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Mandalay municipal poll likely in months

MG ZAW KHIN SU WAI newsroom@mmtimes.com

MANDALAY residents will soon get to follow their counterparts in Yangon to the polling booth to elect municipal officials.

Mandalay Region Hluttaw Speaker U Win Maung told *The Myanmar Times* last month that under a law passed in the second week of December, during the hluttaw's 11th session, almost half of Mandalay City Development Committee members will be chosen by popular vote.

The election will take place within three months, he said, and the election commission formed for the vote will announce the polling date at least three weeks in advance.

At this stage the law has only been approved by parliament, however, and not yet been signed by Chief Minister U Ye Myint.

He could elect to send the law back to parliament with recommended changes, which could delay the election timeline.

Under the current draft of the Mandalay City Development Law, which would replace legislation from 1992, the seven-member committee could expand to have either 13 or 15 members, U Win Maung said.

MORE ON NEWS 3



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PHOTO: ZARNI PHYO

Boom times for the budding private security sector

A trainer at private security firm Aspect leads a training session for security guards at the firm's Bahan township office. Aspect is one of about 25 security companies - up from just a handful five years ago - that are struggling to keep up with growing demand from embassies, NGOs and the private sector.

Govt delays land-use policy after criticism

Policy will now be sent to cabinet at the end of March - three months later than originally planned - because of concerns it was being rushed through without proper consultation. NEWS 7

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NLD election doubt

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi says she will wait to see election rules before agreeing to contest 2015 vote.

BUSINESS 21

Foreign investors tiptoe toward electricity

There's been a trickle of foreign investment coming to the power sector, but will it be enough to solve the country's electricity woes in 2015?

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THE INSIDER: The local lowdown & best of the web

Once was Burma...

From 'The Myanmar Times' archives



Independence Day issue of *Bamar Khit* (Bamar Era) Magazine, 1948. Departing British governor Sir Hubert Rance depicted saying "Please take care of your children, and good luck."

Myanmar likes big butts and data cannot lie

One of the more important pieces of data analysis conducted in 2014, which offered some serious anthropological insights, was released in late December after statisticians from Pornhub and Youporn (the 72nd and 124th most popular sites on the web, respectively) got together to crunch numbers on popular search terms and map the results in order to answer the age-old question: boobs or butts?

Countries were mapped as either red or blue, depending on their preference: blue for boobs and red for butts. Almost all of Asia appeared as a blue titty stronghold, with Myanmar representing as an island of ass.

'Also connoisseurs of the derriere, it would appear, were Bhutan, North Korea, Mongolia and East Timor.'

As you head east towards the 'stans, rumps prevail. They also mapped other search terms like 'legs', 'feet' and 'pregnant', but it appears Myanmar was pretty lukewarm on those. The majority of foot fetishists are to be found in the Middle East.

That bums are a big deal here shouldn't really be a surprise. Any woman who's ever attempted to go shopping for underwear will be familiar with the phenomenon of the butt bra: a kind of Wonderbra for the behind that, once you're aware of, will leave you regarding butts on the street with some suspicion.

A Facebook page for posterior enthusiasts called Myanmar Model Buttocks, which carries the rather dubious acronym of MMBT, counts upwards of 85,000 fans (including at least seven Myanmar Times staff). The page posts images that cover the full spectrum of ass, from oiled-up thong-clad booty to rather demure shots

of *htamein*-swathed 'tocks. Zune Thinzar, allegedly an actress, counts upwards of 90,000 Facebook followers - due in no small part to the constant stream of rear-end selfies she posts.

(NZ) public rallies behind (one of) the VGastro Three

Beleaguered Kiwi bar manager Phil Blackwood is currently waiting to find out just how strongly the long arm of the law feels about the Buddha headphones saga, sitting in Insein Prison along with two local staff.

Some of Phil's friends back home in Aotearoa have set up a page on New Zealand crowdfunding site GiveALittle (pronounced "guv-a-little"), in order to raise money for his legal costs.

"Phil Blackwood is a typical kiwi guy, working hard to help his young family. Phil is currently imprisoned and needs your help."

"Phil was imprisoned in December 2014 while working as a bar manager in Myanmar due to an advertising campaign which breached local laws. Phil was not aware he was breaking the law and has apologised for his mistake. Please help Phil with his legal costs so that he can come home. He is a great guy who would do anything to help anyone," the page reads. Donations at the time of printing had tipped the \$1,635 mark, although those are probably New Zealand dollars so if you can spare a penny, it would likely be appreciated.

As far as we're aware, there has not yet been a Kickstarter campaign launched for his local coworkers who are facing similar charges.

The truth is out there

Tin foil hat wearers and UFO trutheers the world over will have rung in the New Year with plenty to ponder,

after the CIA revealed at least half of sightings of unusual craft in the 50s was simply them testing out their new toys. A tweet sent from the official CIA account on December 29 revealed the agency's most popular article for 2014 was on the subject: "Reports of unusual activity in the skies in the '50s? It was us." While this certainly goes some way to explaining the boom in sightings in a fairly concentrated area (if you Google 'aliens' and 'Myanmar' the results are unsurprisingly, distinctively terrestrial), many UFOlogists are not satisfied they're getting the whole truth. So, it's all well and good and nice to hear people haven't lost their hobbies overnight, but I think I speak for everyone when I say I still want to know what's making those damn crop circles.

In brief:

Story about Beyonce and Jay-Z visiting Bagan gains more traction on social media than anything about Letpadaung, something journalists and activists alike are calling "very depressing" and "a damning indictment on the modern condition"

Next week:

Man celebrates third anniversary of having a LinkedIn presence, yet to have any opportunities come of it
Experts concede it's "hard to say" if run on aluminium foil can be attributed to a surge in yaba use or the proliferation of conspiracy theories
Puppy vendors near Bogyoke left with major stock surplus as winter temperatures reduce collateral losses from suffocation, dehydration

Patent advisory:

Umbrella selfie sticks

Rupert Murdoch @rupertmurdoch · Dec 27
Myanmar perhaps most Buddhist country in world. Gold temples everywhere. Another world. Must come back before tourists wreck.

Rupert Murdoch @rupertmurdoch · Dec 27
From Aussie bush to sailing islands off Myanmar coast. Fascinating, beautiful country slowly opening after decades' self-imposed isolation.

Media mogul and alleged reptilian Rupert Murdoch enjoys a jaunt to the archipelago, considers billionaires exempt from the label of 'tourists'

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What's next for YCDC poll winners?



NOE NOE AUNG KYAW PHONE KYAW

FOR the first time in more than 60 years, publicly elected representatives will take up seats in City Hall in the second week of January. The winners of the Yangon City Development Committee election on December 27 will hold their positions for 15 months before fresh elections are held, after which terms will be for five years. *The Myanmar Times* profiles the winners from each of Yangon's four districts, who will each have a seat on the nine-member YCDC.

Southern district

The representative for Yangon's southern district, U Aye Min, is a physician. He says his priorities while in office will be tackling public health issues such as waste collection and the use of chemical dyes in food.

While he is unsure as to the best way to address these problems, he said he will initially focus on public awareness campaigns.

"I'll make vinyl signboards warning about the incorrect use of chemical dyes in foods and put them up in markets and small shops," he said.

Beside these problems, U Aye Min

said he is eager to improve transparency at YCDC. At the same time, he is unsure how much information he will be able to release to the public.

"I would love to tell the public what happens at every meeting but there might be [some restrictions] because of the Secrets Act," he said. "People need [transparency]. Whether we can or cannot do something, we must be transparent about so that people will understand that we have made a decision for the right reason."

Western district

The winner from the city's western district was U Khin Hlaing, who owns Zawtika Group of Companies. His business empire is most well-known for its monk robes, book shops and a shopping centre near Shwedagon Pagoda.

He said he will break his 15-month term up into five sections, with different goals for each three-month block.

During the first three months, he will conduct research on all 21 YCDC departments. The rest of his term will be spent reforming the committee's financial, HR, accounting, legal and internal affairs, he said.

To improve its financial position, he plans to introduce greater accountability in taxation and expenditure. On legal reform, he plans to work with regional hluttaw MPs on amending outdated laws.

However, he declined to offer any



A Yangon resident votes in the Yangon municipal election on December 27.

Photo: Zarni Phyo

specifics when contacted last week.

"I don't want to disclose these facts as it will create tension within [YCDC]. It is not so good to say big words before you start," he said. "To implement a strategy, you can't broadcast it to everybody."

He has also promised to hold a monthly press conference to explain YCDC activities.

Northern district

U Khin Mg Tint won the vote in Yangon's northern district, but his victory was highly controversial.

His competitors have alleged that he broke the election laws by having his agents distributing voting cards with a tick next to his photo.

An official complaint is soon expected. Under the YCDC election law, the complainant will have to pay K500,000 and then an official from the commission will investigate the allegations.

The law does not state what will happen if he is ruled ineligible. The election commission will have to decide whether to accept the runner-up or to hold another vote.

Eastern district

As in the western district, the eastern

district winner is a business identity: Sakura U Htay Aung.

He said he plans to reduce centralisation within YCDC.

"I am going to meet with township and district YCDC officials and share authority with them. If we can do it then it would be more convenient for people," he said.

Before he takes up his position he plans to meet his constituents to thank them for their support. He has also pledged to hold a public meeting with them each month.

"I gave my [phone] number to them. They can call me if they have any inconvenience because of YCDC ... I will do whatever I can."

Yangon's municipal election: the results

Votes cast: More than 106,000
Eligible voters: 401,634

Daw Thida Oo (social organisation representative)

Winners

City-level committee

Eastern district: U Htay Aung

Western district: U Khin Hlaing

Southern district: U Aye Min

Northern district: U Khin Maung Tint

Western: Dr Tin Tun (chair); Daw Lae' Lae' Win (expert); U Tin Sein (social organisation)

Southern: U Zaw Win (chair); U Win Naing (expert); U Khin Maung Lin (social organisation)

District-level committees

Eastern: U Myint Thein (chair); U Soe Tun (expert representative);

Northern: U Min Han (chair); U Zaw Myint (expert); Daw Thin Thin Khaing (social organisation)

CONTINUED FROM NEWS 1

A 13-member committee would have six elected representatives - one from each township - while a 15-member body would have seven. The current mayor, U Aung Maung, will keep the top job, while the deputy mayor would be one of the elected representatives.

Unelected members on the committee will be mostly technocrats, including engineers, doctors and lawyers, appointed by the regional government.

Under the law, candidates must be at least 30 years of age, be born of parents who are both Myanmar citizens, hold a bachelor degree and have lived in the township in which they are standing for election for at least 10 years. Candidates or their relatives must also own property in that township.

As in Yangon's municipal election, only the head of each household will be allowed to vote.

Mandalay residents said they had heard nothing about the impending vote.

"I didn't know anything about it," said U Tin Mg Tun, 65, from Chan Mya Tharsi township. "Recently the ward authorities collected information about our household and said it was for the election, but they didn't mention what type of election."

MCDC joint secretary U Thet Nang Tun said he had not yet been instructed to begin preparing for the election.

He said he expected an election commission would be formed to oversee the vote but was unsure on the details because the law was drafted by the Mandalay Region Hluttaw rather than MCDC.

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FORMER Myanmar citizens comprise almost two-thirds of those who have taken out application forms for a newly launched permanent residency program, an official said last week.

The program was launched in December and is targeted at skilled foreigners and investors. It has been criticised by exiled politicians, who say many of the conditions imposed on PR holders are unfair and contrary to earlier promises.

On December 29, the government began distributing the application forms through a new office on Yangon's 37th Street in Kyauktada township.

Daw Thidar Aung, the head of the office's Permanent Residency Section,

said 167 people had taken out applications by the end of the first week, including 98 former citizens.

Only three were foreign experts and investors, while the rest were considered "social" applicants.

She said she had no further information on those who had taken out forms.

"We are just distributing the application forms, answering inquiries and explaining the process," she said.

Daw Thidar Aung said the office had not yet begin accepting applications but expected to announce a date within two weeks.

Myanmar embassies will also be able to accept applications from former citizens, she said.

"When we launch the online application process, it will be possible [for former citizens] to apply through

embassies because they don't need to have lived in the country for one year before submitting the application," she said.

Yangon resident U Aye Myint said he had inquired at the 37th Street office about the permanent residency program last week for a friend.

"He is a former citizen who now lives in Taiwan. The three-month visas were not very convenient for him to do business," he said.

While the PR program is open to those who have taken up foreign citizenship, it excludes those who have received political asylum or been classified as a refugee.

Those accepted are eligible for PR status for five years. Applicants must pay a US\$1000 non-refundable application fee and a \$1000 annual fee. The fees are halved for former citizens.

Former citizens dominate PR applications

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A civil society representative speaks at a meeting with speaker Thura U Shwe Mann on December 30. Photo: Zarni Phyo

Speaker urges civil society to push hluttaw on amendments

LUN MIN MANG
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HOUSE speaker Thura U Shwe Mann has invited civil society organisations to go through parliament if they want changes in the law. The representatives of several civil society organisations told the speaker at a meeting last week at Yangon Regional hluttaw of laws they wanted passed, abolished or amended.

The meeting was organised by the speaker in order to hear the concerns of civil society leaders and was the first of its kind held.

Thura U Shwe Mann advised them to discuss their proposals directly with parliament as it would be faster than lobbying government ministries.

"Make sure you clarify exactly what you want. Then the members,

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Laws that have been repealed, amended or enacted since the hluttaw was formed in 2011

committees and commissions of the hluttaw will investigate and consider amendments," he said.

"When a complaint is submitted to the hluttaw, the responsible groups will check whether any change is in the public interest or not. If so, they proceed to the next step," he said.

According to Thura U Shwe

Mann, 126 laws have been repealed, amended or enacted, while 40 bills are under discussion in the Pyithu Hluttaw and the Amyotha Hluttaw. Another 10 have been sent to parliament by the government and other organisations since the last session ended in November.

Civil society leaders told *The Myanmar Times* that they welcomed the opportunity to put forward their concerns directly to the speaker.

U Ba Oke Khaing, chair of the Myanmar Consumers' Rights Protection Association, who attended the meeting with the speaker, told *The Myanmar Times* he used the meeting to give the speaker and other parliamentarians an open letter outlining the need for changes to the National Food Law. "Now we have to see whether it works or not."

NLD refuses to commit to 2015 election

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi also says the government has few achievements to show for its four years in power



EI EI TOE LWIN **LUN MIN MANG**

THE opposition National League for Democracy might not take part in this year's general election, its leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, hinted last week, as she also questioned the government's achievements since 2011.

Just before the monthly broadcast by President U Thein Sein, in which he said 2015 would be a remarkable year in Myanmar politics, the NLD chair seemed to adopt a wait-and-see attitude to the vote.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi told the media at a December 30 press conference that the NLD was concerned about possible rules that could restrict the party's ability to contest the election. Whether the party contests "depends on the situation", she said.

"We don't know what kind of rules and regulations may be in force. We will wait and see," she said.

The NLD is not the only party refusing to commit to the election. The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy party, which boycotted the 2010 general election, has also not yet decided to contest the vote. "We will make an announcement after the Union Election Commission declares the election date. I think they will announce it in June," said general secretary U Sai Nyunt Lwin.

Speaking on January 1, President U Thein Sein urged all parties to participate in the electoral process. "The 2015 elections will mark the first time since our independence when elections will

be contested by all the political stakeholders freely and fairly," he said, adding that 2015 would be "shaped by the elections and by the efforts of all political stakeholders to find the right solutions through the electoral process".

During the past four years, the government has carried out improvements and scored successes in political, economic and social affairs, President U Thein Sein said in his radio broadcast.

However, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi disputed this claim at her press conference, telling reporters that parliament was a more effective institution than the government. While citing what she called the willingness of parties in both hluttaws to work together in the national interest, the NLD leader said she could not identify a single success on the part of the government.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi even dismissed the government's tenure as 2014 chair of ASEAN, saying it had not improved the lives of Myanmar citizens.

"There has been cooperation between the [political] parties in the national interest," she said. "The NLD is a minority in the hluttaw ... but some of the proposals raised by NLD representatives were approved or successful."

"The executive sector, however, I could hardly call successful."

But presidential spokesperson U Ye Htut challenged this view. "Citizens know their political and economic rights. Their right to speak freely has been promoted. The culture of excluding parties opposed to the government has given way to a culture of round-table talk," he said.

"We accept that we still face challenges on the journey. But much has been achieved, and Daw Suu should accept this," he said.

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Happy New Year



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Govt responds to public concerns on land policy

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THE government has delayed the introduction of a controversial land-use policy by at least three months in order to conduct further public consultations, an official has confirmed.

The Land Use Allocation and Scrutiny Committee, the body that drafted the policy, had planned to finalise the policy in December, after conducting public consultations in November. Weighing in at almost 100 pages in Myanmar language, the policy was released to the public in October after being in development since June 2013.

The committee held 17 meetings in all 14 states and regions during the consultation period, most of which were attended by a few hundred people.

But it had come in for criticism because of the seemingly short time allocated for public feedback. U Tin Maung Than, a deputy director of the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry's Land Office, said one of the main issues raised at public consultations was the need for more time to gather opinions.

"It is not a postponement. The process is continuing but we will take

more time for public consultations," said U Tin Maung Than.

"The new policy will be sent to the cabinet at the end of the March after holding an expert meeting and a national forum," he said.

According to the revised schedule, the expert meeting is planned to be held at the end of January and the national forum in February. Members of the public can submit feedback through to the end of January, he said.

'There were serious complaints about how rushed the process was and the lack of information.'

U Shwe Thein
Land Core Group

Civil society leaders said they welcomed the extension.

"I'm glad to hear that the consultation process has been extended and we will read the draft and send our suggestions," said U Thein Aung, the head of the Freedom of Farmers League.

"I thought the process had finished. Because I was busy I didn't even have

a chance to finish reading the draft before their deadline," he added.

Land Core Group head U Shwe Thein, who attended nine of the 17 meetings, said there had been good participation at the meetings but a frequent complaint was the lack of information the government had released about the policy.

"Some [meetings] were well-prepared and papers were even distributed to attendees at some meetings. However, there were serious complaints about how rushed the process was and the lack of information," he said.

"Participants also expressed concern [that the policy] would override the existing land disputes and the rights of smallholder farmers," he said.

U Tin Maung Than said the committee is now compiling the public feedback and will release it at the expert meeting next month.

"We are doing data analysis. It will be distributed at the expert meeting where the experts will also discuss the draft policy," he said.

Civil society groups say they should be invited to take part in the expert meeting.

"Attendees at the consultation meetings demanded more involvement from their representatives and those whom they trust in the drafting the policy," U Shwe Thein said.

U Tin Maung Than said CSOs should put forward a proposal to attend the meeting.



A farmer works beside a field in Ayeyarwady Region. Photo: Christopher Davy

"The committee will accept the civil society proposal to attend the meeting and invite them," he said.

The land-use policy will form the basis of a National Land Use Law that is being simultaneously drafted

by the committee and will be sent to the parliament for approval. Parliament will conduct its own public consultations on the draft law, which the committee expects to be enacted this year.

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Trainee security guards study in a basement classroom at Aspect's Yangon headquarters. Photo: Zarni Phyo



The rise of private security

The influx of foreign businesses, embassies and NGOs has led to a recent boom in the private security sector – but are guards equipped with the skills and knowledge to secure potentially volatile development projects?

BILL O'TOOLE

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COMBAT veterans and retired police officers do not seem like the type to be found regularly inside a classroom, but lessons are a fact of life for staff at security firm Aspect.

The day *The Myanmar Times* visited Aspect's Bahan township office last month, 30 mostly middle-aged men were crowded in a basement, seated at desks and listening attentively to the instructor preparing them for their final written exam.

The test covers everything from the process of detaining suspicious persons and reporting faulty office equipment to the correct way to iron and wear a uniform. Those that pass can expect to work for Aspect clients such as the Turkish embassy, Horizon International School and several United Nations offices, or as plainclothes bodyguards for individuals.

The majority of the company's recruits come from the armed forces, Aspect owner and general manager U Myo Nyein said. As if on cue, the cadets leap from their benches to stand at attention when their boss enters the room.

U Myo Nyein returned from Singapore in 2009 to start the company. He has quickly found himself at the centre of a boom for private security services.

During a tour of the Aspect office and classroom, U Myo Nyein said his organisation is continuously running new training courses but still has to turn away business.

While the UN is its most high profile client, it is among the least lucrative of Aspect's jobs, having raised its payment per guard only once in five years.

"For UN business, our profits are very small ... But it's ok for us [because] it's good for our image," he said.

U Myo Nyein is not the only one taking advantage of the present boom, which is being driven by demand for guards at offices and retail and hospitality sites, such as hotels, banks and INGO offices. Industry sources say there are more than 25 firms in the

sector, up from just a handful five years ago.

In the coming years, however, experts forecast that extractive projects and other large-scale industries will drive demand for private guards.

Riding on this growth, exhibition organiser MP Singapore has already begun publicising "Myanmar Security Expo", scheduled for next October in Yangon.

The company says demand is being driven by the reforms initiated by President U Thein Sein's government, which have resulted in sanctions being lifted and sections of the economy liberalised. As a result, many international firms have begun to enter the market.

"We see great opportunities and wish to encourage international players to join us to explore this emerging market," said MP Singapore executive director Jason Ng.

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Estimated number of private security firms, up from a handful five years ago

Private security firms are relatively new in Myanmar. Under the military regime, security for large projects was regularly handled by the military, often with disastrous results.

One infamous example was the Yadana gas pipeline, a joint venture between the government and the oil companies Total and Unocal. Construction on the pipeline linking the Yadana field and Thailand began in the early 1990s in Tanintharyi Region.

The project was plagued by widespread reports of military personnel assigned to provide security committing human rights abuses. Eventually, after a lengthy court battle, Unocal – now Chevron – was forced by a United States court to pay damages to a group of villagers in 2005.

Another local example is the Letpadaung copper mine, where police

have helped to secure the mine and its workers but also broken up protests and strike camps. On December 22, one woman was killed when police fired on demonstrators who were trying to stop fencing work on disputed land.

Vicky Bowman, director of the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business, said these incidents illustrate why large-scale extractive companies across the world have come to rely on private security firms.

"Generally, companies try to keep public sector [security] providers as far away as possible as it tends to aggravate the situation," she said.

Beyond potential lawsuits and bad PR, Ms Bowman said US sanctions will make companies even more wary of engaging with the military in any way. "That's just not an option that any of them are remotely considering."

However, they have come to terms with the fact that in Myanmar – like many countries – the private security firms they engage will likely be owned and staffed by former members of the military and police force, such as those training at Aspect's office last month.

Ms Bowman, who advises a number of multinational companies through her work at the centre, said many companies in need of guards are also embracing a local approach, where guards are recruited from communities near their project.

"Generally, when you're an extractive industry the best possible practice is to hire people from the local community, because it's a creator of jobs."

It's a method that security services firm Scipio, which counts Halliburton as a client, also employs. Managing director Adam Castillo, a former marine, said his company's recruitment strategy is similar to the methods he used in the US military while serving in Afghanistan: reach out to local communities, win hearts and minds.

Even with imported best-practices, some worry that the growing use of private security firms will lead to legal and human rights-related issues.

Daniel Aguirre, a Yangon-based legal adviser, said much of the country's wealth of economic resources is located in its most dangerous and volatile areas, where rule of law is weakest.

Holding companies responsible for the actions of private security firms will also be difficult. "The private security companies are hired as sub-contractors by local subsidiaries of the main investors and are difficult to connect legally with the parent company. This reduces the company's liability."

Another issue is the lack of regulations specifying the duties and limits on authority of private security companies. Locally, private security firms need only to apply for the same operating licence as any corporation or medium-sized enterprise, and there are no rules or standards for recruitment and training.

But this is not a problem limited to Myanmar, according to Mr Aguirre.

'The private security companies are hired as sub-contractors ... this reduces the company's liability.'

Daniel Aguirre

Yangon-based legal adviser

"At the international level there is the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers, based in Geneva," he said.

"This is a voluntary, non-binding, industry initiative that lacks oversight and has no enforcement mechanisms."

Aspect security has already gained experience working in volatile situations. Its staff were on the ground in Sittwe in March when mobs of angry Rakhine Buddhists attacked several large aid agencies.

U Myo Nyein said his guards followed the strict crowd-control and de-escalation procedures they had learned in Yangon, and this helped to ensure there was no major damage.

For him, it was proof that no matter how the industry changes, they have the model for success. "We find the old but trusted men, and then we train them, and then we send them [to where they're needed]."

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Residents look out over Mogok from a hilltop pagoda. Photo: Si Thu Lwin

Mogok residents object to gem association HQ

SITHU LWIN



sithulwin.mmtimes@gmail.com

RESIDENTS and environmental activists in the famed ruby-mining town of Mogok have objected to a construction project beside an iconic lake in the town's centre.

The project is slated for parkland beside the lake and would house the Mogok Gem and Jewellery Entrepreneurs' Association headquarters and possibly other buildings, officials say.

The lake and adjoining park is regularly pictured in photographs and paintings that depict the town and conservationists say its beauty would be damaged by the new buildings.

A spokesperson for the Sein Lan Mogok environmental conservation group said residents only objected to the choice of location.

"This is only public space in town and houses our monument sign," Mogok resident U Soe Myint said.

"If this place is replaced with buildings, we won't have any monument in town in the future," he said. "This project is well intended but we've objected to its location."

U Soe Myint added that official complaints and objections have already been submitted to both the Mandalay Region and Union governments.

A Mogok Gem and Jewellery Entrepreneurs' Association spokesperson said the project had already been approved by the regional government and would encourage economic growth by drawing foreign gem buyers to the town.

Associate secretary U Tun Oo said he was confident that the project would proceed, despite the objections.

He added that gem associations are already established in Yangon, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw but not in Mogok, where most of the country's gems are mined.

"There will be gem laboratories in the office building," said U Tun Oo, an associate secretary at the association. "The project is planned to offer a one-stop service for foreign buyers."

He suggested the development is likely to be much larger than just the association's headquarters.

"But we have yet to consider construction of other buildings, such as hotels and shopping malls, which will lead to jobs for young people."

But U Soe Myint said the project would not bring extensive economic growth to the town.

"If they really want to boost the town's economic growth, I say let the small-scale dealers operate freely in the gems market. The market has been monopolised by big entrepreneurs," he said.

"Our young people are working in other cities and towns. This project is not an effective resolution for such problems."

Residents are also concerned that a Pyithu Hluttaw representative is chairing the association.

"A parliamentary representative should not be chairing a gem association," said Daw Pwint Phyu from Sein Lan Mogok. "They are elected by the people so they have to work for the interests of the people."

She said even some of the gem association's more than 1000 members have objected to the project.

"There are no factories in Mogok so the town is still clean and we need to maintain this status. Shwedagon Pagoda is an historic monument of Yangon, while the moat is a part of Mandalay's heritage. All our town has is this lake," Daw Pwint Phyu said.

The lake covers 16 acres and is surrounded by 14 acres of park. A project to build a special eye-care hospital on the land is also facing objections.

- Translation by Zar Zar Soe

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MYANMAR will collaborate with its neighbours to prepare an anti-corruption framework for least developed nations in ASEAN.

Vice President U Sai Mauk Kham said the framework would support the development of the ASEAN Economic Community, which is due to launch at the end of 2015.

"A framework in ASEAN is essential and is needed to overcome corruption as ASEAN implements its economic community," he said during a regional meeting in Nay Pyi Taw on December 16.

38

The average score out of 100 among ASEAN countries on Transparency International's 2014 corruption index

The vice president's comments coincided with a December 18 statement from international watchdog Transparency International calling on Southeast Asian governments to establish an ASEAN Integrity Community to protect against serious corruption risks.

The average score for ASEAN members in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index is 38 out of 100, where 100 is clean and 0 highly corrupt.

"The ASEAN Economic Community promises many benefits, but with greater economic integration comes new and larger corruption challenges for the region," said Natalia Soebagjo, international board member of Transparency International and chair of Transparency International Indonesia.

U Than Aung, a member of Myanmar's Anti-Corruption Commission, said it will take time to prepare the framework. He added that for it to be successful it will need to be backed by effective anti-corruption legislation, strong and independ-

ent anti-corruption authorities, enhanced intergovernmental anti-corruption cooperation, and meaningful engagement with civil society to create a level playing field for business.

"The framework won't be appearing straight away because we are at the beginning [of the process]. We can't make an agreement in one session," he said. "We will continue to cooperate with international organisations, including other ASEAN members, to draw up a framework."

Transparency International and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime are supporting the development of a targeted ASEAN anti-corruption action plan. Transparency International also issued a statement calling on all ASEAN countries that have signed up to the UN Convention against Corruption to implement its wide-ranging measures.

"However, in many countries public institutions lack transparency and accountability, key anti-corruption laws are absent, and civil society engagement is restricted. Only Indonesia and Thailand have passed a freedom of information law, while many anti-corruption authorities in the region fall short of their full potential, often suffering from a lack of operational independence and limited capacities," the press release said.

"ASEAN governments need to show leadership through swift action on the establishment of an inclusive multi-stakeholder regional body to tackle corruption," said Srirak Plipat, director of the Asia Pacific department at Transparency International. "Unless collective action is taken, the massive infrastructure development and increased trade central to achieving the region's economic potential will be left vulnerable to corruption."

U Naing Ko Ko, a PhD student in governance and anti-corruption regulation at the Australian National University, told *The Myanmar Times* that Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia are the only ASEAN members not have established anti-corruption commissions.

However, only the commissions in Thailand and Singapore have been willing to take effective action against corruption, he said.

ASEAN



President U Thein Sein passes on the ASEAN gavel to Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak in Nay Pyi Taw on November 13, 2014. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

Myanmar quietly gets the job done

Rather than rock the boat, Myanmar opted to chart a smooth course as ASEAN chair in 2014 - but critics say it should have done more to leave its stamp on the regional bloc

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SHRUGGING off the scepticism that attended its assumption of the chair of ASEAN a year ago, Myanmar is now widely considered to have passed an important test. As Malaysia, its successor, prepares to take up the gavel, a review of the year's events looks largely positive for Nay Pyi Taw.

Still, the prevailing sentiment is one of relief - that of someone who has successfully carried a large tray of crystal glasses across a polished marble floor without dropping it - rather than of solid achievement.

On taking over from Brunei,

Myanmar faced a daunting list of internal and external challenges. Observers wondered whether the incoming chair could handle its obligations in terms of protecting human rights, handling its ethnic-group problems, guiding forward the peace process and managing the Rohingya issue. External issues included the South China Sea disputes, North Korean nuclear testing, and the triangular relationship between ASEAN, China and the United States.

President U Thein Sein announced that the theme for Myanmar's leadership of ASEAN would be "Moving forward in unity, toward a peaceful and prosperous community". In doing so, it would conform to ASEAN's two governing principles, non-interference and consensus, and the use of quiet diplomacy.

For instance, with regard to the complex and potentially dangerous dispute between China and some ASEAN members over the South China Sea, ASEAN has failed so far to produce a document of conduct (DOC), let alone a code of conduct that could help defuse the issue.

Nor has any timetable been agreed to resolve these issues.

To be sure, Myanmar has highlighted issues of general global concern, such as climate change, the environment, trans-border crime, human trafficking and terrorism, concerns which sound good to raise and do not ruffle any local feathers. But many observers see missed chances.

"Myanmar has done a good job in maintaining ASEAN centrality and unity on key issues," said Kavi Chongkittavorn, a senior fellow at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. "However, little was done on domestic issues," he added.

Little or nothing has been done in the past year to strengthen links between Myanmar and the other lower-income members of ASEAN, or bridge the gap between them and other members that are more advanced in economic, social and political terms. Nor has there been much progress in the promotion of small and medium enterprises, a key issue in economic integration.

And while President U Thein Sein repeatedly stressed the need for ASEAN to review and where necessary reform its institutions, U Aung Myo Min, director of the Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB) said Myanmar did not take its chance to lead a review of the ASEAN charter or declaration of human rights.

"The chair has the chance to promote an agenda. But Myanmar made no progress on human rights during its tenure," he said.

'Myanmar had the chance to call for a review of the ASEAN human rights declaration ... but did not do so.'

Kyaw Lin Oo
ASEAN affairs analyst

U Aung Htoo, deputy director general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' ASEAN Affairs Department, suggested Myanmar's main achievement was to prove the sceptics wrong. "We focused mostly on the creation of the ASEAN Community," he said.

ASEAN analyst U Kyaw Lin Oo said Myanmar's tenure did not distinguish it from earlier chairs. "Myanmar had the chance to call for a review of the ASEAN human rights declaration, and greater respect for it, but did not do so," he said. "Nor did Myanmar protest against the coup in Thailand."

Another analyst, Bertil Lintner, said Myanmar had failed to live up to its slogan for the year, having neither moved forward nor made the ASEAN Community much more prosperous.

Citing the failure so far to sign a national ceasefire agreement with ethnic armed groups, Mr Lintner said, "I'm afraid it will take a long time for Myanmar to become peaceful and prosperous."

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Govt to seek MP approval for \$300m loan

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CHINA will provide a US\$300 million loan to Myanmar as part of a giant \$3 billion package to five ASEAN countries - but only if the Ministry of Cooperatives can get approval from a potentially hostile parliament.

China said last week that the loans, which will also go to Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam, are designed to boost cooperation with ASEAN, improve the bloc's infrastructure and alleviate poverty in the region.

Of the loan to Myanmar, \$220 million will be used to expand credit to farmers, while another \$50 million will be loaned to businesses and \$30 million used to sell farm machinery on installments.

But the loan proposal is likely to face opposition in the hluttaw. A \$100 million loan from South Korea to buy Daedong farm machinery was approved this year at the second request, but only after lengthy debate as to whether the Ministry of Cooperatives should be selling agriculture equipment.

An earlier Chinese loan of \$100 million to expand credit through the Ministry of Cooperatives attracted controversy because of the interest rate, which some said was too high at 4 percent a year. The \$300 million loan is also 4pc, payable over 10 years, while the Daedong loan was 2pc over seven years.

However, Minister for Cooperatives U Kyaw Hsan brushed off the concerns in a recent interview, telling *The Myanmar Times* that it would still enable the government to offer loans at much cheaper rates than illegal moneylenders, who charge anywhere from 5pc to 15pc a month.

The government has proposed the loan be added to next year's budget, according to U Win Oo, a member of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Planning and Financial Development Committee.

Some hluttaw representatives have criticised the minister for publicly talking about the loan as though it had already been approved. "Everybody knows that there was intense debate on the last loan, which was from South Korea," said MP U Saw Taw Pale.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun



Workers repair sections of U Bein Bridge in Amarapura township in March 2014. Photo: Phyo Wai Kyaw

Rotten teak pillars putting bridge at risk

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MORE than 30 of the teak pillars that support popular tourist attraction the U Bein Bridge across Taungthaman Lake in Amarapura, Mandalay Region, have to be replaced because of advanced decay. The entire structure is at risk because some pillars

have become detached from their bases.

The secretary of the bridge's conservation committee, U Soe Win, said that the work required the permission of the Ministry of Culture's Department of Archaeology. The new pillars will be made of concrete.

There are altogether more than 480 spans in the bridge, which dates

to about 1850 and was constructed with more than 1000 teak pillars.

The committee will spend a K10 million donation to repair and replace floor-joists and beams. U Soe Win said the average height of a pillar was about 22 feet (7 metres), and each cost about K500,000 to replace.

In May, the regional government contributed K13.4 million for repair and restoration work.

Maubin to mark Aung San birth with statue

MAUBIN township, Ayeyarwady Region, is to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Bogyoke Aung San next month by installing a 2.7-metre (9-foot) statue of the independence hero.

The event will take place from February 9 to 13, and will feature an exhibition of the Bogyoke's mementoes, competitions for essays, poems and cartoons, speeches and literary discussions. An award ceremony will be held on February 13, when the statue is inaugurated at the centre of the main through-road.

Civil society organisations, political parties and well-wishers in Maubin have contributed to the K15 million cost of the bronze statue, which was cast in October in Mandalay's Tanpawady bronze foundry.

Organising team member U Than Htike Aung told *The Myanmar Times* that they would collect the statue on January 25 and build an enclosure to house it. The entire commemoration will cost about K30 million, he said.

"Bogyoke has been ignored in history for years but now we have the chance to restate our pride and his honour. All our activities are aimed at awakening the history of independence in the younger generation," he said.

"Children hardly know about Bogyoke, and they can't learn much from school textbooks. We want children to cherish the father of our independence," he said.

The regional capital, Patheingyi, will also host a celebration of the centenary, while sister cities Nyaungdon, Bogale and Hinthada are will also put up statues in his honour.

General Aung San was born on February 13, 1915, in Natogyi township, Magway Region. He fought for independence and was assassinated on July 19, 1947. The anniversary is now designated as Martyrs' Day, a national holiday, and his mausoleum stands near Shwedagon Pagoda. - Cherry Thein

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A protester confronts police officers during a protest near the Chinese Embassy in Yangon on December 29. Photo: AFP

Police charge seven for Letpadaung protests

SEVERAL protesters against the China-backed Letpadaung mine in Sagaing Region have been charged with holding an illegal demonstration, police said last week.

They were among 100 activists who scuffled with police on the evening of December 29 near the Chinese embassy in Yangon.

The protesters demanded the closure of the mine, where a female villager was shot dead during a clash with police on December 22.

The shooting sparked a series of protests in Yangon and Mandalay as well as a running stand-off at the mine, which villagers say has been

established for the benefit of a Chinese company at their expense.

"They protested in front of the Chinese embassy on Monday [December 29]. We opened the case against them as they breached the law," a police major in Dagon township said.

They face several charges including protesting without permission and criminal intimidation, the officer added. Four of the protesters - Naw Ohn Hla, U Nay Myo Zin, U Sein Htwe and U Tin Htut Paing - have been held in Insein prison since late on December 30, police and activist sources confirmed. The other three are still at large. - AFP

NLD leader calls for action over mine death

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi says the government has failed to properly implement the recommendations of the investigation commission that she led in 2013



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DAW Aung San Suu Kyi has urged the government to take "serious" action over the recent killing of a protester at the Letpadaung mine in Sagaing Region.

The National League for Democracy leader, who headed an investigation into protests at the mine in 2013, said the government also needed to do more to satisfy the demands of protesters.

"You can't put a value on one person's life," she said. "If there are issues that are endangering lives, then the government should take action. The authorities should satisfy those people who are feeling aggrieved."

"We can't make a judgement just by listening to a one-sided account of events but the first thing to note is that a woman lost her life. We can't replace a life. The authorities have to take serious action."

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said the government also needed to follow the recommendations of the Letpadaung Investigation Commission, which, led by the NLD leader, submitted a report



Daw Aung San Suu Kyi speaks at a press conference on December 30.

Photo: Zarni Phyo

on the mine project in February 2013. Controversially, it recommended the project continue but the terms be renegotiated to give the state a larger share of the profits.

"I believed that the disputes would be resolved if the government follow the commission's advice. However, they didn't follow the suggestions given by the commission and the conflict has continued," she said, without specifying which of the commission's recommendations the government had failed to implement.

Daw Khin Win was killed during a protest at the copper mine on December 22 when police opened fire on demonstrators. The protest had been launched to stop the mine company

from building a fence in territory disputed with local farmers.

The killing prompted hundreds of people to demonstrate in Yangon and Mandalay outside the Chinese embassy and consulate.

Government officials say the authorities are still investigating the woman's death. The regional government has set up an investigation team, while Salingyi township police have also accepted the case.

Presidential spokesperson U Ye Htut said a third investigation would be led by Minister for the President's Office U Hla Tun, who was given responsibility for implementing the recommendations of the Letpadaung Investigation Commission.

"U Hla Tun is going to this area and he will submit [a report] to President U Thein Sein about the situation," U Ye Htut said.

Tensions remain high in the area, according to residents. One resident of Seltae village said a sit-in protest had been launched near the mine site on December 29 and participants had ignored warnings from the authorities to stop their demonstration.

"We will never step back from our protest," said the resident, who asked not to be named. "The police are watching us from nearby. I think they are preparing to build the fence again."



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Views

Challenges loom in the year ahead



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WE have now entered 2015. The next 12 months promise a considerable number of challenges and problems. The question is, can they be overcome?

Everyone knows that Myanmar will hold a general election this year. It is important not only for Myanmar but also those countries with which it has significant bilateral ties, as it will be an important test of whether Myanmar is still on the democratic path. That's why Western diplomats in Myanmar, including US ambassador to Myanmar Derek Mitchell, have been regularly meeting Union Election Commission chair U Tin Aye.

He recently aroused concern as to whether the commission will oversee a fair election due to some controversial comments. These include defending everything the country's military dictators have done as necessary and correct, and warning that instability could lead to another military coup.

These words are worrying in the context of the election, which will pit Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy against the Union Solidarity and Development Party, which was formed by ex-military officers, including U Tin Aye.

Another concern is the lack of accurate voter lists. Many people still do not have an ID card, such as a citizenship scrutiny card, to confirm their identity when voting. Even some founders of political parties lack proper ID documents. The election commission should inform the Ministry of Immigration and Population about the problem and ask it to take immediate action to resolve it. Unless something is done soon, those without ID cards are likely to lose their right to vote.

Another important problem for

2015 is dialogue between the country's top political leaders. Although the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw has proposed the holding of six-person talks, President U Thein Sein and Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing have not yet formally responded.

There is also the issue of constitutional reform. It is clear from events in the hluttaw that the amendment process is likely to be anything but smooth. One recent example came when hluttaw speaker Thura U Shwe Mann approved a bill to hold a referendum to amend the constitution

It is clear from events in the hluttaw the constitution amendment process is likely to be anything but smooth.

but President U Thein Sein disagreed with some sections and sent it back to parliament rather than sign it into law.

But the most important point is that no one has drafted a constitutional amendment bill. The bill for holding a referendum has been approved before we even know what the hluttaw has decided on constitutional change. It's not wrong to say we've skipped a step in the amendment process. From what I can see, the only way to smoothen the amendment process is for substantive high-level talks between the main political leaders.

Another major challenge for 2015 is achieving a nationwide ceasefire. Peace talks between the government and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team, which is negotiating on behalf of 16 armed ethnic groups, are not moving forward as hoped. Skirmishes keep erupting in Kachin and northern Shan states, and in some cases the fighting is intense.

The main problem is that the Kachin Independence Organisation has not signed a bilateral ceasefire

with the government and doesn't want to sign a ceasefire. The group's stance overwhelm other ethnic armed groups and we can see from some of the Tatmadaw's military activities that it is getting impatient.

While peace talks were held recently in Yangon, Major General Gun Maw from the KIO and NCCT leader Naing Han Thar, as well as military representatives, did not take part. This is not a good sign for the peace process.

All of these challenges and how they are handled will have implications for not only foreign investment but also economic development more broadly.

This does not even begin to take into account other recent hot issues, such as the renewed conflict at Letpadaung, the government's failure to set a minimum wage, the possible impact of religious violence on election and the failure to make much progress on the situation in Rakhine State.

Yes, 2015 is going to be a year of challenges.

— Translation by Thiri Min Htun

Singapore starts to show its age



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THIS year marks the 50th anniversary of the independence of Singapore, and there will be lots of fireworks and festivities on the Little Red Dot, as it is affectionately known.

In geographic terms, it is not merely little, it is minuscule. And it is "red" because it is three-quarters Chinese – and always will be.

That is because it is a maxim of the long-ruling People's Action Party that the ratio of the island's three ethnic groups must never change.

Thus, as they did 50 years ago, the Chinese form 75 percent of the population, the Malays 14pc and the Indians 8pc, with Eurasians and others making up the rest. Of course, as recent events have shown, even the PAP's mythical efficiency could not keep the figures spot on; so the Malays have currently dropped to 13pc and the Indians risen to 9pc.

But if the figures move more than a percentage or two, action is taken and immigrants from China, Indonesia or Malaysia are swiftly brought in to make up the difference.

It is this policy of racial eugenics that has anchored Singapore's social stability, meritocratic education and housing systems, and rapid economic development.

The island's "red" appellation can also be traced to the 1950s, when the newly formed PAP was dominated by communists, socialists and other fellow travellers. Its fiery young leader, Harry Lee, now better known as Lee Kuan Yew, broke his teeth politically as a trade union adviser who helped

striking postal workers win a famous victory in 1954.

When it became politically expedient, of course, he dropped the name Harry, as he did smoking and driving over to Johor Bahru in his open-top Studebaker to quaff beer with his mates. Instead, he mutated into an authoritarian capitalist, who was dismissive of his left-wing roots and never again afraid to radically change his stance on any issue.

That was clear when, soon after becoming prime minister in 1959, he argued that an independent Singapore could not survive and must join Malaya. So a merger took place and was a disaster, forcing Lee to do a volte-face and pull Singapore back out on August 9, 1965. It is that date, 50 years on, that will soon be lauded as the anniversary of Singapore's independence.

Meanwhile, not wanting to dwell on the merger debacle, Lee turned his wrath on political rivals at home – the very ones who had argued against merger in the first place.

They were crushed and for the next two decades Lee's PAP held every seat in parliament. In an acid-laced aside, Australia's visiting PM Gough Whitlam told Lee, "Admirable, how you've turned a Westminster system into a one-party state."

But the Little Red Dot continued to prosper, although the notion that it is run in a super-efficient, incorrupt and crime-free way has taken a beating in recent years.

Poor Lee, now 91, must be furious that his golden years have witnessed

The People's Action Party is bereft of ideas and grasps at policies that must horrify former PM Lee Kuan Yew.



Red spheres floating between white spheres in Singapore's Marina Bay form a giant number 50 on December 31, 2014. Singapore will mark its 50th anniversary as an independent country in 2015. Photo: AFP

Singaporean businessmen, civil servants and members of the police and security services convicted of corruption.

As well, infrastructure failures have become frequent, epitomised by the Singapore stock exchange breaking down three times recently, causing shock and anger among brokers and companies.

And the once-famed MRT subway system has endured repeated failures – more than a dozen last year, with riders left stranded in darkened tunnels for lengthy periods without assistance.

There is also the ticking time bomb of the island's dependence on foreign workers, now estimated to make up than one-third of the population.

As a PAP MP once told me, "Singapore's success has been achieved on the back of cheap workers from Bangladesh and the Philippines and the rest of the region."

He laughed nervously, but what to do? It cannot continue and yet the PAP is bereft of ideas and grasps at policies

that must horrify Lee, such as the approval of licensed gambling.

Revenue from the big new casinos may help the flatlining Singapore economy, but a drastic downturn in punters from mainland China has caused profits to plummet over the past two years. Not only that, but as the government itself warned in the days when Lee was PM, casinos bring triads, money-laundering, drug dealing and prostitution – and that's what has happened.

Plus they mean sky-high prices and abysmal standards. Of the Marina Bay Sands casino complex, the *Bangkok Post's* Umesh Pandey wrote, "The experience was nothing but appalling. The service staff were nowhere close to being courteous. It was my first and last trip to this hotel."

Other reviewers make clear that only a masochist with money to burn would think of staying at this minimum US\$300-a-night disaster.

And that is what Singapore has become after 50 years: a faux Monte

Carlo, with a grand prix through the streets for the rich and fatuous, which causes turmoil for ordinary citizens for the best part of a week.

As Roger Cohen wrote in the *New York Times* two weeks ago, "I travelled several thousand miles recently from London to Singapore. There I found myself on Orchard Road, that vast temple dedicated to the worship of the global brand, a tropical and air-conditioned Oxford Street. I wondered why I had bothered."

At least he doesn't mention being hassled every few metres by the clusters of Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese hookers who throng Orchard Road every evening.

But enough, let us not begrudge the Little Red Dot and its earnest citizens their birthday bash.

Because really – although Lee himself said, "You get the government you deserve" – Singaporeans really don't deserve the current lot. Hopefully they will kick them out well before the end of the next half-century.

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Business

Experts urge export strategy to do more than gather dust

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A NATIONAL Export Strategy should arrive this month, with assistance from economic donors, according to Ministry of Commerce economic adviser U Maung Aung.

The document is the culmination of two years' work, and has already been submitted to the President's Office for approval - though some say it will be challenging to see the plan to fruition.

Authorities have found it to be difficult to plan initiatives to improve exports without a comprehensive strategy, U Maung Aung said. The draft strategy document highlights rice, beans and pulses, fishery products, garments, wood-based products, rubber and tourism as the six priority areas, and outlines measures to support them.

"Now, [the Ministry of Commerce] is waiting for the President's Office to permit the strategy, which will be launched with aid from international donor organisations," said U Maung Aung.

'We have planned so many strategies which have never been implemented successfully.'

U Hla Maung
Economist

"Though [the ministry] doesn't have final approval yet, we hope to launch it in January," he added.

The ministry aims to team up development organisations with each of the six chosen industries, and has already received some interest, particularly for the tourism and rice industries, he said.

Experts have highlighted the challenges faced by domestic experts. Although markets such as the European Union have opened their doors over the past two years, many of Myanmar's exports are low-value goods that have had difficulty gaining market share in advanced economies.

Fishery exporter U Nyo Min said the fish industry lacks financing and a coherent policy for exports.

"We can't make exports properly," he said. "If we can have a national strategy for exporting, I think [exporting businesses] could obtain proper financing and assistance, helping us gain international market share."

Economist U Hla Maung said he welcomed the strategy, though added plans and proposals are often not followed through to fruition.

"In Myanmar, we have planned so many strategies which have never been implemented successfully," he said.

U Hla Maung said that the six industries that are to be chosen will play to Myanmar's strengths.

"Promoting rice exports doesn't only help exporters, but the country's economy, as so many people rely on it," he said. "Myanmar is also the world's second-largest exporter of beans, so it has a huge opportunity there as well."



Interpreting translates t



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TARGETING the needs of foreigners flocking to Myanmar is an increasingly intelligent business strategy.

There's no shortage of examples. A raft of restaurants has opened up to provide a taste of home to expats and tourists, while developers and real estate agents are designing houses -

and prices - with foreigners in mind.

Perhaps no industry stands to benefit as much as Myanmar-English translation, though - at least in the short term.

Ma Bo Rosy is a freelance translator. She earns her keep on a succession of contracts from all types of

clients, from an oil and gas giant that needs interpreting help, to a Vienna-based professor keen on Myanmar, to acting as a tour guide.

She's been in the business for three years, and says she enjoys it for her freedom and the chance to travel.

"I can survive off translating alone, and I always have something coming up - that's an interesting part of my life," she said. "When you're translator, you have to learn and you have to get experience."

Interpreting at live meetings is the most difficult work she does, and

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ANZ Bank talks setting up shop in Myanmar as it spreads in Southeast Asia

BUSINESS 20



Local developers hope for foreign knowledge to build skyscrapers

PROPERTY 25

Exchange Rates (January 2 close)

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Euro	K1232	K1260
Malaysia Ringitt	K307	K308
Singapore Dollar	K778	K786
Thai Baht	K31	K32
US Dollar	K1036	K1040

IN PICTURES

Photo: Zarni Phyo



Construction work is underway at Mya Kyun Thar Park near Inya Lake – though some parts of the development are behind schedule, according to insiders.

More on page 24

Myanmar Oriental Bank aims to improve with IFC support

AYE THIDAR KYAW

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THE International Finance Corporation (IFC) is looking to strengthen its partnership with Myanmar Oriental Bank, according to the bank's chair U Mya Than.

Although foreign institutions are currently forbidden from owning any part of domestic banks, many expect the laws to change to allow more foreign participation. In the meantime, Myanmar Oriental and the IFC are discussing a convertible loan that could allow the IFC to take an equity stake in the firm.

"We are discussing equity participation in MOB, and have made good progress, to an extent," he said.

Myanmar Oriental Bank has been running for more than 20 years, being one of the first, along with banks like First Private Bank, Myanmar Citizens Bank and Co-operative Bank, to open their doors following a change in government policy toward private banks in the early 1990s.

U Mya Than said there was a huge gap between what Myanmar businesses required and what state banks were able to provide when Myanmar Oriental Bank set up in 1993. As one of the first private banks that emerged in the early 1990s, it aimed to help fill these holes in the market.

The bank has connections with the local Chinese community. Its founding family has Chinese roots, and connections with other businesspeople in Asian countries such as China, Taiwan and Singapore, with corresponding

banking agreements.

There are a total of 25 shareholders in the bank, from various backgrounds. U Mya Than himself was an employee of state-owned Myanma Investment and Commercial Bank before joining the private sector.

Established in 1993, Myanmar Oriental has shared the tumultuous history of the banking sector in general.



Myanmar Oriental chair U Mya Than.

Photo: Thiri Lu

In 2003, several large Myanmar banks failed in a banking crisis. However, Myanmar Oriental recovered to continue operations. Now with over two decades of experience, it has 26 branches – more than some, but less than KBZ, the market leader, which has over 150 across the country.

U Mya Than said Myanmar Oriental has decided to focus on areas like internet banking and treasuries trad-

ing when it becomes available rather than simply adding more branches. It also has made a commitment to ensure 95 percent of financing goes to small and medium enterprises.

"Widening branch networks is a very traditional way of doing business. Domestic banks normally have offered the same products and compete with each other in markets that are smaller than their dignity, but this habit will change," said U Mya Than.

Myanmar Oriental is aiming for a wide customer base, and also looking to perform more international banking functions, he said.

U Mya Than added that while the Central Bank of Myanmar has eased some restrictions on banking, commercial banks need to upgrade their capabilities while the Central Bank needs to improve from a regulatory standpoint.

The agreement with the IFC is to be partly aimed at improving Myanmar Oriental's capabilities.

The IFC has already signed a deal for a US\$5 million convertible loan with Yoma Bank in September, plus an agreement to improve its risk management and corporate governance.

In February, Myanmar Oriental and the IFC signed an agreement for a \$5 million trade finance facility, aiming to assist local companies increase their imports and exports.

U Mya Than said the IFC also provides guarantees for Myanmar Oriental's letters of credit used in trade financing, as well as assisting with corporate governance and risk management processes.

o good business

therefore commands the highest price. It gets particularly challenging if the subject is technical. Ma Bo Rosy – who attended an English-language school but spoke Myanmar at home – said she sometimes encounters words such as "dictatorship" where she has trouble with the Myanmar language equivalent.

"For interpreting, if you know the subject, it's easy, but if you don't know everything, it's difficult," she said. "You have to be ready, you have to be alert, you need 100 percent concentration and that can be tough."

Some client also request transcription services, which is particularly tiresome, she said.

"Sometimes it can be hard to understand the tape, and we have to listen to it all three times. Since billing is per hour, sometimes people are too strict about the timing – they assume we have a computer brain."

Although the work has challenges, Ma Bo Rosy said she is eager to pursue the industry – dreaming of one day opening a business, Rosy Translation Services. She is keen to continue as a freelancer, however. For now she finds many of her customers through word-of-mouth, she said, adding it is important to maintain good relations with clients.

"I know a lot of my friends earn a lot more than me, but it's more uneven," she said. Often some translators charge high rates, but then clients are reluctant to return.

Ma Bo Rosy is also always on the hunt for new clients.

"I'm a social person, so I hang out with friends and find connections. I talk about my job with people and they like my talking and hire me," she said.

She translates periodically for an Austrian professor, who was initially put in touch by a mutual friend. The professor now recommends her to colleagues or

students, proving to be an important connection as there are more translators than ever in the mix providing a range of services

Ma Wai, 23, said payments are decreasing for entry-level work as a result of all the new translators.

"Some youth translate for free, and they do the job not always for the money but also the experience," she said.

Ma Wai said she reckons learning foreign languages such as English is becoming a trend. Previously, many youth had no interest learning languages as they saw little benefit, but now that is beginning to change.

There is more and more material and conversations that require translators. "Nowadays being a translator means not just translating text but also movies," said Ko Ye Min, 23. "Experienced people are making more money, as they are in demand, but young translators often have trouble."

Ko Ye Min said translators are generally keen to work with big-name organisations, as they tend to pay the most – but also have the highest standards.

"Bosses like translators who study in foreign countries and then return to Myanmar. They get paid more money and are more valued," he said.

Like Ma Bo Rosy, Ma Hnin Hnin Kaing is also keen on the freelancer's lifestyle. She finds work translating movies, though added the quality differs significantly.

"Payments for translation change depending on the field. Sensitive fields like court translation generally receive more money – but it's not always the same and depends on the boss," she said.

It's tough to say what will happen in the business generally, but translators say there will be no shortage of people requiring language help.

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PHNOM PENH

ANZ making a regional banking push



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A WELL-REGARDED set of regional banks emerged as the winners of nine foreign banking licences as they were announced in October.

Three of the Japanese megabanks snagged licences, along with two large Singaporean banks and one each from China, Malaysia and Thailand. Also included on the list was Australia and New Zealand Banking Group, commonly branded as ANZ.

At first glance it may appear the odd one out, currently being headquartered in Melbourne, Australia, and tracing its corporate lineage to an 1835 charter received in London for The Bank of Australasia.

However, while ANZ is currently among the four largest banks operating in Australia, it has made a significant push into Asia, including the Mekong Region. It operates one of the largest retail banks in Cambodia with a local partner and has a subsidiary in Laos, as well as previously holding a minority stake in a Vietnamese bank.

ANZ also won a conditional licence in Thailand's foreign bank contest earlier in 2014. Grant Knuckey, CEO of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar for ANZ Banking Group, said the firm will benefit from going through the process of setting up in both Thailand and

Myanmar at roughly the same time. "ANZ's strategy is also about leveraging strong home market positions in Australia and New Zealand into profitable Asian expansion," he said in an interview at the firm's Phnom Penh offices.

ANZ and France's BRED Banque Populaire were the only two Western-based banks among the 25 institutions vying for licences.

Notably, UK-based heavyweight Standard Chartered decided not to participate in the contest, although it has a Myanmar representative office.

Mr Knuckey said he was a little surprised ANZ was the only Western bank that emerged with a licence, but attributed it to the timing of the contest rather than interest from other banks.

"I think there's plenty of intent from a number of Western banks around Myanmar and growth in Myanmar," he said.

ANZ had already participated in a similar process for the Thai licence earlier in 2014, and had a Myanmar representative office after being issued a licence on December 6, 2012.

"We were very much in the mode of readiness in terms of market entry to Myanmar when it opened up. We were pretty ready to go," said Mr Knuckey.

"Perhaps most other Western financial institutions weren't at the same level of preparedness," he added. "I have no doubt that if you fast-forwarded a few years that will be quite different. I think you will see a lineup of financial institutions coming or about to come."



ANZ CEO of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar Grant Knuckey. Photo: Supplied

Myanmar is still at an early stage of its economic transformation, though is trying to compress reforms that would normally take decades into only a few years, he said.

"It means the opportunities arrive a little earlier and they need to be seized earlier, and it also means accelerated

waves of investment and infrastructure are required," said Mr Knuckey.

"It all adds up to an explosion of activity and a very rapid pace of reform and development that needs to happen for [the economic transformation] to be realised."

While the introduction of foreign

banks to Myanmar has been one of the more visible signs of the transformation, it has also proved controversial. Some local bankers opposed their introduction, claiming they are arriving too early and may be able to do business in areas that are still closed to local institutions.

Mr Knuckey said the foreign banks will face restrictions with their licences, adding it is important that national banking champions emerge for the country.

"If you don't allow the banking sector to build that capacity, if it's really just a free-for-all, then you won't build those champions - at least not without some luck," he said.

However, he added the licensing process had been well-crafted, allowing the demands of investors to be met but local banks to be able to preserve a large chunk of the market, while learning and working from foreign banks.

"This is not a situation of foreign bank hoards sort of coming over the hill and rolling over everything in their path, absolutely not," he said.

In the "fullness of time" the restrictions on the foreign bank licences - such a prohibition from retail, a limit of one branch and a ban on kyat loans to domestic businesses - will likely be relaxed, as has happened in other regional countries.

ANZ is now working to set up its Yangon branch. The Central Bank of Myanmar as of October gave the foreign banks a year to set up and officially receive their licences.

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ANALYSIS

Private investment to spark electricity boom



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POOR power supply continues to plague Myanmar.

Most estimates claim less than one-third of the country's population has regular access to electricity, and those that do still experience frequent power cuts. Businesses have difficulty operating with uncertain power supply - generators are expensive, and downtime translates directly to lost revenue for too many companies.

Effort is clearly being made to tackle the gargantuan task of righting the domestic electricity industry. Several important steps were made in 2014 to improve generation, transmission and distribution capacity.

Importantly, the long-delayed electricity law was finally passed last year, and the Ministry of Electric Power is now working on the detailed rules and regulations that are to follow. These regulations can provide a

solid foundation to improve electrification, but much more needs to be done.

The government is attempting to address the energy shortfalls, though financing the necessary expensive projects continues to be a major problem. Most domestic power projects are currently carried out through funding from the state budget and international loans, and increased foreign investment provides an attractive conduit to improve domestic energy infrastructure.

At the moment, though, foreign investment is largely confined to several high-profile generation efforts.

Nowhere is foreign involvement more controversial than in hydropower. The large-scale Myitsone dam project was frozen by Presidential order in 2011 following public opposition. In 2014, officials from the Ministry of Electric Power have said they would like to see more Western involvement in hydropower, though Chinese investment was the industry's largest driver during the last years of the military government.

Hydropower still produces the majority of the country's electricity.

A swath of agreements to establish some 60 hydro projects - some fanciful and others much more realistic - were signed during the military government era, mostly with Chinese firms as well as other companies from areas like India and Thailand.

More than half of those 60 projects are still to be implemented, with some put on hold and others likely to proceed.

Ministry of Electric Power deputy minister U Maw Thar Htwe has said the government is now only working with companies of an international standard with reliable quality and financing.

"The trend in hydropower project implementation is to turn to Western companies," he said.

A number of Western firms have signed up for domestic hydro projects. Shweli (3) is to be implemented by English and French companies, the Middle Yeywar and Bawgata projects with Norwegian firms and the Middle Paung Laung project by Austrian or English projects. At least four hydro projects signed with Chinese and Thai companies have been delayed due to public opposition.



Energy infrastructure is in a bit of a tangle. Photo: Staff

Coal generating projects also faced public opposition in 2014, with complaints often targeted at their environmental footprint. Some were cancelled and others were delayed, though a few are on track. Coal-fired

projects may not be environmentally friendly, but they are generally easy to build and provide cheap electricity - particularly compared to gas.

MORE ON BUSINESS 23

Drivers welcome oil drop

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ALTHOUGH 2014's worldwide fall in crude oil prices has brought some relief for those filling their tanks in Yangon, local taxi drivers say they are yet to see as much of a price drop as expected.

"It's better than before, but I'm still not too happy that local prices haven't dropped much in Myanmar," said U Soe Min Myo, a Bahan township taxi driver.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate lost 46 percent of its value last year, ending 2014 at US\$53.27 a barrel. The oil market's year saw the steepest fall in prices since the 2008 financial crisis as a global supply glut lockstepped with slowing economies.

Rising US and Canadian oil production has contributed to ample global supplies at a time of slowing growth in China, the world's largest energy consumer, and other emerging-market economies, a recession in Japan and a near-stall in the 18-nation eurozone.

While crude prices are not the sole factor in determining the cost of petrol at fuel stations, they are perhaps the most important part of the equation. Local users say prices at petrol stations have been on the decline - down from K830 to K730 in the last two weeks for regular fuel, according to drivers.

Taxi driver U Thant Zin Myo said he welcomed the price decrease, adding he buys his petrol from the Max Myanmar station on Thein Phyu Road near Kandawgyi Lake as it has a reputation for quality.

Motorcycle taxi driver U Than Win, who works in Yangon's outskirts in Thingangyun township, said his daily income has been helped considerably by the price drop.

"Traffic jams are decreasing and it's hard to get a reasonable fare," he said. "But now because of the price, my daily income isn't so bad."

- Additional reporting Bloomberg

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TOKYO

Japanese markets turn in strong performances

TOKYO'S Nikkei 225 stock index climbed more than 7 percent in 2014, ending on December 30 near its highest levels since before the global financial crisis struck.

The advance adds to a 57 percent surge in 2013 - its best annual return in four decades - as the Bank of Japan's monetary easing blitz sharply weakened the yen, a plus for exporters such as Toyota and Sony. On the year's last trading day Tuesday the index fell 1.57pc on profit-taking, losing 279.07 points to end at 17,450.77.

The broader Topix index of all first-section shares gained 8.07pc over the year to finish at 1407.51.

Analysts were generally upbeat on the prospects for the Japanese market in 2015. But geopolitical issues - including political turmoil in Greece - and an uncertain outlook for the world's number-three economy threaten to limit further gains.

The Nikkei struggled at the start of the year, but a fresh round of Bank of Japan monetary easing in late October pushed the yen even lower.

In addition, the national pension fund - the world's biggest - said it would shift more of its portfolio into stocks, giving the flagging market a boost.

Tokyo's plan to cut corporate tax rates - confirmed on December 30 - plus a fresh \$29 billion fiscal stimulus plan and speculation over even more BoJ easing could help lift the market further, analysts said.

The market also welcomed Prime

Minister Shinzo Abe's move to delay a second sales tax rise scheduled for 2015, after a levy increase in April slammed the brakes on growth and pushed Japan into recession.

"Three tailwinds - a weaker yen, cheap crude oil prices and delaying the second sales tax hike - are blowing through Japan's stock market ... and supporting share prices," SMBC Nikko Securities said.

Nomura Securities analyst Hisao Matsuura tipped the Nikkei to climb as high as 20,000 next year as Japan moves to strengthen its lagging corporate governance rules. The number of initial public offerings in Tokyo this year hit 77, returning to pre-financial crisis levels.

"Improving corporate governance is an encouraging factor - before, that was not the case, and investors grew frustrated," Mr Matsuura said.

Still, the Nikkei remains a shadow of its former self.

This week, the index marked a quarter-century since it peaked at almost 39,000 in the last days of 1989. Japan's asset bubble then popped, dealing a huge blow to the economy and sending the Nikkei plunging over the next two decades.

And the prospect of foreign investors pouring money into Tokyo markets this year appeared uncertain after inflows dropped by more than 90pc in 2014, according to Bloomberg News.

That may signal frustration with the pace of Mr Abe's economic reforms, analysts said. - AFP

SINGAPORE

Labour restrictions lower Lion City growth

SINGAPORE'S particularly trade-sensitive economy grew at the slower-than-expected rate of 2.8 percent in 2014 as the city-state cut its reliance on foreign workers, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on December 31.

The slowing growth was attributed in particular to tougher rules on foreign workers stemming from citizens' complaints about overcrowding, a tighter job market and other impacts of immigration. Some have estimated up to 100,000 Myanmar citizens work in Singapore.

"Our economy has performed moderately well in 2014. Growth was 2.8 percent," Mr Lee said in his New Year message released to the media.

In its last forecast in November, the government predicted growth of 3.0pc for 2014.

"Our growth will be slower than we are used to," he said in the message.

"One reason for this is that we have been tightening polices, including on foreign workers, to get our economy onto a path of sustainable, productivity-driven growth."

The 62-year-old premier expressed concern over "disappointing" productivity growth.

In recent years, authorities

have been phasing in measures to boost the productivity of Singaporeans while tightening the influx of foreign labour and the granting of permanent residency status.

Ongoing concerns over immigration made it a hot-button issue on the affluent but space-constricted island.

The discontent spilled over into the 2011 general elections when Mr Lee's People's Action

Party garnered its lowest-ever vote count after more than 50 years in power, and analysts say it remains a key issue for the next election, which must be held before January 2017.

According to official statistics, over 29pc of Singapore's population of 5.47 million is comprised of "non-residents" - those working, studying or living in the country but not granted permanent residency.

In his message on December 31, Mr Lee also warned of global uncertainties, adding that events this year including air tragedies in Asia, the Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa, extremism in the Middle East and the Ukraine crisis were reminders that "stability, safety and security are precious".

"The road ahead appears daunting. Intense competition and greater inequality because of globalisation and technological advances, security threats from extremist terrorism, new pandemics are just some of the challenges," he said.

Singapore, which became a sovereign state in 1965 after a brief union with Malaysia following the end of British colonial rule, celebrates its 50th year of independence in 2015. - AFP



Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

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JICA

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Note: Only short listed candidates will be contacted for subsequent interviews.

CONTINUED FROM BUSINESS 21

More private energy funds

While efforts to generate electricity from natural gas have not attracted quite the amount of controversy as coal and hydro, gas plants are also often more challenging.

"What's happening right now is that gas-fired power plants have become expensive, and people don't want to accept hydro and coal," said U Khin Maung Win, director general of the Department of Electric Power. "We don't have any other options - but we want positive suggestions."

"We are in a very tight corner to implement these power projects," he added. Although often more expensive, there has been significant foreign interest in Myanmar gas-fired power projects.

Companies from countries like the US, Hong Kong and Korea have won or are competing for tenders.

In 2014, American firm APR Energy won an industry award for its Kyaukse project, while Hong Kong's V Power won a tender for a gas-fired plant for the Kyaukphyu special economic zone. A gas-powered plant was also set up in Thaketa in 2013 by a Singaporean firm.

While efforts to attract foreign interest in gas-fired plants appear to be bearing the most fruit, Myanmar is also experimenting with green technologies.

Agreements to develop solar power projects near Mandalay and Magwe regions were signed in 2014.

Still, U Khin Maung Win said it is Rakhine State which was perhaps the most significant step for Myanmar's electrification efforts last year.

"The most exciting news in 2014 is lighting up Rakhine State, where it's been very hard to get electricity. This is a real milestone for us," he said. "We are also now working on power transmission to Hakha in Chin State, a very remote area."

"These projects are not necessarily profitable from a business standpoint but are important for regional development," he added.

Transmission, getting power from power plants to sub-stations, and distribution, getting power from sub-stations to homes, are equally important to generation efforts. After all, enough power can be generated, but if it doesn't get to Myanmar's homes, the country will still be in the dark.

These areas have been slower in attracting foreign investment. So far there has been minimal involvement from foreign, private enterprises, but foreign development agencies have been stepping up to the plate.

The Export-Import Bank of Korea and Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise signed a US\$100 million deal to establish the 500-kilovolt Taungoo-Kamanat transmission project. Meanwhile, the World Bank Group and the Japanese government have also announced plans to support Yangon with upgrading its electricity distribution system.

All these changes offer large potential rewards, but the ultimate judge will be the end user.

Consumers will be paying the price for upgrades - electricity rates increased by 40 percent in 2014. The government has not yet released figures indicating how much revenue the move generated for state coffers, despite several requests from *The Myanmar Times*.

Last year also saw several steps not taken. Officials were coy on potential privatisation of Yangon Electricity Supply Board, claiming there are no immediate plans to allow private equity participation in the board, which governs distribution in Yangon, home to about half the country's electricity consumption.

On the whole, steps were taken in 2014 to address electrification, one of Myanmar's most pressing issues. Much more needs to be done in 2015 if the issue is to be solved.

SINGAPORE

BRIC busted on 2015 outlooks

THE BRIC grouping of Brazil, Russia, India and China has never looked so disunited to stock investors.

While Chinese and Indian benchmark equity indexes have surged an average 40 percent this year, Russian and Brazilian gauges posted a mean drop of 4.2pc. The annual divergence is on pace for the biggest since economist Jim O'Neill coined the term in 2001, leaving the combined market capitalisation of Chinese and Indian equities US\$5.2 trillion larger than that of Russia and Brazil, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

"From a cyclical point of view, these four countries could hardly be more heterogeneous," said Hartmut Issel, the head of equity and credit for Asia Pacific at UBS Group AG.

"China is slowing gently but still displaying enviable growth, India is starting to pick up, Brazil is in a protracted bottoming process, while in Russia a recession is likely becoming inevitable."

More than 13 years after the BRIC moniker entered usage to characterise the four nations as a single economic concept, the connection is breaking down. While markets have been buoyed in India after Narendra Modi scored the country's biggest election victory in three decades, and in China as authorities take steps to

keep annual growth above 7pc, Russia has been battered by sanctions linked to the crisis in Ukraine, and Brazil has grappled with an unprecedented corruption scandal involving its state-run oil company.

The Shanghai Composite Index and India's S&P BSE Sensex Index are heading for their biggest annual gains in five years as the countries' leaders push ahead with measures to boost economic expansion. Brazil's Ibovespa Index entered a bear market this month as plunging commodity prices threatened the nation's trade surplus, while Russian shares are poised for an annual loss as President Vladimir Putin battles with a currency crisis.

While the MSCI BRIC index has returned about 274pc since Mr O'Neill, a former Goldman Sachs Group Inc economist, predicted in a 2001 research report that the countries' share of the global economy would increase, the gauge has fallen about 5pc this year through the close of Asian markets on December 29.

"At the time BRIC was coined it was useful to describe the broad and increasing importance of the four largest emerging-market economies, but it was never suitable as an investing concept," said Mark Gordon-James, a senior investment manager at Aberdeen Asset Management.

Companies in Russia and Brazil were the biggest drags on the MSCI BRIC gauge this year. Currency volatility has played havoc with foreign investor returns. While China's yuan and India's rupee have fallen less than 4pc versus the dollar this year, the Brazilian real has lost 13pc and the ruble has slid more than 40pc.

The combined market capitalisation of Chinese and Indian stocks rose to a record US\$6.4 trillion this month, while Brazil and Russia together slumped to \$1.2 trillion, the lowest since at least 2005, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

The outlook for China and India remains favourable relative to the two other BRICs, said Adam Tejpal, the Hong Kong-based head of Asia investments at JPMorgan Chase's private bank unit. While there may be

bargains among Russian and Brazilian shares after the recent losses, the countries' "weak" economic outlook is a deterrent for investors, he said.

"We are most excited about new governments established in China and India, who have put reforms in place that will benefit the economy and financial markets in 2015," said Pearlyn Wong, a Singapore-based investment analyst at Bank Julius Baer.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, who pledged to give markets a "decisive" role in the \$9 trillion economy after coming to power last year, has allowed private investors to take stakes in state-owned firms and started a stock trading link with Hong Kong. Modi, his Indian counterpart, has cut fuel subsidies, allowed more foreign investment in businesses such as defence and promised to narrow the budget deficit.

In Brazil, the corruption scandal at Petrobras, where hundreds of millions of dollars from contracts at the company went to executives, contractors and political parties, according to prosecutors and witnesses, threatens to undermine the political clout of President Dilma Rousseff. Mr Putin, who came to power in 2000, is struggling to prevent the depreciation of the ruble from turning into a banking crisis. - Bloomberg

PERCENT

40

Russian ruble's decline in 2014

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Property

BUSINESS EDITOR: Jeremy Mullins | jeremymullins7@gmail.com

Upgrades slow for park on Inya Lake



NOE NOE AUNG

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EFFORTS to upgrade Mya Kyun Thar Park near Inya Lake are likely to be delayed, according to an official from the Yangon City Development Committee.

Although authorities had instructed contractors to finish in set timelines, progress has been slow with some, said the official, who works at YCDC's Department of Gardens and Parks.

"Some companies have not been able to show their building designs to us, and we cannot allow construction to proceed without seeing the designs," he said.

"The projects are delayed, and I'm not sure whether they can be finished in time."

Private companies have been invited to participate in the project to upgrade the park since 2010, with no contractor yet completely finished their parts of the project. However, company officials have countered that frequent changes from the government's side has made completing projects difficult.

The park was owned by the Ministry of Defence until 2012. In the 2012-13 fiscal year it was transferred to YCDC, requiring new contracts with updated prices, as well as upgrading some parts of the project with more modern design.

"Some companies are waiting for blueprints they have ordered from foreign architects and designers - I think that is why they are delaying," said the YCDC official.

Eight Myanmar companies are participating in the 30-year contract to build a modern amusement park at Mya Kyun Thar. The completed project is to include shopping malls, health care clinics, restaurants, cinemas, game centres and a golf driving range.

The driving range opened several months ago, allowing participants to hit golf balls into the lake. The balls float and are collected by boat.

The YCDC official said the unique aspects of the 44.5-acre park are being preserved.

"Businesses and their customers are not allowed to throw waste into



There is lots of development near Inya Lake - not only Mya Khun Thar (foreground) but also the Sedona expansion and HAGL projects (background). Photo: Zarni Phyo

the lake, and are prohibited from going into the lake," the official said.

Authorities are also keen to preserve trees in the area, though the park is not a designated green area, he said.

"So it is not breaking the rules, letting companies do their business," he said. "And in my opinion, the park was once a place that was only filled with couples - like a dating area. But if game centres and entertainment buildings are added, it will be a place for families. So this is great."

Yangon residents say they have enjoyed the park in the past, and are waiting to see what happens with the development before making judgment.

Ko Myo Minn, 27, says he enjoyed visiting when he was a student.

"The park was so big and not

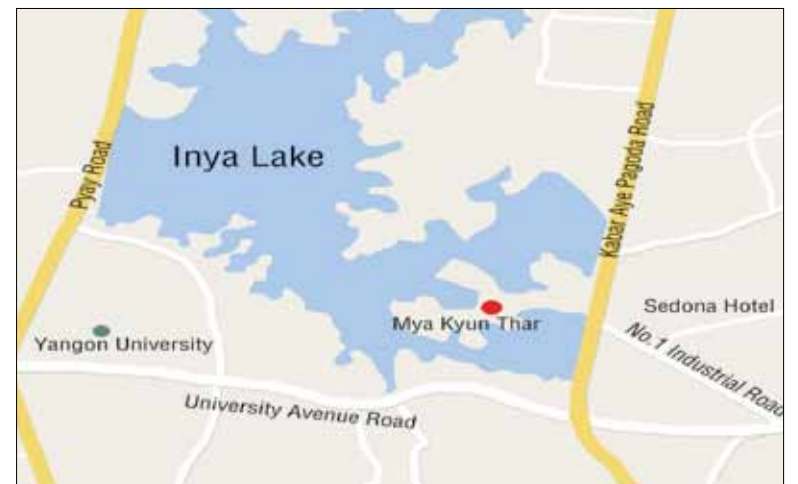
crowded like other parks. There were lots of trees and many had their species labeled, like a botanical garden - and there was a karaoke room where we could show off our vocal abilities," he said. "I enjoyed the old park a lot."

He is now employed full-time and too busy to visit, so he said he's not sure if the park's development is a good idea.

"If the upgrades are completed, the park could be lively again - but I still want the trees to be preserved," he said.

Another official from the committee overseeing the Mya Kyun Thar development said that an access road is currently being built by Max Myanmar, and most of the companies are expected to begin construction at the site this year.

Placing Mya Kyun Thar Park



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Open Daily

“In Myanmar, we have planned so many strategies which have never been implemented successfully.”

— Economist U Hla Maung

A look at the year that was in photographs

WORLD 32 – 33

Local firms angle for skyscraper know-how

TIN YADANAR TUN
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THE trend for large-scale construction projects continued to alter Yangon's skyline in 2014, with work on many tall buildings now under way and dozens more in the planning stages.

There will be more skyscrapers added in 2015 and beyond, as developers build upward as well as outward to accommodate the city's expanding population and growing demand for homes.

Yet many local firms don't have the experience or capital necessary for constructing these skyscrapers. They are increasingly turning to foreign partners to assist them with financing and constructing these larger projects, often on land that is first secured by the local firm.

“There is a lot of [undeveloped] land still owned by the government and Yangon City Development Committee [YCDC] in Yangon, along with all the new projects that are cooperations between foreign and local firms,” said U Yan Aung, manager at Asia Builders Construction.

Although there have been some foreign companies involved in the domestic property market for some time, interest has picked up significantly in the past few years.

Yangon's swath of new skyscrapers are often presented “international standard” in their promotional campaigns, highlighting the expertise the foreign developers bring to the project – though representatives from local firms say they are also trying to learn from these foreign firms.

“Foreign developers should be cooperating with two or more local developers on a project,” said U Aung Min, director of Myat Min Construction.

“Local developers are often not familiar with large-scale developments, but it's important to gain this knowledge because large developments can be ready in a short time, with many rooms to sell.”

Myanmar Construction Entrepreneurs Association vice president U Tha Aye said it is too early to say Myanmar has turned the corner on improving its construction sector, though many projects have been added and business is growing. “It is important the construction sector develops with the correct rules and regulations,” he said.

U Myo Thant, vice secretary of business association UMFCCI, said the Myanmar Investment Commission assists with striking a balance between foreign and local participation in projects to ensure both sides benefit.

HOUSE OF THE WEEK

Lose yourself at 8 Mile



WERE Eminem a resident of the greater Yangon area, one presumes he would be living at 8 Mile.

While the criteria for this statement is based entirely on the similarity of the name of the Yangon neighbourhood and the American rapper's Detroit-area home, 8 Mile has a lot going for it. Well, the Yangon 8 Mile, at least – *House of the Week* can't vouch for amenities in greater Detroit, and reviews seem somewhat mixed.

This week's home near Pyay Road is a standalone in a large compound. It could also make the transition to an

office – such as a recording studio – relatively easily.

It's two storeys, a total of 3600 square feet in a large 8000-square-foot compound. It boasts three master bedrooms, two single bedrooms, four bedrooms, an assortment of living and dining rooms and a kitchen. There's some furniture, but you'll want to be adding more.

There's a lovely small garden outside, which could be expanded.

A selling point is the location. It is located in Mayangone township, within reach of uptown amenities like

Junction 8 Mile.

The price is lower than some homes in the area, and is certainly negotiable. Though you may only have one shot, one opportunity, to seize everything you ever wanted in a home.

– Tin Yadanar Htun

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MIAMI

Tiny 'life detector' could sense alien movement: study

EUROPEAN researchers said last month they have devised the first tiny motion detector that could help find microscopic life forms on distant planets.

Until now, scientists have tried to find signs of extraterrestrial life by listening for sounds that might be emitted from an alien world, by scanning the skies with potent telescopes and by sending robotic probes and rovers to analyse the chemical fingerprint of samples from comets and planets.

But researchers in Switzerland and Belgium were interested in a new method. Taking advantage of movement, which they call "a universal signature of life", they would aim to sense on a nanolevel the tiny motions that all life forms make.

They began to explore the possibility of searching for life with a sensor attuned to those nanoscale vibrations in microscopic organisms such as bacteria and yeast.

"The nanomotion detector allows studying life from a new perspective: Life is movement," said Giovanni Longo, lead author of the paper in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, a peer-reviewed US journal.

"This means that the nanomotion detector can detect any small movement of living systems and deliver a complementary point of view in the search for life," he told AFP via email from Switzerland.

Mr Longo, a scientist at the Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne, and colleagues at Vlaams Instituut voor Biotechnologie in Belgium devised an instrument that is smaller than a millimetre - just a few hundred microns in length - that can sense the smallest nanoscale movements.

They tested it on a variety of

living things, including *E coli*, yeast, as well as human, plant and mice cells in the lab.

In all cases, when living organisms were placed near the sensor, they "produced an increase in the amplitude of the measured fluctuations", said the study.

Mr Longo and colleagues also scooped up soil and water from the grounds near their Swiss lab and found that the sensor could detect tiny life there, too.

Researchers found they could manipulate the movements of the life forms by adding nutrients which the cells would consume, or adding chemicals that would kill them, making the motion stop.

"The detection system can be used as a simple, extremely sensitive, and weight-efficient 'life detector,'" the study said.

Mr Longo said a prototype would cost less than US\$10,000, would use very little battery power and could be contained in a 20-by-20 centimetre (8-inch) box.

The device has not been presented

'The detection system can be used as a simple, extremely sensitive, and weight-efficient 'life detector''

Giovanni Longo
Lead author

yet to NASA or the European Space Agency, but efforts are under way to write a proposal and make a prototype that could travel to space on a robotic vessel or orbiter that is hunting for extraterrestrial life, Mr Longo said.

If it had been available to the ESA's Rosetta mission, which recently sent its Philae lander onto a comet for the first time and detected water and possible signatures of life in the form of complex carbon, it could have propelled the science one step further, "determining if these conditions are still harbouring life, in any form", Longo said.

If the world's space agencies find a way to use it, the detector could be used to search for life on the moons of Jupiter or Saturn, or on Mars, where it might help scientists recognize life exists in a form that they had not previously expected or understood.

The sensor could also be used to detect extreme life forms in areas that are hard to measure on Earth, such as volcanoes and the ocean floor, he said.

However, it could be years before the sensor is actually tested in space.

"It is rare that anything is 'simple' in the context of space exploration," said Ariel Anbar, a professor in the School of Earth and Space Exploration and the department of chemistry and biochemistry at Arizona State University.

Nonetheless, Anbar, who was not involved in the study, described the work as "refreshing" and a "fundamentally new idea".

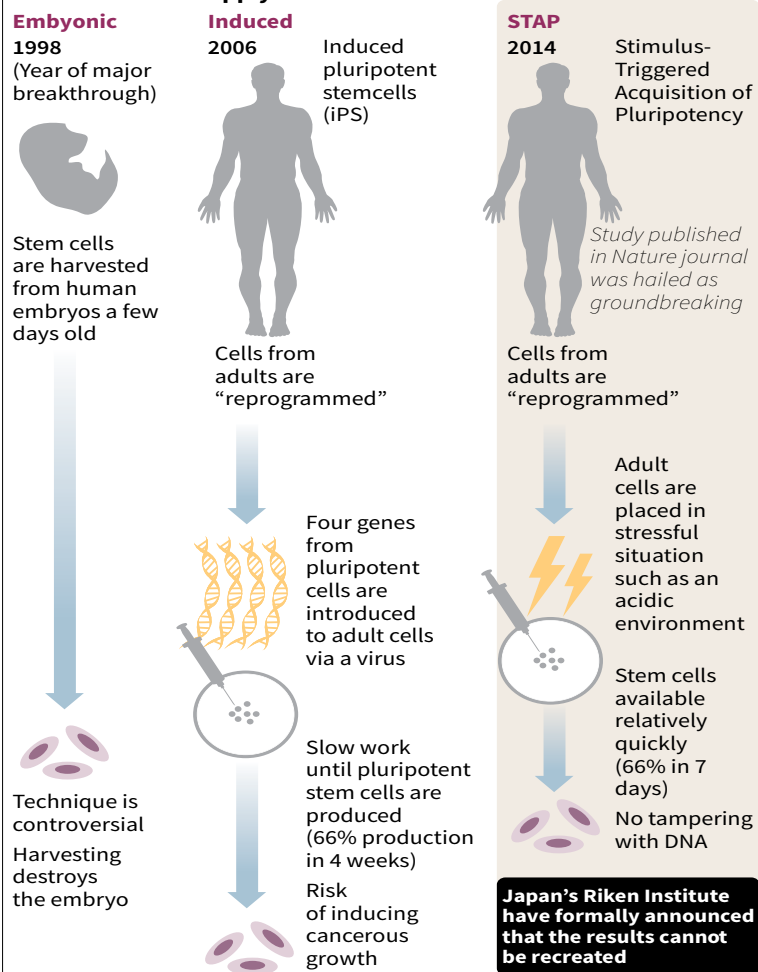
"Motion-detection on such a scale has never been attempted before as an extraterrestrial life detection approach," he told AFP.

"If it is as technologically simple to implement as the authors claim, then it could be worth integrating into future mission concepts." - AFP

TOKYO

Stem cell fabrication scandal

The search for a supply



Top Japan lab dismisses stem cell study

LATE last month, Japan's top research institute hammered the final nail in the coffin of what was once billed as a ground-breaking stem cell study, dismissing it as flawed and saying the work could have been fabricated.

The revelations came shortly after a young researcher at the centre of the scandal, which has rocked the country's scientific establishment, said she would resign after failing to reproduce the successful conversion of an adult cell into a stem cell-like state, known as 'STAP' cells.

The failure marked a stunning fall from grace for 31-year-old Haruko Obokata, whose co-researcher committed suicide amid the embarrassing scandal that prompted respected science journal *Nature* to retract an article detailing the research.

On December 26, the government-backed Riken institute, which sponsored the study, said embryonic stem cells had been added in the process of the research, countering Ms Obokata's contention that she had found an easier way to generate new stem cells in the lab.

"But we can't conclude whether the mixing was done on purpose or by mistake nor can we conclude who did it," probe team chief Isao Katsura, head of the National Institute of Genetics, told a news briefing in Tokyo.

In January 2014, Ms Riken trumpeted Obokata's simple method to re-programme adult cells to work like stem cells.

The study was top news in Japan, where the photogenic Ms Obokata, a Harvard-trained scientist, became a phenomenon.

But media attention soon grew into scepticism as doubts emerged about Ms Obokata's papers on Stimulus-Triggered

Acquisition of Pluripotency (STAP).

Mistakes were discovered in some data published in two papers, photograph captions were found to be misleading, and the work itself could not be repeated by other scientists.

On December 26 the head of the probe team, which was made up of scientists outside the institute and lawyers, said the committee interviewed Obokata three times.

"During the last of our interviews we told her that we had enough evidence to show the mixing-in [of embryonic stem cells]," Mr Katsura said.

"Then, before us asking anything, Ms Obokata said 'I've never mixed them'"

Embryonic stem cells are prototype "mother" cells found in early-stage embryos, with the potential to become any kind of tissue in the body. But critics argue that an embryo is a human life, pointing to ethical problems.

Another way of generating stem cells from adult skin cells, called induced Pluripotent Stem (iPS), are cumbersome compared with the method which Ms Obokata claimed to have discovered, scientists have said.

Ms Obokata, who earlier said she created STAP cells some 200 times, since July has been trying in tandem with independent teams to reproduce her own results. She claimed there was a secret knack for creating STAP cells, but has refused to publicise it, asserting it is a subject of her future papers.

As the scandal deepened, Ms Obokata's mentor and co-author, stem cell scientist Yoshiki Sasai, hanged himself, further shaking Japan's scientific establishment.

Riken has pledged to restructure its Center for Developmental Biology where the scandal took place. - AFP

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Ooredoo adds credit transfer services



**AUNG
KYAW
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aungkyawnyunt28@gmail.com

CHRISTMAS may be over, but Ooredoo is hoping consumers are still in a giving mood. On December 30, the Qatar-based telco unveiled its newest digital service, allowing customers to transfer calling credit to other users at the push of a button.

By typing *155* followed by the amount they want to transfer and the receiving phone number, users can send up to K5000 worth of credit to friends or family on the Ooredoo network.

According to Ooredoo representatives, the transfers take place in a matter of seconds. The company charges

K100 for each completed transfer.

Since winning tenders to operate in Myanmar in 2013, both Ooredoo and the Norwegian multinational Telenor have faced setbacks and delays in building their national network infrastructure, which in turn has delayed their ability to expand their digital services since officially launching in 2014.

In addition, a lack of regulatory clarity from the government has impeded both operators ability to develop services such as mobile banking. However, both companies and the government has promised a raft of new digital services in the coming year.

Whether this transfer option will be enough to lure new customers remains to be seen.

Speaking to *The Myanmar Times*, several mobile phone users pointed out that MPT has offered the same service for several years at a rate of K25 per transfer.

BEIJING

China: Google provoked Gmail blocking

INTERNET giant Google's unwillingness to obey Chinese law is to blame for the shutdown of its hugely popular email service, state-run media said on December 30 after the last easy way to access Gmail was apparently blocked.

"China welcomes the company to do business on the prerequisite that it obeys Chinese law; however Google values more its reluctance to be restricted by Chinese law, resulting in conflict," the *Global Times* said in an editorial.

Gmail, the world's biggest email service, has been largely inaccessible from within China since the run-up to the 25th anniversary in June of the Tiananmen Square crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators.

Users could access the service by using third-party mail applications, rather than the webpage. But Jeremy Goldkorn, founder of Beijing-based Danwei which tracks Chinese media

and the internet, said those ways of connecting were also barred in recent days.

Some access seemed to be restored on the afternoon of December 30, with some users saying they could download messages.

Google's own Transparency Report showed a slight uptick in traffic compared with the past two days, although the amount of users accessing Gmail from China was still a fraction of what it was before the block.

China operates the world's most extensive and sophisticated internet censorship system, known as the "Great Firewall"

Foreign websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are routinely blocked and content that the ruling Communist Party deems offensive is often quickly deleted.

Google withdrew from China in 2010 after a fallout with Beijing over censorship issues. - AFP

Budget Beat Blasters

- Myo Satt



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World

WORLD EDITOR: Fiona MacGregor

OPINION

Who had the worst 2014 in Asia? Not Obama, but sadly, an entire ethnicity

CURTIS S CHIN & JOSE B COLLAZO

THERE goes the Year of the Horse. As 2015 begins and the Year of the Sheep approaches, it's time for one last look at the year we left behind.

Last year our winner of the "Worst year in Asia" was US President Barack Obama. However this year, despite a trying year at home where midterm elections saw the president's political party lose control of the US Senate, he has avoided an appearance on our "Worst year in Asia 2014 edition".

Read who took the "honour" - along with our take on the people who had a really bad year, a bad year, a not-so-good-or-bad year, a good year and the best year in Asia. Congrats, of sorts, to all.

WORST YEAR IN ASIA

The Rohingya people

Stateless. Marginalised. Persecuted. These are the words used to describe the plight of Myanmar's Muslim minority the Rohingya - a people whose very identity Myanmar's leaders and would-be leaders including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi decline to recognise. Sectarian riots have killed hundreds. Thousands have fled, easy targets for human traffickers, and at least dozens have drowned, fleeing on rickety boats to Malaysia or Indonesia. Those that stay in Myanmar face restrictions on movement, marriage and education. This year is unlikely to bring any respite as the nation's primarily Buddhist and majority Bamar (or Burman) ethnicity electorate and all too many foreign investors, enamored of a new Burma, look the other way.

REALLY BAD YEAR

The once-anonymous Asian business executive

Can it get it much worse for Malaysia Airlines CEO Ahmad Jauhari Yahya or Sony CEO Kaz Hirai? In a region all too often stereotyped as the realm of crony capitalism and secretive CEOs - shareholder accountability, what's that? - 2014 saw tragedy and a cyberattack bring to Asian executives the sort of scrutiny that Western business executives have grown accustomed to in a world dominated by social media and a 24-hour news cycle. In Kuala Lumpur,

Mr Yahya continues for now as head of an airline still struggling in the wake of one missing airliner and another shot down over the Ukraine. In Tokyo, Mr Hirai has had a lot of explaining to do, first over the struggling conglomerate's billions of dollars in losses in five of the last six years. Now comes the "mother of all email leaks", deriving from a cyberattack suspected to be of North Korean origin and detailing tension between Mr Hirai and Hollywood subsidiary Sony Pictures Entertainment - one of its few, if not only, profitable units. Not everyone can be a Jack Ma, the founder of China e-commerce pioneer Alibaba who saw a 2014 IPO turn him into China's richest man, or Air Asia CEO Tony Fernandes whose performance so far in the midst of the latest air tragedy to strike Asia has so far been hitting the right notes.

BAD YEAR

Cho Hyun-ah

And then there's Cho Hyun-ah, also known as Heather Cho, the one-time Korean Air vice president. We know that air travel has become a drag. Just ask Ms Cho, whose father Cho Yang-ho runs the airline, and who took it upon herself to order a plane back to gate in order to remove a steward who failed to ensure that her macadamia nuts were served to her on a plate, not in a bag. The incident of "nutrage" went viral, and has brought unwanted attention to South Korea's conglomerates, the families who run them, and the power they wield. The only winner: sellers of macadamia nuts, who saw sales jump after the incident became public.

NOT-SO-GOOD YEAR

Umbrella Man

In late September, thousands took to Hong Kong's central business district demanding fully free elections only to be met by police using pepper spray and tear gas to disperse them. Thus was born the "Umbrella Revolution", and an image of "Umbrella Man" - that of a defiant protester clutching an umbrella amidst tear gas - was beamed across the globe to become the symbol of the movement. Much more than a symbol of Hong Kong's struggle to find a way forward under Beijing's heavy hand, the Umbrella Man speaks to the plight of democracy

in the region. Whether the jailing of pro-democracy bloggers in Vietnam and anti-coup activists in Thailand, or stalled reforms in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, 2014 was clearly a not-so-good year for democracy in Asia.

NOT-SO-BAD YEAR

Kim Jong Un

They say there's no such thing as "bad press", and perhaps this whole blow-up behind Sony Films' political comedy *The Interview*, which depicts the assassination of North Korea's supreme leader Kim Jong Un by a newsman and producer played by actors James Franco and Seth Rogen, may have been exactly what Mr Kim wanted to announce his return, and relevance, after disappearing from public view earlier this year. Joining the likes of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie on the pages of popular magazines that normally don't cover diplomatic news, Mr Kim is now a household name to people who had no idea who he is or what's going on in the Korean peninsula. His nation's economy may be falling fast, and his conventional arms rusting away, but there's no questioning that Mr Kim had made headlines from Hollywood to Washington to Tokyo at year's end.

GOOD YEAR

India's space program

Many Asian nations talk about moving up the knowledge and value chains, but no one did it in such a dramatic fashion as India with its first interplanetary mission, officially called M-O-M, for Mars Orbiter Mission. Launched by the Indian Space Research Organisation in November 2013, its Mars craft, after a 298 day journey, successfully entered Mars's orbit on September 24. In doing so, India became the world's fourth nation to embark successfully on an interplanetary journey, and did so in its first attempt - something, the US and other space powers can't claim - and in a triumph of low-cost engineering, at a US\$74 million price tag. That's less than the cost of the Hollywood movie *Gravity*.

BEST YEAR

Asia's new management

Jokowi, Modi, and even Xi and Abe. Best year in Asia goes to leaders of countries representing the vast majority of Asia's populace. "Under New Management", a sign often signalling changes to come, would also be appropriate across a map of Asia as China, India, and Indonesia, home to a third of the planet's population, have undergone a change in leadership these past two years. India's Narendra Modi and Indonesia's Joko "Jokowi" Widodo are seen as pro-business and reform-minded. Their agendas have the potential to kick into high gear their respective countries' economies. They will face a tough, uphill battle to root out corruption and improve each country's business environment, as will Xi Jinping in China and Japan's Shinzo Abe, but if successful, together will assure the region's critical role in growing the global economy, and accelerate the rise of the "Asian Century."

.....
Curtis S Chin, a former U.S. Ambassador to the Asian Development Bank, is managing director of advisory firm RiverPeak Group, LLC. Jose B Collazo is a Southeast Asia analyst and an associate at RiverPeak Group.



PANGKALAN BUN

Search for Ai tightens as m

INDONESIAN recovery teams narrowed the search area for AirAsia Flight 8501 on January 2, hopeful they were closing in on the plane's crash site, with a total of 16 bodies and more debris recovered from the sea.

French and Singaporean investigators with equipment for detecting the signal from the plane's black boxes were set to join the hunt for the Airbus A320-200, which disappeared from radar during a storm on December 28 en route from Indonesia's second city of Surabaya to Singapore.

The plane crashed in the shallow waters of the Java Sea off Borneo but rough weather and high seas were hampering the search for the fuselage and the bodies of the 162 passengers and crew.

Search and rescue agency chief Bambang Soelistyo said the search on January 2 was focused on an area of 1575 nautical square miles, with 29 ships and 17 aircraft engaged in the operation. It is a tenth the size of the previous, which covered an area of 13,500 nautical square miles.

"There are two main tasks in this priority sector: First, to locate the biggest part of the plane's body.

"The second task is to find the position of the black boxes, or flight recorders, which will be carried out by the KNKT [National

Transport Safety committee] which start working today," he told a press conference.

"Divers are already on standby at the navy ship Banda Aceh to dive on that priority area to locate the body of the plane," he said.

"I hope we'll get a significant result today."

Another search official, SB Supriyadi, said the bodies and debris recovered so far had been found within a relatively small area, which indicated the fuselage was likely nearby.

"We found parts of the plane which could be part of the wing or the plane's interior," he said on local television channel MetroTV, displaying a white wooden structure about 1.5 metres by 1 metre (5 feet by 3 feet) with part of a corrugated hose attached.

Former transport minister Jusman Syafii Djalil said it appeared to be part of a wing flap.

Mr Supriyadi told MetroTV that they had also detected a metal structure but it proved to be a false lead, possibly a sunken ship.

There are dozens of shipwrecks in the Java Sea, both modern and from World War II when the area was the scene of a major naval battle between the Allies and the invading Japanese.

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Dated: 5 January 2015



A year in pictures:
Look back on 2014
in photographs

WORLD 32 - 33

Middle class
Bangladeshis turn
to minstrel life

WORLD 34



Fears for sharks as
population continues
to decline

WORLD 35



IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP

Revellers film fireworks during a New Year celebration in Manila on January 1. The Philippines is mainly Roman Catholic but the event draws on ancient superstitions and Chinese traditions in which the noise from firecrackers is meant to drive away evil spirits and bring good luck in the coming year. Philippine authorities said more than 260 people had been injured by fireworks, firecrackers or stray bullets in the days leading up to New Year's Eve.

r Asia crash spot ore bodies retrieved



Indonesian officers carry wreckage from AirAsia flight QZ8501. Photo: AFP

Mr Supriyadi also said the weather had improved to allow the use of helicopters as well as ships in the search.

"Besides the aerial search, we'll concentrate on searching for the fuselage using sonar detectors," he said.

"Hopefully we'll be able to locate it so that the victims will be immediately retrieved and brought to their families."

Relatives held the first funeral for an AirAsia victim on January 1 afternoon after her body was handed over to her family in Surabaya.

Police said she was identified as Hayati Lutfiah Hami from fingerprints and a surgery scar, plus an ID and a bracelet on her which the family recognised.

A crisis centre for identifying the victims has been set up at a police hospital in Surabaya with facilities to store 150 bodies.

Police said they would be using fingerprints, dental records and DNA to identify victims. Visual identification is likely to become more difficult the longer the bodies remain in the tropical sea.

The plane is believed to be in

relatively shallow water of around 25-32 metres (82-105 feet).

Before take-off the pilot had asked for permission to fly at a higher altitude to avoid a storm. But his request was not approved due to other planes above him on the popular route, according to AirNav, Indonesia's air traffic control.

In his last communication, Captain Iriyanto, an experienced former air force pilot, said he wanted to change course to avoid the menacing storm system. Then all contact was lost, about 40 minutes after the plane had taken off.

Of the 162 passengers and crew on board Flight QZ8501, 155 were Indonesian, with three South Koreans, one Singaporean, one Malaysian, one Briton and a Frenchman, the co-pilot Remi Plesel.

The plane was operated by AirAsia Indonesia, a unit of Malaysia-based AirAsia, which previously had a solid safety record.

The crash came at the end of a disastrous year for Malaysian air travel.

After the disappearance of Flight MH370 in March, en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with 239 passengers and crew, another Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 was shot down over Ukraine in July, killing all 298 on board. — AFP

SHANGHAI

New Year's Eve crush deaths mainly women

CHINA on January 2 mourned the 36 dead from a New Year's Eve crush on Shanghai's famed waterfront, as the city government revealed the victims were mainly young women.

In the morning, around 100 people gathered in front of a statue of Shanghai's first communist mayor Chen Yi near the accident scene, some laying flowers in a government-approved show of mourning.

The youngest of the 32 victims identified so far was a 12-year-old boy, the oldest 37. All but four were aged 25 or under, according to a list released by the city government on January 2, and 21 were female.

University student Chen Xiaohang placed white chrysanthemums at the site in memory of the sister of a high-school classmate who died.

"I feel very sad about this and I hope the government will offer better safety controls for events like this," she said.

The incident was Shanghai's most deadly accident since a fire in a high-rise residential building killed 58 people in 2010 and tarnished the commercial hub's international reputation.

Shanghai residents were questioning why the city government did not control the crowds, though police said a "more than normal" 700 police officers were present.

"The Shanghai government should take responsibility for the incident," said taxi driver Xu Jianzhong.

Authorities at first removed flowers after the incident but later set up crowd barriers to allow them to be laid in a controlled area. On the evening of January 1, mourners lit candles including an arrangement in the shape of a heart.

Internet postings and media

reports initially blamed US dollar-like notes, which were actually promotional items from M18, a glitzy Bund nightclub, thrown from a building for setting off a scramble and causing the carnage.

But police said the "money" throwing occurred 12 minutes after and 60 metres away from the crush in a plaza.

"This happened after the stampede incident," police said in a statement that cited surveillance video, adding it did not cause crowding pressure.

Shortly after the incident Chinese President Xi Jinping demanded an immediate investigation.

The disaster, centred on a wide stairway leading up to a riverfront promenade, happened shortly before midnight on December 31 as people packed the Bund area to usher in 2015.

The Bund, renowned for its colonial architecture, is the former financial district of China's commercial hub and now a popular tourist destination, packed with high-end restaurants and expensive boutiques.

Shanghai residents have traditionally flocked there to celebrate New Year, and more recently the district government has staged official celebrations.

This year's "countdown" included a light show, performances and fireworks. It was scaled down and moved to a new location specifically due to concerns about overcrowding after nearly 300,000 people turned out to see the spectacle last New Year's Eve, the *Shanghai Daily* said.

The tragedy was a "wake-up call that the world's second-largest economy is still a developing country which has fragile social management", the official news agency Xinhua said in an unusually critical commentary. — AFP

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2014 – The year in photographs



January



February



June



March



May



April

Jan Riot police officers gather to clash with protesters in Kiev on January 22 following two months of protests over then-Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich's failure to sign a deal for closer ties with the EU.

Feb South Sudanese children from the Dinka ethnic group stand at a cattle camp in the town of Yirol, in South Sudan, on February 12 as UN leader Ban Ki-moon condemned the use of cluster bombs in the war there.

Mar An anti-government activist is arrested by national police during a protest against Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro's government in Caracas on March 13.

Apr The mother of murdered Abdolah Hosseinzadeh slaps the man who killed him during the execution ceremony in Nowshahr on April 15, before she removed the noose around his neck – sparing his life.

May Pope Francis prays at Israel's separation barrier in Bethlehem on May 25, during a three-day Middle East tour aimed at forging regional peace.

Jun A tourist at Copacabana beach in Brazil jokes in front of an advertisement showing Uruguay's forward Luis Suarez on June 26 following his four-month soccer ban for biting Italian Giorgio Chiellini.

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✂

2014 - The year in photographs

Photos: AFP



July

Jul Wreckage covers the crash site of the downed Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in a field near the village of Grabove, in the Donetsk region on July 23 almost a week after it was shot down over Ukraine.



August

Aug Palestinians flee their destroyed neighbourhood on a horse and cart in the northern Gaza Strip city of Beit Hanun, on August 18, just hours before the midnight expiry of a five-day ceasefire.



September

Sep South African Paralympian athlete Oscar Pistorius leaves the High Court on September 11 after being found not guilty of murdering his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp.



December

Oct A woman reacts after her husband dies from suspected Ebola virus in the Liberian capital Monrovia on October 4, during the deadliest epidemic of the disease on record.



October

Nov A medic stitches the head of a wounded Syrian boy at a makeshift clinic after a mortar reportedly fired by Syrian government forces fell in the rebel town of Douma where 200,000 people were under siege.



November

Dec Mourners light candles during a vigil in Islamabad on December 18, for the 148 people - mainly children - killed in a Pakistani Taliban attack on an army-run school in Peshawar.

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CHHEURIA

Wealthy Bangladeshis adopt the life of wandering minstrels

AFTER giving up all worldly possessions, they wander the Bangladesh countryside dressed in white robes, singing of peace and love for all with their single-stringed *ektaras*.

Bangladesh's "mystic minstrels" have long been dismissed as hippies and even attacked and killed after being branded heretics in the Muslim-majority country.

According to their leaders, Bangladesh's minstrels, known as Bauls, are growing in popularity, even attracting members of the rising middle class with their ethos of inclusion and rejection of consumerism.

"More and more people are drawn to Baul philosophy and its humanism despite the attacks and daily humiliation," said Mohammad Aynuddin, 35, an English teacher at a state school who describes himself as a Baul enthusiast.

Originating in Bengal in the 17th century, the sect was popularised by musician and social reformer Lalon Shah whose moving songs of religious tolerance inspired poets and thinkers of the time.

Many ascetic Bauls renounce the modern world and travel on foot from town to town singing and begging alms, staying at ashrams, but have no fixed address. Others choose to remain in their homes, but live a quiet, secluded life of music and worship.

Strongest in west Bangladesh and across the border in India's West Bengal, the sect's philosophy is a mix of Hinduism and Sufism rather than one specific religion, angering some Islamic hardliners.

In November, suspected Islamist militants hacked to death a popular sociology professor who had held weekly meetings on Baul philosophy and also pushed for a ban on the full-face veil on campus.

Although police are still investigating, the professor's son and his colleagues believe both moves enraged religious fanatics.

In August, Muslim villagers also attacked a group of wandering Bauls, hacking off their beards and hair and forcing them to recite Islamic prayers, according to the *Daily Star* newspaper.

But such attacks failed to dent the mood recently at Lalon's shrine



Aftab (right) and Saleha (second left), blindfolded and with their hands tied, are led round the shrine of a revered Bangladeshi poet and Sufi mendicant in the village of Chheuria some 250 kms from Dhaka on October 18. Photo: AFP

in a remote western village, where sect members new and old gathered to mark the 124th anniversary of the singer's death.

Blindfolded, with their hands tied and draped in white death shrouds, new recruits Aftab and Saleha were led around the shrine, while dozens sang and played their *ektaras* and drums, in a lively initiation.

The 70-year-old husband and wife, who both use only one name, have handed over their prosperous restaurant in Dhaka to their children, to spend the rest of their lives roaming the country singing.

"Today I'll become a beggar. I'll live by begging and won't care about worldly affairs," the worshippers sang as the pair, dressed in the shrouds to symbolise their "last journey as free souls", walked around the shrine seven times.

Thousands of Bauls took part in five days of singing and other celebrations for Lalon in late October in the border town of Chheuria where he once established an ashram for his followers.

"From now on their religion will be humanism. They'll be neither Muslim nor Hindu or Christian," said Banat Ali Fakir, who became a Baul seven years ago, as he watched the initiation.

After taking a two-day vow of silence, the new recruits were expected to beg rice and other food from adjoining neighbourhoods to host a feast for their fellow followers.

"In the past only a few hundred people would visit the shrine daily," shrine caretaker Mohammad Ali Fakir said.

"Now there are days we see 2000 to 5000 people. More and more people are becoming Bauls as its core message is humanism. It does not differentiate between peoples or castes," he said.

Some Bauls expressed concern about the recent attacks, saying that, with just a musical instrument, they are vulnerable and unable to defend themselves as they travel around singing.

"They ask us: Why don't we say our Islamic prayers or fast during the

month of Ramadan? They warn that nobody will join our funeral prayers," Baul enthusiast Aynuddin said, describing the response of his Muslim fellow villagers.

But Baul researcher and writer Saymon Zakaria said the attacks are "nothing new" although he conceded they are growing amid a rise in the number of "hardline Islamists in rural areas who see the Bauls as a threat".

"Most Bauls simply ignore these attacks and live a quiet life among villagers. They are mainly pacifists who won't fight back," he said.

Bauls are growing in numbers in cities because of their "pastoral appeal" although there are no official figures.

Baul philosophy is even spreading to Western countries like Japan because "it's a kind of rebellion against consumerism. It is also a new fashion," according to Mr Zakaria.

"People are tired of straightjacket rituals. They seek peace and salvation and they find that in Lalon Shah's songs and Baul lifestyle," he said. - AFP

MANILA

Former president sent back to detention for NY

DETAINED former Philippines president Gloria Arroyo was set to be back under hospital guard for new year after being allowed home for Christmas ahead of the Pope's visit to the country.

On December 22 a court decided to show "compassion" ahead of Pope Francis's January visit to the Philippines.

Ms Arroyo has been under arrest since 2011 on charges of vote-rigging and corruption and is being held in a government hospital where she is receiving treatment for a rare bone disease.

The 67-year-old, who was president from 2001-2010, was told she would be allowed to stay at her home in Manila from December 23 to 26 "for humanitarian reasons", according special anti-graft court clerk Estela Rosete.

However permission to remain over the New Year period was denied.

Ms Rosete quoted a court resolution saying the leave was granted "in light of the forthcoming visit of his holiness, Pope Francis who is the personification of mercy and compassion".

The pontiff is due to visit the predominantly Roman Catholic archipelago from January 15 to 17 and will attend events that are expected to draw millions of people.

Ms Rosete stressed that Ms Arroyo was only being allowed to visit her home. "Not to any other place, just there," she said, adding that visitors were permitted and that there would be a police escort.

Ms Arroyo's lawyers had asked that she be granted leave from December 23 to January 3. Her successor and arch-critic President Benigno Aquino has previously blocked Ms Arroyo's efforts to seek medical treatment abroad. - AFP

3 YEARS

Period of time former Philippine president Gloria Arroyo has been held under arrest on corruption charges

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TANJUNG LUAR

Fears grow for falling shark population

SHARKS are hauled ashore every day at a busy market on the central Indonesian island of Lombok, the hub of a booming trade that provides a livelihood for local fishermen but is increasingly alarming environmentalists.

Now a Singaporean is luring the fishermen away from Tanjung Luar market, where an array of other sea creatures including manta rays and moray eels are also sold, by offering them jobs as local guides for the growing number of tourists visiting the island.

"The whole dream is that there's enough tourists coming, not on a daily basis because the corals would be affected, but maybe on a weekly basis," said Kathy Xu, a former teacher who gave up her job to focus on the project.

"Hopefully I can engage more fishermen to do this."

But Ms Xu recognises that she faces an uphill battle to tackle a lucrative industry, which is fuelled by demand for fins, particularly from China, and has transformed the vast Indonesian archipelago into the world's biggest shark fishery.

On a recent visit by AFP to Tanjung Luar, 10 sharks were laid out on the dirty tiled floor before being auctioned off, but an environmental group said on a busy day up to 300 are brought to the market.

"Sometimes there are so many sharks we can't fit them all in here," said Ismail, a businessmen who finances local shark fishermen and goes by one name.

So far Ms Xu has persuaded a

handful of fishermen to work with tourists, mostly from Singapore, taking them snorkelling on beautiful coral reefs and to secluded white-sand beaches, on average twice a month.

She also takes visitors to the market to raise awareness about the impact of shark-fishing in Indonesia, where 110,000 tonnes are caught a year, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

During a recent tour, 25 Singaporean students aged 13 to 15 watched women transfer fish from colourful baskets into buckets, workers sharpen their machetes and porters haul sharks hung over their shoulders.

"Normally you find out these problems from picture books, saying killing sharks for their fins is bad, but they don't really go further than that and you don't really think about it anyway," said 14-year-old Ray Chua.

Despite Ms Xu's efforts, hunting sharks remains a better option for many local fishermen.

"We get much more money from hunting sharks than taking tourists to swim. On a lucky day, I can get 10 times more for catching sharks," said Sulaiman, who goes by one name.

While the fins are sold on to China and other countries where they are considered a delicacy, the rest of the shark is sliced up and its meat and skin made into meatball soup and snacks that have become part of the local diet.

There has even been a recent trend toward eating shark pups, which are being sold in major grocery chains



A man holds a dry shark skin up for students from Singapore to see as they visit a traditional market in Tanjung Luar in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, on November 14. Photo: AFP

on the main island of Java, said shark protection campaigner Riyanni Djangkaru.

Conservationists have long been raising the alarm about shark-fishing in Indonesia, and point to signs that populations have been declining around Tanjung Luar and across the

whole archipelago, which consists of over 17,000 islands.

The Lombok market is one of the few where sharks are openly landed. In other parts of country, fishermen hunt sharks in the open sea, slicing off their fins and dumping them back in the water to die.

However, protection groups point out that careless fishing by tuna trawlers is the biggest killer of sharks.

Far more of the creatures die when they are accidentally caught in trawlers' nets in places such as Bali, central Sulawesi island and in the south of Java, than by fishing, they say. — AFP



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Ethnic Akha ring in New Year at Kengtung festival



PHOTOS: DOUGLAS LONG AND THANDAR KHINE



DOUGLAS LONG
dlong125@gmail.com

HELMETS are mandatory for anyone riding a motorcycle in Kengtung in eastern Shan State, but traffic police were willing to make an exception for the ethnic Akha women who sported traditional beaded and metal-festooned headgear as they streamed into the town's football stadium on December 28.

They had travelled many kilometres from their mountaintop villages to attend the 2015 Akha New Year Festival, which celebrated the arrival of the Year of Sheep on the Akha astrological calendar.

The elaborate women's headaddresses - whose design indicates the wearer's age and marital status - were not the only eye-catching styles on display. Black-dyed costumes were decorated with colourful embroidery, and some outfits were further embellished with beaded necklaces, metal belts or large medallions. Post-adolescent women wore *jejaws* - beaded sashes that hang down the front of the skirt - while many men had donned dark turbans, some with dangling metal attachments, others with feathers sticking out the top.

Shan State Chief Minister Sao Aung Myat was on hand at the festival's mid-morning opening ceremony to cut the tinsel, release the balloons and deliver the standard rose-tinted government lecture about unity among Myanmar's ethnic groups.

The festivities ground to a virtual standstill during the heat of day, but when night fell the stadium quickly filled

with vendors selling sticky rice and grilled meat, children going crazy in the dragon-shaped bounce house, and young men laying down wads of kyat in fruitless efforts to master tricky ring-toss and darts games.

On the main stage, distorted pop music blared as women in Akha dress performed dances whose movements borrowed heavily from Kachin, Kayin and other ethnic styles.

Far more interesting was the secondary stage, which featured live performances of eerily lilting Akha vocal music. Near this stage, a group of revellers slowly circulated around a flagpole, following a wooden pathway that had been laid on the ground. As they walked, they rhythmically clacked long bamboo sticks on the wood planks, while a few others rang gongs or played drums.

Despite the big crowds, many Akha stayed away from the celebration in Kengtung because of the expense of travelling to the city.

"If they don't have relatives they can stay with while in Kengtong, most of them can't afford to come to the festival," said Shan tour guide Sai Nook Seng (Matt). He explained that the remote Akha villages hold their own New Year festivals around January 2 and 3, with celebrations including the roasting of pigs.

The Akha are originally from Yunnan Province in China, but significant numbers migrated to Myanmar, Laos and Thailand in the early 20th century.

They are the second-biggest ethnic group in the Kengtong area, accounting for about 10 percent of the regional population. The biggest group, the Shan, constitute 80pc of the local population.



THIMPHU

Bhutan directors face uphill battle to make movies

AMMU KANNAMPILLY

WHEN Bhutan's top director Tshering Wangyel finishes a film, he and his staff take to the Himalayan countryside for months at a time armed with a projector, tent, screen and tickets.

Moviemaking in the isolated kingdom is strenuous business. Not only do you have to teach yourself the filmmaking basics, but you must also lug a makeshift cinema from village to village to reach Bhutan's movie-loving population.

Despite the lack of infrastructure, Bhutan's 25-year-old industry is thriving, with audiences in one of the most remote countries on earth flocking to homegrown movies that blend Bollywood with traditional Buddhist teachings.

"Currently, it takes us a year to cover the country for screenings. I used to do it myself all the time. Now I send my staff," Wangyel said.

Many of the industry's directors and actors also have to juggle their passion for cinema with day jobs as soldiers, monks and even politicians.

Wangyel began his career in government, but the avid Bollywood fan, who grew up in a country where Indian musicals were a staple, always had movies on his mind.

"I was living this mundane nine-to-five life when I decided to make my first film: a love triangle about two college kids falling for the same girl," Wangyel said.

Three of his friends acted in the 1999 production and contributed US\$5000 each toward the shoestring budget. Wangyel, then an official in the ministry of agriculture, wrote the screenplay and handled the camera, sound and lighting.

He also made Bhutan's first musical number, lifting the melody from a popular Indian film and convincing his cousins to serve as backup dancers.

He released the flick, *Rawa* (Hope), in Thimphu's only cinema,



A Bhutanese makeup artist brushes an actress's face ahead of shooting a film scene on a set in Thimphu on October 24, 2014. Photo: AFP/Prakash Mathema

the crumbling, rat-infested Lugar, currently under renovation.

By the time he made his second, he realised that while production was a challenge, distribution was an ordeal requiring filmmakers to carry generators, fuel and screening equipment from village to village.

Forty movies later, he says distribution continues to be a slog, handicapping the industry's growth.

Despite these challenges, the industry has expanded substantially, with annual output jumping from three films a decade ago to 15 films this year.

Each year, it attracts new entrants like aspiring director Killey Tshering, who turned a friend's bungalow into a film set and secured funds from a cousin, all to make his debut venture, *Nga Dha Choe* (You and Me).

"Filmmaking in Bhutan is a community enterprise - friends lend their houses, relatives give you money, everyone helps out on set," Tshering, 27, said on the sidelines of his shoot.

The popularity of local films has seen fans give the boot to Bollywood productions, which are rarely shown these days in Bhutan's handful of cinemas after dominating screens for decades.

Although a small number of Bhutanese films - including 1999's *The*

Cup, directed by a Tibetan Buddhist lama - have found critical and commercial success overseas, viewers at home prefer movies with a dose of song and dance.

"If a film is too artistic or realistic, it won't work. Our audiences like a formula. It must include songs, dances, humour and tears," Wangyel said.

Critics blame Bhutan's isolation, which only allowed access to television in 1999, and its limited exposure to world cinema for the formulaic but commercially successful productions.

"The sad part is we say we are so proud of our culture but then you look at our films, it's like we have picked up a broken piece of mirror from Bollywood's vanity case," said independent filmmaker Tashi Gyeltshen.

Gyeltshen, whose short film "The Red Door" screened at the Rotterdam film festival last year, said the relentless push to promote tradition while imitating Bollywood formula risked creating "a cultural desert" for future generations.

"We are wallowing in past glory ... We are not creating anything in terms of leaving a legacy," Gyeltshen said.

"Everyone in Bhutan talks about the preservation of culture, but if you don't create, what will you preserve?"

- AFP

The Global Gossip

NEW YORK Kanye West and Paul McCartney drop surprise New Year single

Musical powerhouses Kanye West and Paul McCartney have teamed up in a surprise collaboration to produce a new single released on January 1 titled "Only One".

The soft ballad, which West said was inspired by his daughter, features the vocals of the world-famous rapper, and former Beatle McCartney on the organ.

The lullaby-like collaboration has been in the works since early 2014, when the two met in a bungalow in Los Angeles, according to a statement from West's label Def Jam recordings.

"The process that would result in 'Only One' began with a simple brainstorming session between the two, with McCartney improvising on the keyboards and Kanye vocally sketching and shaping ideas in a stream-of-consciousness riff," it said.

The song was inspired by West's daughter North, who was sitting in his lap when he sang to her, "Hello my only one".

West said his own mother used to sing those words to him as a child.

"My mom was singing to me, and through me to my daughter," said West, whose first name also means "only one" in Swahili.



Kanye West arrives for the 2014 LACMA Art + Film Gala in Los Angeles on November 1, 2014. Photo: AFP/Valerie Macon



US singer Taylor Swift performs during New Year's Eve celebrations at the Times Square in New York on December 31, 2014. Photo: AFP/Jewel Samad

LOS ANGELES Sony expands distribution for 'Interview'

Sony Pictures said last week it had expanded distribution of the controversial comedy *The Interview* to include more theaters and video-on-demand platforms, after hackers threatened to attack cinemas screening the film.

From January 2, a total of 580 independent theaters were showing *The Interview* - a madcap satire about a fictional CIA plot to assassinate North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un.

Threats by hackers issued after a November cyberattack on Sony Pictures initially prompted the movie giant to cancel the film's Christmas Day release, after many large US theatre chains got cold feet.

The United States has blamed North Korea for the cyberattack, but Pyongyang has vehemently denied any involvement.

The comedy, starring Seth Rogen and James Franco, eventually opened on December 25 in more than 300 independent movie houses that offered to show the film after Sony came under fire for pulling it.

It was also made available on Google Play, YouTube Movies, Microsoft's Xbox Video and on a dedicated website, www.seetheinterview.com.

LOS ANGELES Jennifer Lawrence, 'Hunger Games' stars make Ebola video

Jennifer Lawrence says she would be fine if she got Ebola, in a video that encourages Americans to focus more on West Africans far more likely to die from the dreaded virus.

The actress teamed up with fellow stars from *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 1* for the nearly two-minute online public service announcement from the Ebola Survival Fund.

The video opens with a montage of clips from US television news coverage of the tiny handful of Ebola cases so far in the United States. It then points out that none of the eight "American patients" treated for Ebola in US hospitals have died, while in some parts of West Africa only two out of every 10 cases survived.

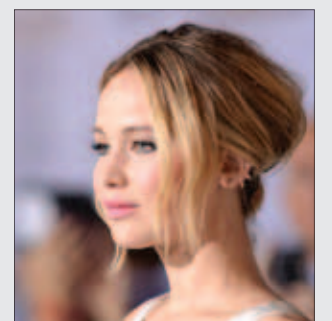
"A lot of them didn't make it," says Lawrence, to which her *Hunger Games* co-star Josh Hutcherson replies, "They didn't have a lot to begin with."

"In Liberia, they had 50 doctors for 4.4 million people," Hutcherson says before telling Lawrence, "I know what would happen if you got Ebola."

"I'd be fine," she solemnly replies.

Mahershala Ali, Liam Hemsworth, Julianne Moore and Jeffrey Wright also appear in the video.

But the core message comes from Harvard medical professor and Partners in Health cofounder Paul Farmer. Ebola patients in West Africa, he says, urgently need IV fluids, electrolytes, food and "many more well-trained West African medical professionals". - AFP



Jennifer Lawrence arrives for the premiere of *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 1* at the Nokia Theatre in Los Angeles on November 17, 2014. Photo: AFP

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Building a sustainable future for Myanmar's weavers



A woman weaves cloth from lotus fibre at the "Made in Myanmar" exhibition at River Ayeyarwady Gallery in Yangon on December 13. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

NANDAR AUNG
nandaraung.mcm@gmail.com

A WOMAN wearing traditional Myanmar dress, her hair tied neatly, sits surrounded by brightly coloured cloth in the attic of the River Ayeyarwady Gallery in downtown Yangon.

Phyu Ei Thein, the creator of the Sunflowers Group Social Enterprise, has been working with local weavers to promote a sustainable textile industry in Myanmar for more than 10 years.

In recognition of her work, she was recently given the Accelerating Woman Entrepreneurs award, with a prize of US\$2500, by the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation NGO. She received the award at a forum held to celebrate Women's Entrepreneurship Day on November 19.

Phyu Ei Thein, 43, has been exporting textiles since 2004, ordering traditionally woven cotton, silk and lotus textiles from Inle, Taungyi and Amarapura, and exporting them to Japan.

She started her Yangon-based enterprise, which produces Myanmar

textiles, natural dyes and knitting accessories, in 2013. Now her products are sold at Pomelo and Thiripyitsaya in Yangon.

"I am not a specialist in weaving or dyeing," said Phyu Ei Thein. "I don't even know how to use a sewing machine. But I'm interested in our traditional crafts and I want to extend our business into the international market."

She spends most of her time at the River Ayeyarwady Gallery, an old garage on 35th Street in downtown Yangon that has been renovated to create an impressive art space displaying hundreds of works by local artists.

Phyu Ei Thein's textile studio is in the attic of the two-story gallery. Here, dyed cloths and traditionally woven textiles made from cotton, silk and lotus fibre – and designed by women in rural areas across Myanmar – are displayed.

As Yangon marches toward modernisation, the city's shopping malls have been flooded with modern textiles and fashion accessories. According to Phyu Ei Thein, both young people and adults prefer modern fashions and branded clothes.

'Because of the increase of foreign products in Myanmar that have taken the place of locally made crafts, there is a lack of demand for local textiles'

Phyu Ei Thein
Sunflowers Group Social Enterprise

In contrast, there are far fewer traditional textile and craft boutiques in the city, although she said shoppers and local designers are becoming increasingly interested in locally produced textiles. However, sourcing quality textiles can be problematic, she said.

"Because of the increase of foreign products in Myanmar that have taken the place of locally made crafts, there is a lack of demand for local textiles. Because of this, most weavers and craftspeople have abandoned their trades and switched to jobs that can earn them more income," she said.

"In other countries, most people earn a regular salary and can pay for what they need. It's not the same in Myanmar. Commodity prices are increasing but salaries don't increase. So tradespeople try to make a greater number of products with less quality. That includes the weaving industry."

Phyu Ei Thein spotted an opportunity to benefit women in rural areas by promoting the local textile industry and improving weavers' incomes.

In return for quality textiles, she said she treats her employees like her family, paying them good salaries

and bonuses based on the number of products they produce. She also provides them with medical checkups twice a year.

In 2013, Phyu Ei Thein held an exhibition of handmade textile products from across Myanmar titled "Made in Myanmar". A second exhibition was held last month and attracted shoppers looking for traditionally woven lotus, cotton and silk products.

"Most people think Myanmar products are cheap and poor quality, and that the labour fees are cheap," she said. "But our products are good quality. So when people ask me whether they are really Myanmar products, I can't accept that. All of our products are genuinely made here in Myanmar. That's why we dare use the label 'Made in Myanmar'."

Phyu Ei Thein plans to set up a weaving studio in Nyaung Shwe near Inle Lake with three women from a weaving school in Taunggyi. She also hopes to visit Japan, where she will study new dyeing and weaving techniques at Kanazawa Art College.

"I think the benefit of having 10 years' experience," she said, "is that I have the strength to keep moving forward."



WEEKLY PREDICTIONS

JANUARY 5 - 11, 2015

AQUARIUS | Jan 20 - Feb 18



Good luck is not far away from you this week, but remember that luck is only what you make of it. Make the most of opportunities that are presented to you and you will see amazing changes. Develop a larger-than-life vision of yourself, your work and your life. Know that actions speak louder than words and anything worth doing is worth doing well.

GEMINI | May 21 - June 20



Social relationships may be turbulent this week, but never confuse your self-worth with your behaviour or the behaviour of others toward you. It takes not one drop of sweat to put off doing something. You may be blaming yourself for missed opportunities in past months, but remember that under no circumstance is self-hate healthier than self-love.

LIBRA | Sept 23 - Oct 22



Nothing is more important than peace, both for the individual and society. This week, take time for self-reflection and inner quiet, away from your hectic everyday life. Be courageous in communication as a means of maintaining social balance. Love freely, and know that love is an art of the soul that helps protect mental well-being and physical health.

PISCES | Feb 19 - March 20



As you start a new year, take time to reflect carefully on what you want to achieve over the coming months. But do not try chase after too many possibilities. Remember that an expert is the one who knows more and more about less and less. Make a good first impression this week which will have a long-term impact. Tread carefully in restoring a romantic relationship.

CANCER | June 21 - July 22



Significant changes are on the horizon, which may bring anxiety this week. But remember that the biggest challenge to change is always the status quo. Know that you must be the change you wish to see both for yourself and for the world. This is the time to pursue your passions in life. Answer a different question but never change your subject.

SCORPIO | Oct 23 - Nov 21



Enrich your life with understanding, and empower your mind by adopting an optimistic attitude when challenges arise later this week. A bright new chapter in your life might begin if you turn over a new leaf and make some positive changes and a considered choice of friends. You will soon receive good news that will inspire you to rise above your problems.

ARIES | Mar 21 - Apr 19



You may be feeling out of your depth this week as you embark on a new challenge. Remember that all things are difficult until we gain experience. Establish a reputation as a reliable person who can be depended on, so your friends will trust you. Do everything in your power to increase the happiness and success of another person close to you.

LEO | July 23 - Aug 22



Taking a professional risk will pay big dividends over the coming week. You are about to complete a journey of self-realisation. Use your new found wisdom to positively influence those around you, as well as any organisations with which you are affiliated. Know what to own and what to let go. Show respect for the opinions of others.

SAGITTARIUS | Nov 22 - Dec 21



Walking through the doorway to success requires looking outward rather than inward. Pay more attention to seeing beyond appearances, as everything is not as it seems. Don't start an unnecessary social war that could damage an important relationship. A misunderstanding between you and your partner will be a cause of friction this week.

TAURUS | Apr 20 - May 20



You may still be harbouring regrets about the year past, but remember that yesterday is only a dream, tomorrow is only a vision but today is life. Ensure you surroundings are free from negative energy, as one's environment influences one's life and thought. Life is not what you get out of it but you put into it. However, living beyond your means will only bring unnecessary worry.

VIRGO | Aug 23 - Sept 22



Go easy on yourself and your partner when a misunderstanding arises later in the week. Know that careful listening can reveal the unseen secrets behind problems. It is important to take enough time to think, plan and prioritise your goals. Strive to replace your misconceptions with truth and notice the positive effect that it has on you and those around you.

CAPRICORN | Dec 22 - Jan 19



It is time to expand your mind and get stimulated. Your actions and deeds should be more effective than words. Believe that ordinary people every so often can do extraordinary things and you are already a qualified person. Remember that a strong relationship can withstand small incompatibilities, so try not to focus on your differences this week.

NEW YORK

As music sales drop, vinyl soars

VINYL sales and music streaming both soared by more than 50 percent in 2014 in the United States, even as overall sales kept declining, a music industry monitor said.

With few blockbuster releases and streaming becoming more mainstream, consumers in the world's largest music market bought 257 million albums last year, a drop of 11pc from 2013, Nielsen SoundScan said in data released last week.

The music industry saw one bright spot in the strong growth of vinyl, which in recent years has become the format of choice for audiophiles and collectors.

Vinyl sales jumped 52pc to 9.2 million, the biggest year since Nielsen SoundScan began tracking data in 1991 when compact discs were becoming the dominant format. But vinyl still accounted for just 6pc of overall physical album sales.

Both CD and download sales kept falling. Downloads accounted for 41pc of album sales, the same as the year before.

Streaming services such as Spotify saw major growth with 164 billion streams of music or video in 2014, up 54pc from the previous year.

The popularity of Spotify and its rivals - which allow subscribers to listen to unlimited music on-demand - has been transforming the music industry. Critics say that streaming gives little incentive for consumers to buy albums and hurts artists overall, but Spotify argues that it provides a rare source of growth in a long-troubled industry.

Chief among Spotify's critics was Taylor Swift, who pulled all of her music from the Swedish streaming service.

Her latest album *1989*, in which Swift moved more definitively from her country roots to pop, was officially the year's top-seller despite coming out in late October, selling 3.6 million copies as of December 28, Nielsen SoundScan said.

Only four albums topped 1 million in sales in the United States, as opposed to 10 titles last year and 13 the year before.

The soundtrack to the Disney film *Frozen*, which came out in late 2013, sold 3.52 million copies in 2014, a notch below Swift.

Two albums in 2014 sold just above 1 million copies in the United States - British soul singer Sam Smith's *In the Lonely Hour* and a Christmas album by a cappella group Pentatonix.

- AFP

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Healthy recipes for the New Year



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food

Photo: Phy

GRILLED EGGPLANT AND FRIED DUCK EGG

6 servings

- 2 medium eggplants
- 2 cloves garlic (finely crushed)
- 2 duck eggs
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 4 tablespoons roasted white sesame seeds
- 2 tablespoons mirin
- 1 teaspoon Kikkoman soy sauce



Grill the eggplants over an open flame – I use my gas stove for grilling – turning them occasionally. When the eggplants are shrunken or cooked through, cool them down.

When they are cool enough to handle, remove the skin and scoop out the flesh. Cut them into tiny pieces and set aside.

Beat the duck eggs in a small bowl with ¼ teaspoon of salt and a little bit of black pepper. Then add the oil into a wok and make it hot over medium heat. Sauté the garlic for few seconds and add the duck eggs to fry. Stir the eggs with a wooden spatula as if you were making scrambled eggs.

When the eggs are cooked, add the sesame seeds and fry for another minute. Add the grilled eggplants and their juices into the wok, followed by the mirin and soy sauce. Fry for 3-4 minutes. Salt to taste.

Serve with grilled meat or rice as a side dish.

AM starting my 2015 column with healthy food recipes for the New Year.

My idea of healthy food is simple: adequate amounts of fibre, protein and starch; less sugar and salt; and no MSG or artificial flavours. If we can stick with these basics, my mission is accomplished.

I worry about the amount of MSG consumed in Myanmar. Many people are aware that MSG is considered unhealthy, but people are still addicted to it. The more they use, the more addicted they become.

Instead, I try to make recipes focusing on natural flavours from the food.

Let's start with essential Japanese ingredients for making a healthy rice salad.

Being Asian, I love rice salad.

But when Westerners think of salad, they usually think of lots of greens. This is good for health, and provides an excuse to add greens into my recipe.

If you love Japanese food, you need to stock your kitchen with soy sauce, mirin, ginger and rice wine vinegar. Sesame oil is another necessary ingredient.

You can keep these ingredients for a few months without worrying that they will spoil.

Use a glass, ceramic or wooden bowl to mix the ingredients.

HEALTHY RICE AND KIDNEY BEAN SALAD

6 servings

- 2½ cups cooked rice
- 1 tin kidney beans
- 280-300g Chinese cabbage

- 4 spring onions

DRESSING

- 1 teaspoon ginger (grated)
- 1 tablespoon Kikkoman soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon mirin
- 2 teaspoons rice wine vinegar
- ½ teaspoon brown sugar

PREPARATIONS

To make the dressing, mix all the ingredients in a bowl and set aside.

Drain the kidney beans and rinse well. Drain again. Slice the spring onions finely. Shred the cabbage finely.

Add the cooked rice into a big bowl and add the kidney beans, spring onions and Chinese cabbage. Add dressing according to taste. Mix well.

Serve with grilled meat.

Restaurant Review

Taunggyi restaurant offers fresh and tasty Shan food

CHIT SU

suwai.chit@gmail.com

AMONG Shan State residents, Thibaw Ma Nan Htay restaurant comes recommended as one of the best places to eat traditional Shan food in Taunggyi. The two-storey establishment in Daisy Street opened two years ago and during my visit it was packed, despite it not even being lunchtime.

Specialties of the house include the Shan versions of *hinhtoke* (vegetable curry packed in a banana leaf), pork curry and sour rice. I ordered a small dish of noodles (hot and sour) (K500), sour rice (K500), pork curry (K1200), chicken curry (K1200) and *mokete* (noodles in chicken soup) (K1000).

As locals will know, genuine Shan chicken and pork curries are made

with steamed meat and are not at all sour, unlike the variants available in Yangon restaurants. Homesick Shan natives can bring local delicacies back with them – garlic soaked in pure honey, green chilli mixed with garlic, and various kinds of pickled tea are particularly popular.

My order arrived promptly. The noodles were sour, a little salty, and spicy enough to make me sneeze. The chicken and pork curries were sweet and rich, with the meat crushed small and mixed with sticky Shan rice. But I found the pork curry oily and cloying.

The sour taste of

Shan rice familiar to Yangon residents derives from tomato paste. But I found the yellow sour rice of Taunggyi, without tomato paste, more delicious, especially when accompanied with fresh garlic and edible herb roots.

My favourite dish was the *mokete* of sliced meat in a little salty soup, adding chilli and garlic paste to taste.

The small plates I had ordered were ample for two, though the price was slightly higher than that of other local establishments (but lower than Yangon). The atmosphere was calm and peaceful, although without both air-con and Wi-Fi.

Altogether, a great place for a good meal with family and friends if you're visiting Taunggyi.



Thibaw Ma Nan Htay

195/196 Daisy Street, U Gyi Khang township, Taunggyi, Shan State

Restaurant Rating
★★★★★

Food	7
Beverages	5
Value	8
Service	7
Xfactor	7



Photos: Yu Yu

After decades of repression, Myanmar Catholics find a saint and a voice



A young boy holding a cross during a service on October 10 at the FR.Carlo Salerio Centre church near Loikaw, Kayah State. Photo: AFP/Ye Aung Thu

SIX decades after its first saint was murdered for his faith amid a bloody civil war, Myanmar's Catholic Church is stepping up calls for peace and religious tolerance as it celebrates its 500th anniversary.

The grisly 1950 killing of Isidore Ngei Ko Lat, a religious teacher travelling with an Italian priest in the wild and war-ravaged eastern borderlands, had been almost forgotten after decades of military rule that severely restricted religious minorities.

But his canonisation in May has bolstered the Catholic Church, which marked five centuries in Myanmar with celebrations that had been delayed by four years because of curbs to religious freedoms under the former junta.

"We are very encouraged because we have the saint, the first saint officially beatified from Myanmar," said Father Celso, a parish priest from the Kayah State capital Loikaw, near where Isidore and his colleague Father Mario Vergara perished.

The pair had waded into a dispute with Baptist ethnic minority rebels in a remote area where they had started an energetic drive to recruit Catholics.

Having accepted government help to travel in the region, they were seen as state allies by the insurgents, who were embarking on what was to become the world's longest-running civil war.

The missionaries were marched into the jungle and shot. Their bodies were stashed in sacks and flung into the mighty Salween river, never to be seen again.

Church meant "there was an element of fear".

Reforms in the country over the past four years have emboldened the Church to speak out against entrenched conflict in northern Christian-majority Kachin state between the army and ethnic rebels, which has displaced around 100,000 people.

Senior figures have also decried religious intolerance and the waves of mob violence against minority Muslims that have left around 200 people dead since 2012.

The Church, which already runs aid projects across the country, has taken part in multi-faith dialogue uniting moderates from all faiths to promote tolerance.

Last month it held a lively celebration at Yangon's cathedral to mark 500 years in Myanmar.

Thousands of people, many wearing colourful traditional dress of ethnic minorities, gathered in the city for the three-day event. Many expressed delight and astonishment to see so many other believers in one place.

"It is a once-in-500-years event," said 25-year-old Baw Ra, her shoulders draped by the shimmering silver shawl of her Kachin traditional costume.



Members of a congregation taking part in a service at the church October 12 in Loikaw, Kayah State. Photo: AFP/Ye Aung Thu

"That time of conflict was not the time to take things slowly and build understanding," Father Celso said in the sun-drenched grounds of Loikaw's imposing cathedral.

He said the missionaries were "competing for the faith" of local people, many of whom were animists or had already converted to Baptism. But the Christian sects had since then put their differences behind them.

Since independence from Britain in 1948 there have been decades of civil strife in Myanmar's border areas. Ethnic minorities have long complained of discrimination, religious persecution and abuses by the army, which ruled with an iron fist from 1962 until 2011.

Successive military regimes enacted "particular discrimination against non-Buddhist religious minorities - Muslims and Christians", said Benedict Rogers of Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

Overall, Christians are thought to make up about 4 percent of Myanmar's 51 million population - around 500,000 of them Catholics.

Muslims make up another 4pc and Buddhists around 90pc, with other religions including Hinduism and animism.

Rogers said that "even in the darkest times" some spoke out against injustice in subtle ways, including by weaving messages into sermons. But the relative powerlessness of the

'If Myanmar is to be truly free, the rights of all ethnicities and religious faiths must be protected'

Charles Bo
Archbishop of Yangon

"If Myanmar is to be truly free, peaceful and prosperous, the rights of all ethnicities and religious faiths must be protected," said Charles Bo, the Archbishop of Yangon, in June.

"A movement that has grown in volume and influence threatens this: extreme Buddhist nationalism."

Portuguese traders are thought to have brought Catholicism to Myanmar in 1510 as they tried to extend their missionary reach from their Indian settlement in Goa.

Early missionaries had to contend not only with the ferocious heat and malarial jungles that had defeated formidable armies, but also the deep reservations of local people.

A booklet published by the Loikaw church tells of the travails during the 1870s of Father Villa, shunned by the locals of Dorokhu village who did not believe he was human because the shoe-wearing priest "had no toes".

"When the long-bearded foreign missionary was seen for the first time, the villagers considered him to be an ogre and they were afraid of him," it said.

But five centuries have seen the church integrated into Myanmar, with Aung San Suu Kyi even meeting Pope Francis at the Vatican in 2013.

That encounter "definitely gives the church greater confidence," said Rogers.

"Even though they are a minority religion I think they are playing quite a key role in society." - AFP

TUBORG ဇူးဖိုး လမ်းစဉ်
FUN GUIDE



Aung Than



Ye Aung



Kyaw Htoo Linn



Yu Thandar Tin

Asus Mobile Launch

A launch event for new Asus mobile phones was held at Chatrium Hotel on December 22.



Nang Khae Mar



Editorial team

MCM Staff Party

The MCM Staff Party was held at Utopia Tower on December 24.



Aung Htay Hlaing and Jeremy



Wa Lone, Dan, Aye Sapay Phyu and Wade



Nyan Linn Aung

Bawarchi Indian Restaurant Opening



Bawarchi management team and guests of honour from the Indian embassy



Marketing team



Jasmin and Ei Thandar Myint



Sailas Thangal (centre), deputy chief of mission at the Indian embassy

Bawarchi Indian Restaurant held its opening ceremony at La Pyae Wun Plaza on December 28.



Designer Ma Pwint Phyu and models wearing her designs

Diplomatic Skills Trainee Fashion Show

An International Fashion Show organised by Diplomatic Skills trainees was held at Sedona Hotel on December 24.



Honey and Sandy



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INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT SCHEDULES

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Vietnam Airlines (VN) Tel: 255066, 255088, 255068. Fax: 255086

Airline Codes

Table listing airline codes: 3K = Jet Star, 8M = Myanmar Airways International, AK = Air Asia, BG = Biman Bangladesh Airlines, CA = Air China, CI = China Airlines, CZ = China Southern, DD = Nok Airline, FD = Air Asia, KA = Dragonair, KE = Korea Airlines, MH = Malaysia Airlines, MI = Silk Air, MU = China Eastern Airlines, NH = All Nippon Airways, PG = Bangkok Airways, QR = Qatar Airways, SQ = Singapore Airways, TG = Thai Airways, TR = Tiger Airline, VN = Vietnam Airline, Y5 = Golden Myanmar Airlines

Subject to change without notice

Legend for Day: 1 = Monday, 2 = Tuesday, 3 = Wednesday, 4 = Thursday, 5 = Friday, 6 = Saturday, 7 = Sunday

MUSCAT

Oman promises ‘true’ Arabia as it looks to boost tourism

VIVIAN NEREIM

FROM desert camping to luxury hotels, turtle-watching and even the Arabian Peninsula’s first Italian-style opera house, Oman is hoping to carve out a place on the global tourist track.

Heavily reliant on energy exports, the tiny Gulf sultanate is keen to diversify its economy, especially as the drop in global oil prices begins to bite.

But despite its natural beauty and rich culture, Oman’s tourism industry has a long way to go.

“Oman reflects the true Arabian history and culture,” said Amina al-Balushi, an assistant director with the tourism ministry.

“We really need to capitalise on this,” she said, adding that the ministry is preparing a 25-year tourism strategy to be unveiled next year.

Western tourists like 46-year-old Marc Jost, who has made five trips to Oman, need no convincing.

“I can’t get enough,” the Swiss visitor said as he strolled in the Muttrah Souk, a historic covered market in the capital Muscat. “The weather is always good. People are very nice.”

Bordering Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and violence-wracked Yemen, Oman has been an island of stability under Sultan Qaboos, who has ruled since overthrowing his father in a bloodless coup in 1970.

Qaboos, now 74, has won praise at home and abroad for transforming a former backwater into a modern state.

In 2011, Oman was caught up in the Arab Spring protest movement that touched much of the region.

Several civilians died in demonstrations that shook the government, leading Qaboos to implement a series of reforms and to arrest scores of activists.

One of the biggest challenges facing the country now is its reliance on oil – which accounts for 75 percent of state revenues – after the price of crude nearly halved since June.

The drop has put pressure on the government, which needs a higher oil price than most other Gulf states to balance its budget. Oman does not have financial reserves as vast as its neighbours.

“The government of course is aiming to diversify the economy through developing tourism as an important sector,” Balushi said.

Oman attracted roughly 2.1 million visitors in 2013, up about 50pc over the previous two years, according to the tourism ministry.

More than 37pc of visitors last year came from Gulf countries, although Oman is also attracting a growing

number of tourists from Britain, Germany, the United States and other Western nations, tourism ministry data show.

The country also invested more than US\$660 million last year in new hotels and other tourism assets, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council, an industry body.

Still, tourism’s direct contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) reached only 3pc, or about \$2.5 billion, last year.

This “looks like beans”, said Fabio Scacciavillani, chief economist at the Oman Investment Fund, the country’s sovereign wealth vehicle.

“These figures do not portray a thriving situation,” Scacciavillani told a tourism conference in Muscat.

“That’s strange, because Oman can probably live off tourism. If Oman didn’t have oil, it would most likely be an economy based on tourism.”

Tourism guidebooks have lauded the country, with Lonely Planet praising its “abundance of natural beauty” and “ancient soul”.

But Oman has suffered from a lack of tourism infrastructure and the belief among many tourists that the entire Middle East is off-limits because of unrest.

Officials are hoping to change that, both with continued investments and efforts to put forward the country’s stability.

“We are trying to promote ... that Oman is separate, Oman is safe,” said Haitham al-Ghassani of the tourism ministry’s promotion department.

For years, Oman said that by 2020 it aimed to attract 12 million tourists annually – more than double the number that visited Jordan last year.

But Balushi said when the ministry releases its 25-year strategy this year it will probably set an easier goal.

“We are not looking for mass tourism,” Ghassani said. “We are more selective.”

He admitted the country’s lack of infrastructure was a problem, making hotel room rates in Oman “very expensive” because of the lack of supply.

Oman has already won over tourists like Markus Roloff, who hopes the government steers development carefully.

The 47-year-old German made the first of his seven trips to Oman in 1990.

“It’s just a beautiful country and I’m impressed by what the sultan did after 1970, how the country developed,” he said.

Over the past two decades, Roloff has watched the tourist scene transform from a smattering of visitors to crowds pouring off cruise ships.

He worries that if too many discover Oman, its quiet charms may be lost.

“I think that tourism will change the country,” Roloff said. – AFP



Tourists visit the Royal Opera on December 23 in the Omani capital Muscat. Photo: AFP/Mohammed Mahjoub

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The Embassy of the Republic of Turkey Vacancy Notice

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Employment

Embassy

THE EMBASSY of the Republic of Turkey is seeking (1) **Staff** - M 1 post: University graduate, Minimum 3 year's work experience with the related field, Minimum 5 year's driving experience and able to travel, Age between 25 - 44, English and Myanmar Speaking, Excellent communication skills. Qualified and interested candidates should submit CV & copies of educational certificate to 19(AB), Kan Yeik Thar St, Mayangone. Yangon before January 31, 2015. Tel : 01 662992

Ingo Position

INT'L Rescue Committee is seeking (1) **Project Manager (MCH)** in Kayah State : M.B., B.S / B.CommH or other degree related to health disciplines. 3 years experience in project. Skilled in Microsoft office package. Good command of English & Myanmar. (2) **Senior Field Health Officer (MCH)** 1 post in Kayah State: M.B.B.S, BCommH, BNSC or other related professional of health developmental science. 3 years experience. Good command of English & Myanmar. (3) **Reproductive Health Project Manager** in Paletwa : Medical degree with public health background/ Master of public health or post graduate diploma in public health is an asset. 5 years of professional experience. Operational skilled on Microsoft Office Package. Fluency in spoken and written English/ Chin (Khume) written and verbal skill is favourable. Please submit a Cover letter & CV to the HR Department, accepted by email at: WaiMar.Naing@rescue.org Closing date : 7

Local Positions

LOLC Myanmar Microfinance Company Ltd is seeking **HR Manager** 1 Post in for Yangon Office: Possess minimum of 2 - 3 years of managerial level experience. Age 30 to 50. A degree in HR or any equivalent professional qualification is a must. A strong competency in spoken and written English is essential. Interested and qualified candidates are to submit a cover letter & CV to Careers@lolcmyanmar.com.

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CALGARY

Female captains make bobsled history at World Cup

TWO-TIME Olympic champion Kaillie Humphries and American Elana Meyers Taylor broke the gender barrier on December 18 by becoming the first women to compete in a World Cup four-man bobsleigh event.

Canada's Humphries finished 15th in her history-making run, flashing down the track in a combined time of one minute, 48.87 seconds. Meyers Taylor was one spot behind her in 16th out of 17 sleds in 1m 49.52s.

Humphries, who was named Canada's athlete of the year earlier in December, had an all-rookie World Cup team that also comprised Joey Nemet, Dan Dale and DJ McLelland.

Dustin Greenwood, Carlo Valdes and Adrian Adams rode with Meyers Taylor.

Humphries, 29, finished over a second behind winner Oskars Melbardis, of Latvia, who clocked 1m 47.84s.

The International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation announced in September that the four-man discipline would be open to female athletes.

Meyers Taylor and Humphries both satisfied national qualifying standards with third-place finishes in their national team trials.

They confirmed their World Cup spots via the international federation's 5-3-2 rule, competing in five races held on a minimum of three tracks within two seasons.



Kallie Humphries at Sochi. Photo: AFP

Humphries, who took up bobsleigh at 18 after training as a skier, won Olympic gold in women's competition in 2010 and again in February in Sochi.

She's also a two-time World Cup winner and says she still plans to compete in women's bobsleigh. She

finished third earlier in the women's two-man event behind Meyers Taylor who placed first with a combined time of 1m 51.76s.

Humphries and Meyers Taylor hope eventually to see a four-woman event added to the Olympic programme. - AFP

MONACO

New illegal substances fuel sports cheats

A HUGE number of new illegal substances are fuelling a surge in sports doping and "smarter" testing techniques are needed to catch cheats, according to the head of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

China is the source of many of the new drugs despite efforts by the Chinese authorities to clampdown, WADA president Craig Reddie told AFP.

New allegations of widespread doping in Russia and looming sanctions against the Tour de France winning Astana cycling team have cast a fresh spotlight on international efforts to stop drug cheats.

International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach called last week for a renewed focus on the "evils" of doping and protection of "clean athletes". Doping could also become a key topic in the election for the presidency of the International Athletic Association next year.

WADA introduced a new code with tougher sanctions on January 1. But Reddie said the battle is far from won.

"On a very regular basis an enormous number of unknown, untested substances appear on the market," Reddie said in an interview.

"The internet is a wonderful, wonderful benefit to mankind but it means you can pick up whatever you want from practically anywhere before we even know that it is on the market."

"The scale of the problem is not getting any smaller," Reddie said.

"A lot of it comes from China, for example. We have discussions with the Chinese authorities at the very highest level. They understand the issue, but it is a real struggle for a country to manage that process."

WADA could still appeal against a three-month ban imposed against Olympic champion Sun Yang who failed a doping test at the national championships in May while the sanction was only announced in November.

But Reddie said, "The China Anti-Doping Agency is a good one. All the evidence I have is that they take this seriously."

Steroids and erythropoietin (EPO) blood boosters are all produced in backstreet factories in China and

other Asian countries, according to experts. New drugs to cover up performance enhancing substances are also being developed.

More than 200,000 tests of athletes are reported to the agency each year, with about 1.3 percent failing. But Reddie said all countries must step up efforts.

"I really think we need to move on from the standard way of detection which is the analysis of blood and urine."

"We need to be smarter; we need to do it better because quite honestly we haven't been able to completely eradicate the problem using the systems that we currently use."

WADA investigators are now looking to see which drug is prevalent in each sport to plan individual campaigns with better targeted testing.

From January 1, the WADA code doubles the maximum ban for doping to four years and includes stronger powers to punish coaches who help athletes dope. There will also be more emphasis on investigations away from drug tests to catch cheats, such as work which caught US cycling champion Lance Armstrong.

But many experts predict widespread legal challenges by athletes.

"I think there will be some interesting legal debate probably on appeals on some of the terms of the higher sanctions - the business of intent, what does that actually mean," said Reddie.

But he stressed that there were two years of consultations on the code, now backed by China, the United States and all major countries, and that athletes had been at the forefront of calls for tougher punishment.

"Many of them wanted life bans, but that's not proportionate. Four years, that is twice what the maximum was, our advice was that would be proportionate whereas a life ban would probably be challenged in court right away."

WADA also backs proposals by countries such as Germany to criminalise doping. But Reddie said there must be no criminal action against athletes.

"What we do not want is criminal law in any country to apply to an athlete that would apply for example a custodial sentence." - AFP



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Street basketball vies for Olympic place

BASKETBALL has become the latest sport wanting an extra event in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, while at the same time battling to keep Japan in the Olympic tournament.

International Basketball Federation (FIBA) president Horacio Muratore told AFP that new International Olympic Committee reforms had made street basketball, three players against three, a prime candidate for 2020.

Baseball, squash and the likes of karate are already lobbying furiously in the race for a place.

IOC changes setting a limit on the number of medal events rather than sports has boosted hopes of many federation leaders like Muratore. The host city can also name a sport that it would like.

Muratore said the 40 reforms to the Olympics were a "big success" for IOC leader Thomas Bach and "very important" for basketball as he presses the case for 3x3.

The mini basketball, played at a frenetic pace on a half-size court, is already in the Youth Olympics and will also be part of the first European Games in Baku in June.

"This opens a door for us for three against three," said the FIBA leader.

"This is a step forward that gives us big hope that at the 2020 Olympics the organising committee will include 3+3 as an additional event.

"This would be a huge step forward if it was accepted because it is our goal to strengthen 3+3 worldwide and be part of the Olympics."

"At the last Youth Olympics in Nanjing, countries that you would usually never hear of in traditional 5+5, such as Andorra, Iraq, Qatar, Guam, smaller nations, are now ac-



Japan playing China in the Asian Basketball championship. Photo: AFP

tually making it on the international stage," Muratore said.

Qatar won the men's title at the 3+3 world championships this year, whilst traditional heavyweights

the United States took the women's crown.

While the likes of Kobe Bryant and LeBron James overshadow the full Olympic basketball court,

Serbia's Dusan Domovic "Raging Bull" Bulut and Dejan Majstorovic dominate the 3+3 rankings.

FIBA faces another battle in Japan after suspending the country for failing to merge its rival national basketball leagues. Japan could miss out on the 2016 Olympics in Rio if it does not enact reforms on time.

The international governing body has talked tough with the Japan Basketball Association over the two men's leagues, but Muratore said he sees "positive" signs that Japanese sports leaders want reform.

"FIBA really regrets that such a situation has reached a point of no return," the president said. "This had to be done because a lot of FIBA requirements were not met."

Muratore said it was "most important to embrace the opportunity that the 2020 Olympic Games will provide to basketball in Japan."

"It is our objective for Japan to have a competing team for the 2020 Olympics both for men and women and it would not make any sense to not have Japan at the Olympics. They are organising it so they should have teams present."

FIBA is setting up a task force in Japan to bring together the National Basketball League and the rival BJ-League (Basketball Japan League).

"We are very hopeful that the situation will change because of the importance of Japan," Muratore said.

"We have always had meetings and communications with the JBA. What we want to achieve here is to get out of this complicated situation."

"We will put our efforts into it and the signals we are receiving from Japan are positive - they want to get out of this situation for the benefit of basketball in Japan," he declared.

- AFP

Myanmar and China celebrate ties with basketball

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BASKETBALL players from China and Myanmar celebrated the New Year and over a century of cooperation between the two countries with a good-will tournament in Bogyoke Aung San Stadium from December 27 to January 1.

The tournament included six basketball clubs from China and four local clubs. The overall winner was from Guangxi China, followed by the Yangon Fire Wolves, with Mandalay's Fox team coming in third.

The event was organized by the national Basketball Federation in partnership with the Myanmar Chinese Chamber of Commerce, which will celebrate its 106th anniversary in 2015.

"I would like our 106th Anniversary to be special" said Myanmar Chinese Chamber of Commerce's Chair Myint Shwe. He went on to say that he and other organisers hope to make the tournament an annual tradition.

For the basketball federation, the tournament is an opportunity to prepare for their main goal: the 2015 Singapore SEA Games.

"[Our] athletes will get valuable international experience from this competition," said U Kyaw Kyaw Win, general secretary of the Myanmar Basketball federation. "After this competition, we will make selections for the Myanmar national basketball team."



Medal ceremony at Aung San Stadium. Photo: supplied

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