, currently rated as the world's best restaurant.

She opened Mani with her husband, chef Daniel Redondo, in 2006. Their speciality is an interpretation of classic Brazilian maniocas baked and served with a foam tucupi sauce, coconut milk and oil with white truffle.

"I am not and have never intended to be 'the best female chef in the world'," Rizzo said of the award.

"I hope that this award makes the gastronomic world open its eyes to the work of female cooks and to the wonderful kitchens we have in Brazil."

The list of 2014's top 50 restaurants will be announced on April 28 at a London reception organised by British magazine *Restaurant*.

El Celler de Can Roca last year knocked Noma from the top spot. The Copenhagen restaurant, run by Rene Redzepi, had won the previous three years.

- AFP

Go Thai style with tofu

A spicy salad and simple rice bowl refresh an ailing body

AFTER a busy week, and feeling under the weather, I needed something to perk up my taste buds. This sweet, sour and spicy salad with a Thai-style dressing turned out to be just the thing to restore my appetite. Myanmar-style hard tofu salad is very popular and is available at some supermarkets, or on the street. We call it *pae' pyar thoke*. It can also be stir-fried with bean sprouts.

I have cooked rice with fresh peas and shallots, where the green-and-white combination looks very fresh, as well as tasting delicious.



phyo.arbidans@gmail.com

FRIED HARD TOFU SALAD THAI STYLE

SERVES 6

- 3-4 pieces hard tofu
- 200g cabbage, finely shredded
- 1 tsp garlic oil, optional
- 2 tbsp dried shrimp powder
- 2 medium onions, thinly sliced
- 3 tbsp toasted and salted peanuts, crushed
- 1-2 cups vegetable oil

FOR DRESSING

- ¼ cup fish sauce
- 2½ tbsp sugar
- ¼ cup lime juice

- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
 - 3 green chillis, diced
- Wash the *pae' pyar* and dry in sieve. Drain well.
- Slice the onion and soak in water for 10 minutes. Then wash and squeeze the water out. Pat dry with kitchen paper.
- Wash the cabbage, cut off the thick stems and pat dry, then shred finely. When the *pae' pyar* are ready, cut them into two diagonally. Then heat the oil in the wok. This recipe is for shallow-fry – deep-fry will need 1½

P H Y O ' S C O O K I N G A D V E N T U R E



Chicken rice with peas and shallots. Photo: Phyo

- more cups of oil.
- Add the *pae' pyar* into the wok slowly and fry until crisp and brown on all sides. Remove from wok and drain off excess oil.
- For the dressing, dissolve the sugar in the hot water, then mix in garlic, green chilli, lime juice and fish sauce.
- MAKING THE SALAD**
- Slice the fried *pae' pyar* thinly. In a big bowl, add shredded cabbage, onions, crushed peanuts, garlic oil (optional) and dressing. Toss them well.
- Good for an afternoon snack with
- Shan tea or green tea or serve with warm plain or steamed rice.
- CHICKEN RICE WITH PEAS AND SHALLOTS**
- SERVES 6
- 2 cups rice
 - 3 cups chicken stock
 - 280-300g fresh peas
 - ½ cup sliced shallots
- Wash the rice, drain and place in the rice cooker. Add the chicken stock as it cooks.

- Boil 1 litre of water in a saucepan. Add one tablespoon of salt into the boiling water and return to the boil. Add the peas and boil until soft. Then drain the hot water and replace with cold water.
- Slice the shallots thinly.
- As soon as the rice is cooked, drain the cold water and add the peas into the rice cooker. Stir well. Sprinkle the shallots on top and cover. Serve with curry and vegetables.
- I have used chicken stock powder that is MSG-free. Use 2 teaspoons of chicken powder for 1 litre of water.

Cafe offers a setting that's easy on the eyes and a menu that's big on taste

LWIN MAR HTUN
lwinmarhtun.mcm@gmail.com

EASY Café is hard to find. I struggled to make my way there the first time, since the small signboard was sandwiched between those of two other businesses.

It's a small shop, but the decoration is lovely and soothing, painted with greys and with three big, vibrant art pieces on the wall.

On this particular afternoon, the crowd was mostly foreigners busy typing on their laptop computers. My friend and I chose a table for two near the counter.

A waitress soon passed us a paper menu and greeted us "Mingalabar!" I give her high marks for her charming smile and voice. The menus were equally charming, with a handwritten-style font and ancient-paper look.

In addition to the paper menu, the waitress also presented gorgeous photos of all the choices on an iPad – a fine use of technology.

The waitress explained patiently when we asked about the contents of each dish. The menu is somewhat wide-ranging, with Taiwanese, Asian and Western options. I ordered the shop's new menu item, "honey-glazed chicken rice" (K3500), and my friend ordered "cheesy chicken" (K3500). We did not try the signature dish, "Taiwan braised pork rice with specialty egg".

All the same, our meals were delicious, arriving after a 20-minute



The house special. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

wait. The dishes looked and smelled entirely fresh.

The presentation of the honey-glazed chicken rice was especially nice, with white rice and toasted-brown chicken decorated with tomato, cucumber and green salad. The taste, however, was slightly bitter because the meat was overcooked. I still enjoyed the meal

and hope for a perfect experience next time.

Cheesy chicken also had a beautiful golden colour and the first bite was really crispy, then instantly became wonderfully soft and rich. The plate included four pieces of chicken that one person could easily finish.

The beverage menu includes a

variety of coffee options and seasonal fruit juices. On the dessert front, the shop claims to be "famous" for their pudding, and ice cream is also available.

Overall, it's a small, lovely and relaxed place to go for a snack or light meal. Service is great and the prices are reasonable, ranging from K2000 to K7000.

Easy Café

30A/C1 Bo Yar Nyunt

Food	6
Beverage	7
Service	8
Value for Money	8
X-Factor	7

Total Score: 7.4/10

French pop stars Brigitte perform at Institut Francais



Geraud and Adrien, entrepreneurs, with Henri from MRTV-4



Darko from Side Effect



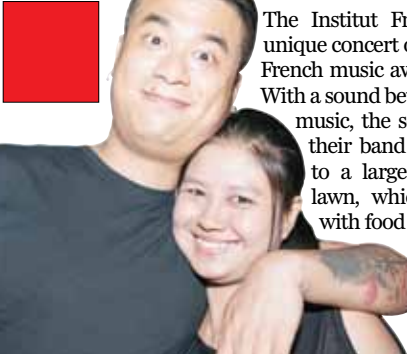
Marita from Myanmar Survey Research, Laura from the German embassy and Alberto from the EU delegation



Sarah, Marie and Florence from IFB



Cesar, Alex and friends



Tser Htoo of Side Effect and Mai Dinah

The Institut Francais de Birmanie hosted a unique concert on March 25 by the glamorous, French music award-winning pop stars Brigitte. With a sound between pop-lounge and retro-folk music, the sequin-clad women of song and their band gave a marathon performance to a large audience assembled on IFB's lawn, which had a cabaret atmosphere with food catered by the French-style bakery La Tartine.

Photos: ima/Emmanuel Maillard

Golden Kitchen restaurant opening

Photos: ima/Emmanuel Maillard



Craig Shim



Leena Salim



Justin Jeon

Golden Kitchen, a new restaurant near Inya Lake under the management of Jean Curci of Mojo bar, hosted a pre-opening event on March 27. The menu offers a combination of Japanese, French, Italian and Myanmar-inspired dishes made with organic vegetables.



Luyba and Ruben



Carla and Jean from Golden Kitchen

River Gallery II opens show of new work by Htein Lin

"Beyond the Itch", a show of paintings by Htein Lin, opened at curator Gill Pattison's River Gallery II on March 26, marking the first time in seven years that a body of the artist's work has been shown in Yangon. Htein Lin spent much of the intervening period in the United Kingdom but recently moved back to Myanmar where he originally found his artistic inspiration and is working on several new projects.

The exhibition presents a combination of old and new work, and guests at the opening were treated to a special painting performance.

Photos: ima/Emmanuel Maillard



Cecilia



Artists Sai, Aung Myint and Thyitar



Matteo



Gill Pattison



Joern Kristensen, Director of IID, and his wife



D Nyein Linn



Stephanie Ashmore and Kathrin Hakenbeck



Jill Kavanagh and Jessica Spanton



Moe Minn

Yangon Cigar Club meets at La Planteur for 1st annual dinner



Philippe May (left) and his wife Caroline Thu Hang (right) with Yangon Cigar Club members.

About 30 cigar-lovers turned out last Friday for the annual dinner of the Yangon Cigar Club at Le Planteur restaurant. According to President Philippe May of Global World Insurance, the club was founded last year by four cigar lovers, including Thomas Henseler of the Belmond Governor's Residence, Philipp Hoffmann of JJ Pun and Ola Borge of KPMG. May's wife, Caroline Thu Hang, was on hand and there were brand-name cigars including Davidoff, Patoro, Cohiba, Avo, Zino and Arturo Fuente. Although the Yangon Cigar Club is by invitation only, May says people interested in joining events can email yangoncigarclub@gmail.com

Revlon new product launch



Khine Zar Min Tun

Su Nandar Kyaw

Annie Ni Khin

Revlon held their new cosmetics launch at Roman Beauty Salon at Hotel Yangon on March 19.

Hip-hop underground

Photos: ima/Emmanuel Maillard



YAK

Ar-T

Hnin Htut Swe

Hip-hop crews laid down rhymes Wednesday night at Flamingo Bar.

YAK

Estee Lauder make-up launch



Eindra Kyaw Zin

Saw Yu Wai

Make-up artist Khin San Win and Ar-T



Bobby Wang

Nandar Khin

Ariel Thu Ta

Estee Lauder launched new products at the Park Royal Hotel on March 23.

Water Library grand opening



Wai Kyaw Ei, Khant Khant Kyaw and Khine Cindy Soe



Kalayar, Bay Bay, Poe Poe and Mya

Water Library held its grand opening ceremony on March 21. The hotel is located on Ma Naw Harry Street, Dagon.



Mr Veroder and Robert Veal

SKAL international re-appears in Myanmar



Khin Aung Htun @ Nyi Nyi, Sonny Aung Khin, Marco Battistotti

Following a long hiatus, the international association of travel professionals known as SKAL has re-constituted itself in Myanmar with founder and Yangon president Sonny Aung Khin of Padonmar Restaurant leading the effort. The second SKAL dinner in Yangon was held March 21 at The Governor's Residence. About 40 of Myanmar's prime movers in travel and related industries were on hand to join Marco G Battistotti, who flew in from Malaysia to attend the event as part of his duties as SKAL International President, based in Penang. With nearly 17,000 members in 400 clubs in 89 countries, SKAL aims to promote good networking in the travel and tourism industry.



(left to right) Oliver Soe Thet, Sonny Aung Khin, Phyo Wai Yarzar, Khin Aung Htun, Marco Battistotti, Wang Li Jun, Cherie Aung-Khin, Thomas Henseler, Naung Naung Han, Susie Moe Aung, Stuart Becker, Min Thein, Edwin Briels, Su Su Hlaing, Phya Phyo Oo

DOMESTIC FLIGHT SCHEDULES

YANGON TO NAY PYI TAW				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
FMI A1	1,2,3,4,5	7:30	8:30	
Y5 777	1,2,3,4,6	7:45	8:25	
FMI A1	6	8:00	9:00	
FMI B1	1,2,3,4,5	11:30	12:30	
FMI A1	7	15:30	16:30	
FMI C1	1,2,3,4,5	16:45	17:45	

NAY PYI TAW TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
FMI A2	1,2,3,4,5	8:50	9:50	
FMI A2	6	10:00	11:00	
FMI B2	1,2,3,4,5	13:00	14:00	
FMI A2	7	17:00	18:00	
Y5 778	1,2,3,4,6	17:30	18:10	
FMI C2	1,2,3,4,5	18:05	19:05	

YANGON TO MANDALAY				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YH 909	1,2,5,7	6:00	7:40	
YH 917	3,7	6:00	7:40	
YJ 891	Daily	6:00	8:05	
K7 282	Daily	6:30	8:40	
YJ 901	1,2	6:10	7:35	
YJ 901	3	6:30	7:55	
YH 917	1,2,4,5,6	6:10	8:30	
Y5 234	Daily	6:15	7:30	
6T 401	2,3,4,5,6,7	6:20	8:25	
6T 401	1	6:20	8:45	
YH 833	2	7:00	8:40	
YH 831	4,6	7:00	8:40	
WV9 201	Daily	7:30	8:55	
K7 266	Daily	8:00	10:05	
K7 642	Daily	8:30	12:20	
8M 6603	2,4,7	9:00	10:10	
YJ 751/WV9 7751	5,7	10:30	12:25	
YJ 761	1,2,4,6	10:30	12:25	
K7 844	Daily	11:00	14:10	
YJ 211	5,7	11:00	12:25	
YJ 201	2,3,4	11:00	12:25	
YJ 601/WV9 7601	6	11:00	12:25	
YH 737	3,5	11:15	13:25	
YH 727	1	11:15	13:25	
YH 729	2,4,6	11:15	14:15	
YH 737	7	11:30	13:40	
WV9 251	2,5	11:15	12:40	
YJ 003	3	11:30	12:55	
K7 226	2,4,6	13:00	14:25	
6T 501	3,5,6,7	14:30	16:30	
WV9 129	Daily	15:00	16:55	
YH 731	Daily	15:00	17:10	
YJ 7211/WV9 211	1,2,3,4,6,7	15:30	16:55	
6T 501	1,2,4	15:30	17:30	

MANDALAY TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YJ 901	1,2	7:50	9:55	
YH 910	Daily	7:40	9:45	
YJ 901	3	8:10	9:35	
Y5 233	Daily	8:10	9:25	

YJ 891	Daily	8:20	10:15	
YH 918	Daily	8:30	10:45	
6T 402	Daily	8:45	10:45	
YH 918	2	9:10	11:05	
WV9 201	Daily	9:10	11:05	
WV9 144	Daily	9:20	10:45	
Y5 132	3,5,6,7	9:30	10:30	
K7 267	Daily	10:20	12:25	
K7 823	2,4,7	11:25	14:25	
YH 834	2	12:00	13:55	
YH 832	4,6	12:30	13:55	
K7 643	Daily	12:35	16:25	
YJ 212	7	15:00	16:25	
YJ 212	5	15:00	16:55	
YJ 202	2,3,4	15:30	16:55	
YJ 762	1,2,4,6	16:05	17:30	
YJ 602/WV9 7602	6	15:40	17:05	
YJ 752/WV9 7752	5	15:55	18:00	
WV9 120	1,3,6	16:30	17:55	
YH 728	1	16:45	18:10	
YH 738	5	16:50	18:45	
K7 227	2,4,7	16:50	18:15	
6T 502	3,5,6,7	16:50	18:55	
WV9 129	Daily	17:10	18:35	
YH 732	Daily	17:10	19:15	
WV9 211	Daily	17:10	19:15	
8M 6604	2,4,7	17:20	18:30	
YJ 752/WV9 7752	7	17:20	18:45	
YH 738	3,7	17:25	18:50	
6T 502	1,2,4	17:50	19:55	
YJ 004	3	18:00	19:25	
YH 730	2	18:00	19:25	

YANGON TO NYAUNG U				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YJ 891	Daily	6:00	7:20	
YH 909	Daily	6:00	8:25	
YH 917	Daily	6:10	7:45	
YJ 901	1,2	6:10	8:20	
WV9 141	Daily	6:15	7:35	
6T 401	Daily	6:20	7:40	
YJ 7141/WV9 141	Daily	6:20	7:40	
YJ 901	6	6:30	7:50	
K7 282	Daily	6:30	7:50	
WV9 143	Daily	7:15	8:35	
YJ 601/WV9 7601	6	11:00	13:05	
6T 501	3,5,6,7	14:30	17:20	
YH 731	Daily	15:00	17:55	
WV9 211	Daily	15:30	17:40	
6T 501	1,2,4	15:30	18:20	
YJ 7211/WV9 211	5	15:30	16:50	
YJ 7211/WV9 211	1,2,3,4,6,7	15:30	17:40	

NYAUNG U TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YJ 891	Daily	7:35	10:15	
YH 918	Daily	7:45	10:45	
WV9 141	Daily	7:50	10:40	
YJ 7141/WV9 141	Daily	7:55	10:55	
6T 401	Daily	7:55	10:45	
YJ 901	6	8:05	9:25	

YH 910	Daily	8:25	9:45	
YJ 901	1,2	8:35	9:55	
WV9 144	Daily	8:50	10:10	
K7 283	Daily	10:40	12:00	
YJ 7211/ WV9 211	5	17:05	18:25	
6T 502	3,5,6,7	17:35	18:55	
YJ 7211/ WV9 211	1,2,3,4,6,7	17:55	19:15	
WV9 211	Daily	17:55	19:15	
YH 732	Daily	17:55	19:15	
6T 502	1,2,4	18:35	19:55	

YANGON TO MYITKYINA				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YH 833	2	7:00	10:05	
YH 831	4,6	7:00	10:35	
K7 642	Daily	8:30	10:50	
YJ 201	2,3,4	11:00	13:50	
WV9 251	2,5	11:15	14:10	

MYITKYINA TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YH 834	2	10:35	13:55	
YH 832	4,6	10:35	13:55	
YH 834	2	12:55	15:20	
YJ 202	2,3,4	14:05	16:55	
K7 643	Daily	14:05	16:25	
WV9 252	2,5	16:05	19:00	

YANGON TO HEHO				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YJ 891	Daily	6:00	8:50	
YH 917	Daily	6:10	9:35	
WV9 141	Daily	6:15	8:20	
6T 401	Daily	6:20	9:20	
K7 282	Daily	6:30	9:30	
WV9 201	Daily	7:30	9:40	
K7 828	1,3,5	7:30	8:45	
K7 822	2,4,7	7:30	10:20	
K7 266	Daily	8:00	9:15	
YJ 751/WV9 7751	5	10:00	11:10	
YJ 751/WV9 7751	7	10:30	11:40	
YJ 761	1,2,4,6	10:30	11:40	
YH 505	3,4,6,7	10:30	11:55	
YH 505	2	11:00	12:25	
K7 844	Daily	11:00	15:00	
YH 737	3,5,7	11:15	12:40	
YH 727	1	11:15	12:40	
WV9 203	Daily	11:00	12:10	
WV9 119	1,3,6	11:15	12:25	
6T 501	3,5,6,7	14:30	16:30	
WV9 129	Daily	15:00	16:10	
YH 731	Daily	15:00	16:25	
6T 501	1,2,4	15:30	16:40	

HEHO TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
WV9 141	Daily	8:35	10:40	
YJ 7141/WV9 141	Daily	8:50	10:55	
YJ 891	Daily	9:05	10:15	
YH 918	Daily	9:35	10:45	
6T 402	Daily	9:35	10:45	

YH 918	Daily	9:35	10:45	
K7 283	Daily	9:45	12:00	
WV9 201	Daily	9:55	11:05	
K7 267	Daily	11:10	12:25	
YH 506	3,4,6,7	11:55	14:00	
WV9 204	Daily	12:25	13:35	
YH 506	2	12:25	14:30	
K7 829	1,3,5	13:50	15:05	
K7 845	Daily	15:15	18:10	
WV9 120	1,3,6	15:45	17:55	
YJ 762	1,2,4,6	15:20	17:30	
YJ 212	5	15:45	16:55	
6T 501	3,5,6,7	15:55	18:55	
YH 728	1	16:00	18:10	
YH 738	3,7	16:40	18:50	
WV9 129	Daily	16:25	18:35	
YH 732	Daily	16:25	19:15	
6T 501	1,2,4	16:55	19:55	
YH 738	5	17:35	18:45	
YH 730	4	17:35	18:45	

YANGON TO SITTWE			
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
YH 511	1,5	10:30	12:05
6T 607	1,3,6	11:15	12:40
6T 605	2,4,5,7	11:15	13:15
YJ 7309/W9 309	1,3,5,6,7	11:30	12:55
K7 422	Daily	13:30	15:25

WEEKLY PREDICTIONS

AQUARIUS | Jan 20 – Feb 18

Nok Airline (DD)
Tel: 255050, 255021, Fax: 255051

Distinguish between knowledge of power and use of power before you take an important action. Notice that almost every day of your life you negotiate in unexpected ways. Negotiate health a favour and understood in your romantic

It is easier to move from failure to success than from excuses to success. You should know that the goal is more important than the you are willing to drench your work beyond the capacity of the man, you are just not cut out at the top. Know that you must be overseen and followed, but leaders

4th Floor, 113, Thamain Bayan Road, Tarmwe township, Yangon.
Tel: 09-731-35632, Email: williameastel@gmail.com

Universal Crossword

Edited by Timothy E. Parker

SOAKED By Luke Cayon

ACROSS

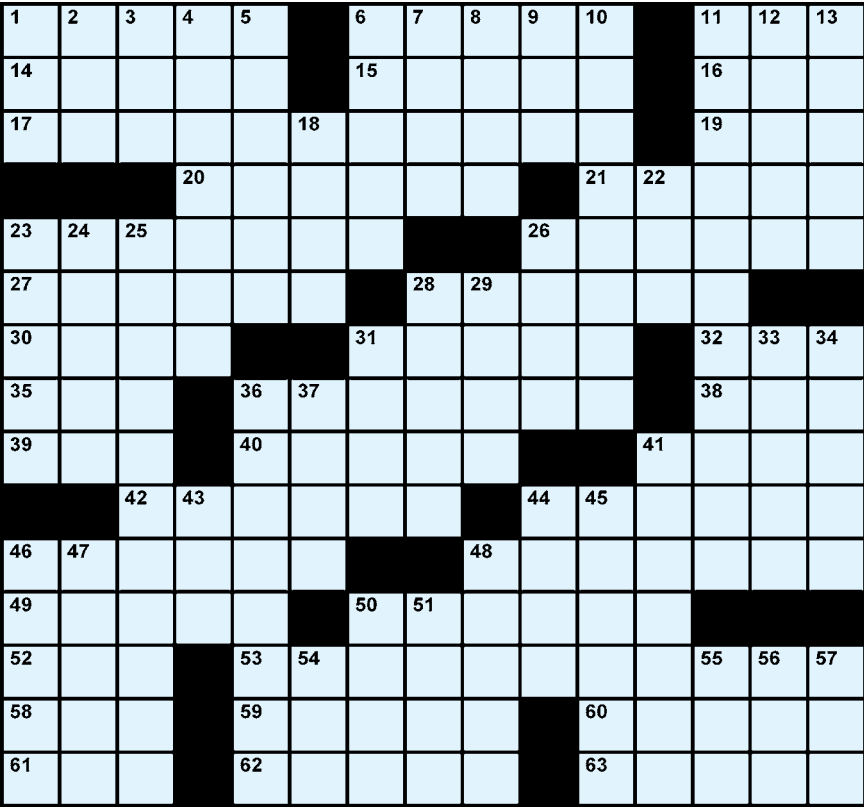
- 1 Drink impolitely
- 6 Dostoyevsky title character
- 11 Aka, in the business world
- 14 Persian Gulf visitor
- 15 Mollusk shell material
- 16 Scott Joplin creation
- 17 Bad thing to step in
- 19 Approximation suffix
- 20 Exist in large quantities
- 21 Brown-tinted photo
- 23 Like the Wild West of yore
- 26 Geometry focus
- 27 "You'll regret it otherwise!"
- 28 Gauguin's island home
- 30 Nag's nosh
- 31 Far from drunk
- 32 Cold-day feature
- 35 A drop in the ocean?
- 36 This crossword, compared to others
- 38 New homophone
- 39 Fashion designer's monogram
- 40 Like Wrigley Field's walls
- 41 Ugly Duckling, in time
- 42 Helpers
- 44 Upward movement
- 46 Wood-smoothing tool
- 48 Palatial residences
- 49 Kind of tea
- 50 Take the wraps off
- 52 Anger
- 53 Old-school "That's totally wrong!"
- 58 Set of parts that need assembling
- 59 a positive note
- 60 Reluctant
- 61 It's an ayeful?
- 62 Perform, King James-style
- 63 Nozzle option

DOWN

- 1 Strew or sprinkle about
- 2 More than stretch the truth
- 3 The best (Abbr.)
- 4 Consumer safety measures
- 5 Investigates
- 6 Small bone of the middle ear
- 7 Sock-mender's oath?
- 8 Like summer tea
- 9 Plate crumb
- 10 Informal wear
- 11 In desperate need of a towel
- 12 Count of jazz

- 13 Turkish generals
- 18 Standout facial feature
- 22 Take in sustenance
- 23 McGraw's sidekick, Baba
- 24 Burnoose wearers
- 25 Gloomy people
- 26 "Like the Wind" ("Dirty Dancing" song)
- 28 Shoppers' bags
- 29 Like many sleepers
- 31 Recipe instruction
- 33 Silly
- 34 Some football kicks
- 36 Type of innocence
- 37 Word with "glades" or "green"
- 41 Seafood morsel

- 43 Words from the bride and groom
- 44 Away from the shore
- 45 Bathroom units
- 46 Like Bart Simpson's hair
- 47 Crag nest
- 48 "Wheel of Fortune" category, sometimes
- 50 Not very nice
- 51 Winged god of love
- 54 Yoko's surname
- 55 1970 Edwin Starr protest song
- 56 Airport stat.
- 57 "Honor ___ father ..."



DILBERT

BY SCOTT ADAMS



PEANUTS

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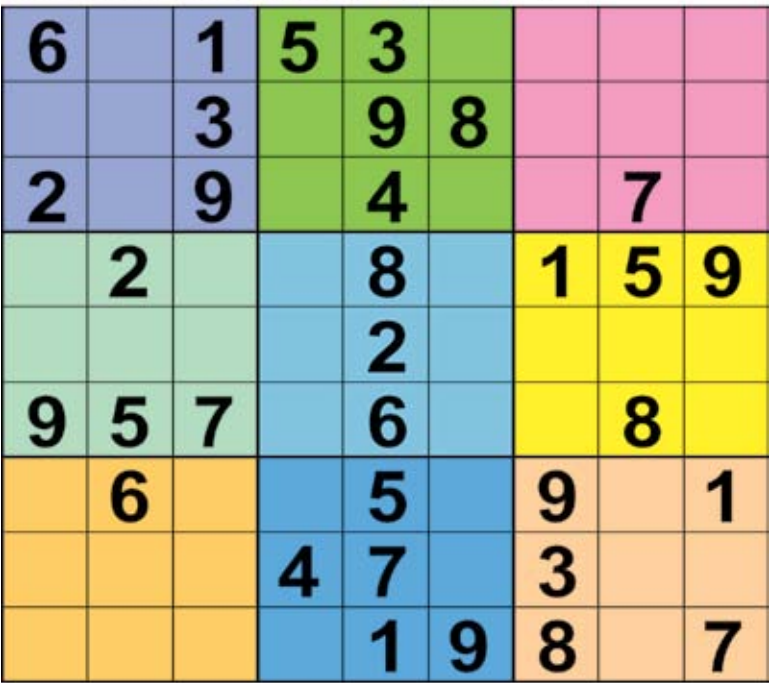
CALVIN AND HOBBS

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SUDOKU PACIFIC

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.



4/3

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally, even backward. Find them and CIRCLE THEIR LETTERS ONLY. DO NOT CIRCLE THE WORD. The leftover letters spell the Wonderword.

DAVID ROCCO (REALITY TV HOST & AUTHOR) Solution: 10 letters



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3/31

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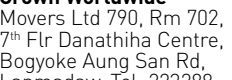
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NEW DELHI

Cricket: Gavaskar to take over troubled India board

Batting legend named 'interim working president'

THE Supreme Court installed batting legend Sunil Gavaskar as the interim head of India's troubled cricket board last week after forcing the scandal-tainted incumbent N. Srinivasan from office.

Three days after warning Srinivasan they would order him to stand down if he tried to cling to power, a panel of judges announced that 64-year-old Gavaskar would take the helm of the Board of Control for Cricket in India.

Gavaskar would be made "interim working president" of the BCCI, said the court, an appointment which places him in charge of the upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

The Twenty20 competition has been embroiled in allegations of illegal betting and spot-fixing, including against Srinivasan's son-in-law.

However it was not immediately clear if Gavaskar would stay on beyond the tournament which begins next month, with a lawyer for the BCCI saying only a current board member could take over on a permanent basis.

There was no immediate reaction from Gavaskar to the March 28 announcement but he has already indicated that he is willing to take on the task of leading the most powerful body in world cricket.

A lawyer for the board meanwhile said that the BCCI "fully endorse[d] the order passed by the Supreme Court today", saying it was in line with its own proposals to the judges.

In its announcement, the court also said that the Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals - the teams at the centre of allegations of illegal betting and spot-fixing in last year's



Gavaskar speaks with cricketer Sachin Tendulkar at training camp. Photo: AFP

competition - would be allowed to take part in this year's IPL.

The same panel of judges said March 27 that both sides should be barred from the eight-team tournament which starts in Abu Dhabi next month.

The U-turn will be a huge relief to the board, with *The Times of India* estimating that the total loss resulting from the teams' suspension could have been as much as US\$1.5 billion.

"We told the court that at this juncture, especially since everything is un-

verified, we could not stop any team in playing in the IPL," CA Sundaram, one of the board's lawyers, told reporters after the hearing.

"It would have affected the tournament as well as millions of cricket-loving public. We are very happy that the court has not passed any order that would have interrupted the tournament."

While there was no immediate reaction from Srinivasan, Sundaram reiterated that the outgoing president had been willing to "stand aside" during the investigations which have ensnared his son-in-law.

The judges were seemingly unimpressed by Srinivasan's offer, aware that he stood aside last year before resuming his duties and then winning re-election.

The panel is looking at a damning report it commissioned into wrongdoing in last year's IPL when former Test bowler Shanthakumaran Sreesanth was caught deliberately bowling badly while playing for the Rajasthan Royals in return for thousands of dollars from bookmakers.

Released in February, the report also concluded that Srinivasan's son-in-law Gurusath Meiyappan - who was the team principal of the Chennai Super Kings - could be guilty of illegal betting on IPL games.

The Super Kings are owned by India Cements, whose managing director is Srinivasan. The team are captained by India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

This year's IPL begins in Abu Dhabi on April 16, with the opening round of matches having been relocated to the United Arab Emirates as India is holding a general election next month.

'We are very happy that the court has not passed any order that would have interrupted the tournament.'

CA Sundaram
Lawyer for the Cricket Board

The court said that Gavaskar would have to cease his work as a television commentator to avoid any conflict of interest in his new role, adding that the BCCI must "adequately compensate" him for loss of earnings.

Gavaskar, the first batsman to score 10,000 Test runs, has carved out a career as a commentator in recent years and a sometimes spiky columnist. He has regularly called for India coach Duncan Fletcher to be sacked.

Srinivasan had been regarded as the most powerful man in world cricket and is still due to take over in July as head of the International Cricket Council.

With its massive TV audiences, India generates almost 70 percent of the game's revenues and several of the smaller Test nations are heavily dependent on its largesse.

International news organisations, including Agence France-Presse (AFP), have suspended their on-field coverage of matches hosted by the BCCI since 2012 after the board imposed restrictions on picture agencies. - AFP

HOUSTON

Philadelphia equals NBA futility record

THE Philadelphia 76ers tied the National Basketball Association record of 26 consecutive losses after being hammered 120-98 by the Houston Rockets on March 27.

Philadelphia joins the 2010-11 Cleveland Cavaliers for the longest single-season losing streak in history with 26 straight defeats.

"We are going through a tough time," said Philadelphia head coach Brett Brown. "The group will stay together and we will finish this thing out together."

The Sixers can set the NBA record with a loss to the Detroit Pistons on March 29.

Philadelphia haven't won since a last-second victory on the road against the Boston Celtics on January 29.

James Harden posted his second career triple-double with 26 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for the Rockets, who have won 11 in a row at home and five-straight overall.

"We did a great job of coming out tonight and taking care of business," said Harden. "No matter what their record was, we knew they were going to come here and play hard."

Terrence Jones tallied 20 points, seven rebounds and four steals for Houston, which improved to 29-7 at home this season.

Dwight Howard had 17 points and 13 rebounds in the win.

James Anderson finished with 30 points against his former team for Philadelphia, who never were in the game and have now lost 12 in a row on the road. Anderson was waived by Houston in July.

If Sixers coach Brown is worried about their place in history he isn't showing it publicly.

"As this thing has moved along and gained momentum, I want these guys to be proud of themselves," Brown said. "I want them to hold their heads high and know that they've given their best effort."

"They are doing everything we have asked them to do and [are] continuing to get better. As I said we don't talk about streaks. We don't even mention it to them."

Henry Sims and Thaddeus Young had 18 and 15 points, with Young also grabbing nine rebounds.

- AFP

IN PICTURES

Penny Coomes and Nicholas Buckland of Great Britain perform during their short program at the ice dance event at the World Figure Skating championships in Saitama, Japan on March 28, 2014.

Photo: AFP



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Sport

Amid scandal, batting legend named cricket board prez

SPORT 62

Footballers assist HIV awareness campaign

MATT ROEBUCK

STARS of Myanmar football, Kyaw Ko Ko of Yangon United and Than Than Htwe - whose goals from midfield contributed to the Myanmar women's team claiming bronze at the 27th SEA Games - will feature in the 'Protect the Goal' campaign launched on March 26 targeted at HIV prevention.

Speaking to the couple at the Sedona Hotel, President of the Myanmar Football Federation (MFF) U Zaw Zaw told them, "This is your duty, to use your popularity ... your duty to the people of Myanmar ... not only to the people of Myanmar but to the whole world."

The program in Myanmar is backed by the UNAIDS, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) who have invested between US\$200,000 and \$300,000 in the program that will initially last between one or two years. However, Eamonn Murphy, UNAIDS Country Director in Myanmar, was keen to point out that although the publicity campaign may finish, the training element would be delivered in a way that ensured the sustainability of the project and its message.

The media campaign featuring the footballing duo will be displayed in advertising at the stadiums during Myanmar National League (MNL) matches. Why football? Murphy explained, "Because they [footballers] connect, they are young leaders in society and young people especially look up to them. With football we can reach the teashops, remove the stigma of discussing HIV and make people not afraid to get tested."

Neil Sta Maria, representative of the AFC, also emphasised this point. "The words said by football players are burnt into memory ... The words



Than Than Htwe & Kyaw Ko Ko at 'Protect the Goal' ceremony. Photo: Boothee

my teachers said to me one week ago, I wouldn't remember ... but every comment of my football idols I would remember all season long."

Footballers will also be providing interviews to local media, discussing the issue of HIV and stressing the UNAIDS vision of "zero new infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths." However, there will be more to this than simply a media campaign. Murphy described U Zaw Zaw as the captain of this team and the MFF, Myanmar Red Cross and Football United - a program of the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia - will be delivering education and training directly to footballers, particularly at youth level.

"The MFF already deliver train-

ing to young players across 11 topics at what they call 'sport development camps' and HIV awareness will now become part of that training," Murphy said.

Training will also be delivered to coaches and support staff. The hope is that these individuals as well as the players and young people will go on to talk to their family and friends and the message will spread.

The 'Protect the Goal' campaign was first launched in South Africa at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The campaign has garnered support from around the world and since then UNAIDS has signed cooperation agreements with the Confederation of African Football (CAF), the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF), the South American

Football Association (CONMEBOL) and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

The AFC signed their Memorandum of Understanding with UNAIDS back in November 2013 and Myanmar is one of five pilot countries on the continent, along with Cambodia, Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand.

When asked how Myanmar's campaign might differ and be adapted to local circumstances, Murphy once again highlighted their local partners' development of the training program and Football United's implementation of similar pre-existing schemes for communities in Mawlamyaing and Yangon. He continued to congratulate the federation, explaining that "Myanmar is ahead of many others. They are the first to launch and start their campaign. Credit must be given to the league; it is modeling for others to follow."

Murphy also reiterated that whilst the international program attempts to put across a message to enhance awareness of HIV, improve access to HIV prevention and treatment, and work to eliminate HIV-related stigma and discrimination, the Myanmar program will particularly focus on prevention, the need for which has been recently emphasised by President U Thein Sein.

Neil Sta Maria had already pointed out that it was the Myanmar Football Federation's enthusiasm to be involved in projects like this and focus on corporate social responsibility that had led to their winning of the AFC's Dream Asia Award 2013.

At the time of receiving the award U Zaw Zaw said, "I am sure the whole country is proud of this achievement. This shows that our work has paid off but more importantly we will keep doing what we've been doing from the bottom of our heart."

Myanmar Tennis open to all comers

KYAW ZIN HLAING

kyawzinhlaing91@gmail.com

FOREIGN athletes will for the first time appear in the Myanmar Open tennis tournament when the 2014 event gets under way on April 2.

The tournament has been held annually at Yangon's Theinpyu Tennis Centre, but has previously only attracted local players. This year, alongside the national team and rising stars of the junior game, players from Slovakia, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand will participate.

"We are very proud to be organising an event that has attracted the attention of so many good tennis players," said U Aung Maw Thein, president of the Myanmar Tennis Federation. "It is an

'We are very proud to be organising an event that has attracted the attention of so many good tennis players.'

U Aung Maw Thein
President, Myanmar Tennis Federation

honour for us to host these players and a great opportunity for our emerging players to have an up-close and personal view of the standard of professional tennis."

Contests will be held in both the men's singles and men's doubles events. In return for the entry fee of US\$30 for foreign athletes and K5000 for local players, the winner of the singles event will receive a prize of \$5000, the defeated finalist \$2500, semi-finalists \$1250 each and quarter-finalists will take home \$625. The winners of the doubles event will each claim \$2000.

The contest will conclude on April 6.

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