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Student demonstrators cling to a barricade during a confrontation with police at Letpadan in Bago Region yesterday. Photo: Zarni Phy

'Blood on your hands': EU defends training for police force

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THE European Union last night defended itself against allegations of complicity in police brutality following a violent crackdown on students in Bago Region, saying it was not responsible for "decisions on the ground".

It also called for a formal investigation into the violence at Letpadan, which the government says resulted in the arrest of 127 people.

The EU has been training Myanmar's police in crowd management and riot control since 2013, reportedly following a request from opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as well as the government. The course included the provision of riot control gear.

The EU said that turning the batons on students was not part of the training.

"The fundamental purpose of the training is to increase the respect of human rights, stress the importance of negotiation and - only as a last resort - consider the use of proportional force," the statement said.

While condemning the actions of police, the EU defended its training program. "This was needed, and as events show, this need still remains," the statement said. "Whilst training can be given, the EU cannot make decisions on the ground."

Anger at the EU delegation due to its Myanmar Police Force training programs began on March 6, a day after a standoff between students and police ended in violent clashes at Letpadan.

In response, activists set up camp near the EU delegation's Yangon headquarters bearing placards condemning its cooperation with the police.

The EU responded with a statement on its Facebook page, but this only provoked further criticism in the comments section, with some posting pictures of students being attacked.

"Shame on you, EU, being fall into the trap and lies of so called reformed government in Myanmar," said one Facebook user, Lin Zaw.

Thurein Linn wrote, "Hey EU, the blood of students and people that shed today is totally on your hands!"

More than 100 held as condemnation grows

Opposition groups and foreign governments last night condemned a violent police crackdown on protesters at Letpadan, set off when students tried to break a police blockade. **NEWS 3**



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KOKANG

UN meets govt over Kokang aid request

UNITED Nations representatives met government officials in Lashio yesterday to discuss the authorities' request for international humanitarian support for people displaced by the deadly conflict in the Kokang region of Shan State.

It is understood to be the first time the government has officially sought international assistance in the region, which has been inaccessible to most outside observers or aid providers since heavy fighting erupted on February 9. Martial law was imposed on February 17.

The move came amid reports that Chinese authorities have been pushing for refugees who fled into China to return to Myanmar.

Pierre Péron, a spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in Myanmar, said the meeting came about after the UN and

humanitarian partners received a request from the Myanmar government "to provide humanitarian support in the Kokang Special Administrative Zone".

"UN staff have been deployed to Lashio and are liaising closely with the authorities there," he told *The Myanmar Times*.

The government had not provided details of what support it is seeking from international organisations prior to the meeting.

Mr Peron said assistance could only be required after UN staff are granted access to the region to assess the humanitarian needs.

"The UN and humanitarian partners in Myanmar are ready to support the government in assisting vulnerable civilians whose needs have been independently assessed. This will require safe and unhindered access to civilians in need," he said.

An estimated 30,000 to 60,000 people are reported to have fled from Kokang into China, while a further 13,000 have been displaced within Myanmar.

A report earlier this week in the state-run *Global New Light of Myanmar* said refugees had already started to return home from China. High-level diplomatic delegations from both countries met on March 8 and discussed the displacement camps set up in China.

It remains unclear whether refugees who have returned did so willingly.

While the government insists the situation in the regional capital Laukkai is stable, reports continue to emerge of fighting taking place in the area. State media reported yesterday that eight Tatmadaw soldiers had been killed and 51 injured in recent days during attempts to regain key positions in the region. — *Fiona MacGregor*

Protest end



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BATON-wielding police yesterday attacked students and monks in Letpadan and arrested almost 130 people in a violent end to an eight-day stand-off over the national education law.

The crackdown prompted widespread condemnation, with the European Union, United States and British embassies in Yangon all expressing their "concern" last night.

Witnesses said the violence started in the early afternoon when students, who had been camped near the Aung Myay Beikman monastery, tried to break through a police blockade. Negotiations had broken down in the morning over student demands to be allowed to continue their protest march toward Yangon that had begun in Mandalay in January.

After exchanges of stone-throwing, about 500 police armed with batons attacked the more-than-100 students. *The Myanmar Times* saw Ko Min Thway Thit, student leader, beaten unconscious by about five police. Ko Aung Hmaing San was also beaten and kicked by police in front of the media. About 10 monks joining the protest were also beaten violently, their heads bleeding.

As the violence intensified, police turned to the media, cursing and shouting, "Beat! Beat! Beat them all to death," forcing about 30 reporters to run to fields near the protest camp.

Then about 300 police raided students hiding in the monastery compound, seizing Ma Phyo Phyo Aung, a student leader, by her neck. All the student leaders were believed to have been arrested in the crackdown.

The Ministry of Information reported last night that 127 people had been arrested. The report defended the use of force, saying that police had responded "according to the law" because protesters had attempted to break through police lines.

Minister for Information U Ye



Htut posted on Facebook that police had "warned the protesters repeatedly" to disperse, and only used force after they attacked police and removed barriers.

However, he conceded that police had overreacted in some cases, referring to damage inflicted on a vehicle used by the students in their demonstration. Photos of the car showed its windscreen had been smashed in.

But the 88 Generation student group said in a statement that it "strongly condemned" the actions of police and called for the immediate release of all who had been

Detained businessman 'leaped to death from window': police

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AN ethnic Chinese businessman with family ties to the commander of Kokang rebels died after leaping from a window of Yangon's military hospital where he was in custody, according to an official police account released yesterday following reports that he had been tortured.

Li Guoquan, a 60-year-old former vice chair of the Myanmar Chinese Chamber of Commerce, was arrested in Yangon by the military intelligence agency on February 23 and died on the evening of March 4. His family collected his body from the hospital and he was buried the next day in Yangon's Yunnan cemetery.

According to a Yangon Region police report that was made available to *The Myanmar Times* yesterday, Mr Li "suffered depression in custody and hit his head against the wall".

Military intelligence agents took him to the military hospital in

Mingalardon township, where he received 12 stitches to his forehead. But he then jumped out of a first-floor window and died on the spot, the report said.

Hearing the news yesterday of his death, members of the business community in Yangon's Chinatown expressed their doubts over the official version. They said it also underscored their fears that the Kokang conflict — which is whipping up nationalist tensions on both sides of the border — could have dangerous repercussions for Myanmar's ethnic Chinese minority.

The businessman's death was first reported by Miandian Zaixian (Myanmar Online), a Chinese-language website which has extensively covered the month-long fighting between ethnic Kokang rebels and government forces in northern Shan State bordering China.

Mr Li was reported to be the brother-in-law of Peng Deren, military commander of the rebel Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) which is fighting to regain territory it lost to the Tatmadaw in

2009. Peng Deren is the son of Peng Jiasheng, also known by his Myanmar name of Pheung Kya-shin, the 85-year-old leader of the MNDAA.

Miandian Zaixian quoted witnesses at the hospital as saying Mr Li's body had serious injuries to the right side of his face and stomach, but that they were prohibited from taking pictures. It cited the hospital's autopsy report as saying he had died of "severe damage to internal organs" which the website claimed was due to torture.

A senior officer at the hospital, who declined to give his name, told *The Myanmar Times* he was not authorised to talk about the case. A hospital worker said he had heard of a patient recently jumping from a window but he had no details.

Mr Li, whose name in Myanmar was U Hla Win, was said to be a keen golf player and a member of various business, sports and ethnic Chinese associations in Yangon with links to Kokang and China's Yunnan province. The Myanmar Chinese Chamber of Commerce was closed yesterday and not available for comment.

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Dated. 11th March, 2015

Students in brutal crackdown



Left: A student protester cries following the confrontation between police and demonstrators. Top: An injured female student is carried by colleagues. Above: Police attack a light truck used by the demonstrators. Photos: Zarni Phyo

arrested. Embassies in Yangon also criticised the government's actions, with the United States tweeting that it was "concerned" and the "violence undermines mutual trust". The British embassy said the crackdown and the use of "irregular security groups" to suppress other demonstrations "undermine the earlier disciplined policing of the demonstrations". The day had begun with signs that the authorities and students would negotiate a way out of the stand-off and avoid confrontation. At about 10am, Yangon Region Hluttaw

representative Daw Nyo Nyo Thin and U Thein Lwin from the National Network for Education Reform met Bago Region Border Minister for Security and Border Affairs Colonel Thet Tun. The initial talks failed but during a second round of negotiations an hour later both sides agreed that the students would finish the 140-kilometre (90-mile) journey to Yangon from Letpadan directly by car, instead of first marching to nearby Tharyarwady as the students had earlier proposed. That agreement broke down when the students rejected the conditions that they not

fly their flags or shout slogans on the way to Yangon, leading to the police assault at about 1:30pm. The students are demanding changes to a framework national education law passed by parliament last year that they say does not give enough freedom from central control to universities and student unions or allocate sufficient resources to education. A set of 11 demands by the students was accepted by government negotiators in February in an attempt to defuse the growing protest movement just as Yangon was also facing demonstrations by factory

workers and farmers. The students, who have received widespread popular support on the road, had insisted on continuing their march toward Yangon to keep up the pressure on parliament while it considered the proposed amendments to the education law. Government officials have privately admitted that they made unrealistic concessions to the students last month but could not take the risk of protests growing out of control if the students were allowed to march on Yangon. - *Additional reporting by Ye Mon and Wa Lone, translation by Thiri Min Htun*

Rohingya clash with Bangladesh forces near Cox's Bazar

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MORE than 100 Rohingya migrants have been released from jail in Bangladesh after a high-speed chase and gunfight on March 6 left one Bangladeshi border guard wounded, sources told *The Myanmar Times*.

After a tip-off, Bangladeshi border guards stopped a convoy of over 300 Rohingya migrants from Myanmar who were travelling near Cox's Bazar on the morning of March 6, according to Reuters.

Fighting ensued and one border guard was shot. Reuters quoted an immigration official who said that 136 Rohingya migrants who had recently crossed the border were detained in the skirmish and then deported back to Myanmar.

But news agencies in Bangladesh reported that the clashes involved human traffickers and resulted in the jailing of 108 migrants pending repatriation arrangements. The UN Refugee Agency said the migrants have now been released.

"We heard from sources that the 108 individuals were not sent back to Myanmar but were released in Bangladesh once they were identified as long-term residents," said Vivian Tan, a spokesperson for the UNHCR in Bangkok.

Myanmar immigration officials claimed to know nothing of the incident, but did say that the migrants would not be allowed back to Myanmar unless they could prove their citizenship status. Many Rohingya, who are officially referred to as Bengali in Myanmar, do not hold citizenship documents.

"No one can claim they are from Myanmar if they don't have legal identity. Some illegal migrants came to Myanmar from Bangladesh," said U Khin Soe, director of the Rakhine State immigration office.

The Bangladeshi embassy in Myanmar did not respond to repeated requests for comment about the episode.

Police beat activist, then apologise at Yangon demo

POLICE beat and detained an activist before apologising and releasing him during a demonstration in Yangon yesterday. The protest was called to condemn a violent crackdown on students at Letpadan in Bago Region. About 100 demonstrators gathered at Sein Gay Har in Hledan at about 2:30pm, an hour after the confrontation at Letpadan, and marched down Pyay Road. They were blocked by about 200 police near the Junction Square shopping centre. When they tried to break through the police line, officers beat and briefly detained one activist. The scuffle quickly attracted

dozens of bystanders, who ignored police instructions to disperse. Demonstration leaders then promised to end the protest if the police released the student and apologised to the crowd - a bargain that was quickly accepted by the officers. "I apologise for beating the student if we have made a mistake, and I promise to release him. Please return to your homes," said a police officer, U Win Kyi. Ko James, the husband of Ma Phyo Phyo Aung, a prominent student activist who was attacked by police at Letpadan earlier in the day, said the government's response to the demonstrations was "very stupid". "The students don't have weapons but they attacked those [students] with weapons. The reforms are going backward. I am very disappointed," he told *The Myanmar Times*. Demonstrator Ko Htoo Shwe Thike said the students could "never forgive and never forget" the government's actions. "The government will face consequences for their mistakes. I really believe that," he said. - *Ye Mon*

'The government will face consequences for their mistakes.'

Ko Htoo Shwe Thike
Demonstrator



Police release a demonstrator they briefly detained during a protest outside Junction Square yesterday. Photo: Kaung Htet

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Dam public consultation ends in protest, criticism

Participants question whether consulting firm broke Unlawful Associations Act in contacting armed groups



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DOUBTS surrounded both the conduct and the outcome of the first public consultation meeting on the Mong Ton Dam in Taunggyi yesterday.

Participants suggested that in canvassing local opinion, the Snowy Mountain Engineering Corporation (SMEC), an Australian consulting firm that chaired the consultation, might have breached the law banning unlawful association with ethnic armed groups. It also emerged that many of the participants were ethnic group members whose shaky grasp of the Myanmar language meant they could not understand everything discussed at the consultation.

A group of civil society organisations took the floor as the meeting wound up to express their opposition to the project.

The dam project, located on the Thanlwin River, is expected to take 14 years to complete. It will produce an estimated 7000 megawatts, of which 90 percent will go to China and Thailand, with 10pc reserved for domestic use.

The dam is being developed by China Three Gorges Corporation, China Southern Power Grid and Power Construction of China, as well as the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand and Myanmar's International Group of Entrepreneurs (IGE).

The dam is the largest of six Myanmar has announced plans to build on the 2800-kilometre (1730-mile) Thanlwin, which is also known as the Nu or Salween River.

During the second part of the four-hour meeting, which was devoted to questions and answers, a participant drew applause when asking how SMEC could have conducted credible social and environmental assessments in the area without committing "unlawful association" under the law, which imposes a blanket ban on contacts with armed groups.

Resettlement specialist Mary Ann Botengan told the meeting, which was held in the Taunggyi Hotel, Taunggyi, Shan State, that SMEC met "different armed groups and we may seek their help in conducting practical feasibility studies".



Activists wearing headbands calling for an end to dams on the Thanlwin River stand up during a public consultation for the 7000-megawatt Mong Ton Dam held in Taunggyi yesterday. Photo: Lun Min Mang

U Kyi Win, a senior government liaison officer with SMEC, said he did not believe this contact violated the Unlawful Association Act.

"We're doing good things for society," he said.

An environmental expert affiliated to SMEC, U Ba Than, told the meeting that SMEC's role was merely to conduct feasibility surveys, and not to favour one side or the other.

SMEC is due to submit its report in the third quarter of the year, and says it will conduct 16 consultation meetings in all.

Interviewed by *The Myanmar Times* during a break in the meeting, some ethnic Pa-O participants confessed that they had not entirely understood SMEC's presentation. "To be honest, I didn't get all the technical terms," said U Yin Yin Maung, a Pa-O from Hsi Hseng township. Others said they had followed the PowerPoint

presentation despite not speaking Myanmar.

SMEC group leader Michael Holics said they would consider the issue in future.

"We know that there will be a language barrier, and we need to make

'We will continue to oppose the dam. We can't let it happen because we want the Thanlwin to be a virgin river.'

Daw Sao Haymar Thaike
Dam opponent

better communication at the next public consultation," he said.

According to SMEC's presentation, the dam project will affect about 12,000 residents in Shan State.

Immediately after the meeting, opponents criticised the project. "We will continue to oppose the dam. We can't let it happen because we want the Thanlwin to be a virgin river. We don't want a dam on it," said Daw Sao Haymar Thaike.

She said the financial side of the dam project was also inequitable. "Thailand and China get 45pc of the benefits each, while we got only 10pc. We think that's unfair when some people will have to risk their lives."

An official from IGE, who asked not to be named, said the company was not against the public expressing its opinion on the dam. "But obviously we don't feel good when we see [the protest]," he said.

Mon language classes to launch at state schools

STUDENTS in Mon State will be able to study the Mon language at local schools starting this academic year, according to U Min Aung Zay, leader of the Mon language curriculum working committee.

However, the classes, which will be conducted inside school hours, will initially be limited to students in grades 1 to 3. Because of a lack of technology, human resources and budget, the curriculum is not ready for grades 4 and 5, he added.

"We will complete the curriculum soon, but there is no budget from the Mon State government," said Minister for Planning and Commence U Min Nwe Sae.

Mon literacy experts, professors from Mawlamyine University, lecturers

from Mawlamyine Education College, education department representatives, Mon literati and others took part in a three-day workshop at the end of February to prepare the curriculum, which will cover topics including Mon culture and traditions.

"Our intention is for the students of Mon State to study the Mon language, but Mon people in other states can also [use the curriculum] at their schools," he said.

According to a survey carried out by the curriculum committee, there are more than 50,000 students at 382 government schools wishing to learn Mon. The committee expects to complete the curriculum for fourth and fifth grades by September. – *New Say Phaw Waa*

CRIME IN BRIEF

Five jailed on drug charges in Kokang

A military tribunal in Laukkai, northern Shan State, sentenced five people to 10 years' imprisonment on March 5 for possessing narcotic drugs. A police patrol in the town seized 36 amphetamine tablets from Lee Kwe Chaung and Yae Shin Linn on March 2 and charged them under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances law.

On March 3, narcotics officers from Kunlong working with local police found three men in a vehicle in possession of 2000 amphetamine tablets in Laukkai's No 3 ward. Kwan Chain, Yan Lauk San and Kyan Lauk Kyan were charged with possession and also received 10-year sentences.

Man dies in fall from toddy palm

A Magwe man died after falling from a toddy palm tree while replacing the

toddy pot. U Soe Hla, 45, was pronounced dead at the scene in Myin Zar village in Gangaw township, Magwe Region, on March 8.

Five novices killed in highway crash

The driver of a Mann Shwe Myo Daw highway bus has been charged with causing death by negligence and three other offences following an accident on the Nay Pyi Taw Highway that claimed the lives of five novice monks.

The bus collided with a light truck carrying almost 25 people, including 20 monks, near Tatkon, about 64 kilometres (40 miles) north of Nay Pyi Taw, on March 9.

The light truck rolled over, killing the five novices instantly. Fifteen monks and four laypeople in the truck were also injured, but no bus passengers were hurt. – *Toe Wai Aung, translation by Emoon*

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Protests blamed for youth centre delays

A NATIONAL youth centre whose establishment was proposed by President U Thein Sein is yet to open after nearly a year – and some are accusing the authorities of preventing it from opening because they fear it could become a focus of student activism.

As recently as January 30, Minister for the President's Office U Aung Min said he looked forward to opening the Union Youth Centre as soon as possible – perhaps on Union Day, February 12. It is to be run by young people independently of the government.

Based at the Livestock and Veterinary University in Insein township,

the centre will be used for youth-related activities and will feature a library, internet access, and meeting and conference facilities. U Aung Min said in January that the centre could serve as the forum for discussions between young people and the government about youth-related policy.

But yesterday, centre organiser Ko Thet Swe Win told *The Myanmar Times* that it seemed the government had delayed opening the centre due to worry over student demonstrations. "We're ready to open, and have called on the government to open the centre as soon as possible. We've written

twice to the government, but got no reply," he said.

Ko Thet Swe Win said U Aung Min had told him earlier this month that he had transferred responsibility for the youth centre to energy minister U Zayar Aung. Neither U Zayar Aung nor Minister for Rail Transportation U Than Htay, who has also been involved in setting up the centre, could be reached for comment yesterday.

President U Thein Sein proposed the establishment of the national centre in a letter sent to the ASEAN Youth Forum held last March. – *Aung Kyaw Min, translation by Zar Zar Soe*

Social welfare plan to miss out in budget



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MYANMAR'S chronically underfunded social sector is shaping up for yet another cash-strapped year, according to figures from the latest draft of the budget allocations report obtained by *The Myanmar Times*.

With the end of the financial year rapidly approaching, MPs remain locked in debate over the government's budget request. As it stands, however, the social sector has once again been relegated to a distant last place in the fight for funding.

Social welfare is slated to receive less than 1 percent of the national budget for 2015-16. Education and health meanwhile are both set for modest gains, at 9pc and 4pc respectively. In 2014-15, social welfare raked in just 0.08pc of the budget, while education took nearly 6pc and health was given just over 3pc.

By contrast, defence is lined up for yet another raise, taking a 13pc chunk out of the budget, up from last year's 12pc due to salary increases for soldiers.

MP Daw Myo Lwin said negotiations over the numbers will continue next week but at this stage budgets for each sector can only increase if the government increases its revenue forecast. Funds can no longer be reallocated from one sector to another, she said.

According to the draft budget allowance report, the Ministry of Social Welfare requested K10 billion (US\$9.66 million), a decrease on the K11 billion received last year.

Officials from the ministry declined to comment on the figure or how it would be allocated in the coming year, on the grounds the figure had not yet been finalised.

But the low request seems likely to cripple plans for an ambitious

new social protections strategy backed by the United Nations Children's Fund that was announced in December.

UNICEF has said that implementing the full 10-year strategy will require considerable funding but it would be "a key intervention to break the cycle of poverty".

The first two elements of the policy, a universal pension and a cash transfer program for pregnant women, would cost about K1.3 trillion to implement in 2015-16.

'We are calling for an increased budget for children in Myanmar and three MPs have been selected to argue for it.'

Daw May Win Myint
Social development committee

While MPs are supportive of the initiatives, they said last week that they were unsure whether any funding will be allocated in 2015-16.

"We are calling for an increased budget for children in Myanmar and three MPs have been selected to argue for it in [parliament]," said Daw May Win Myint, a member of the social development committee.

Daw San San Aye, deputy director of the Department of Social Welfare, said that funding could also arrive in September, when the government will submit its supplementary budget for 2015-16.

"We have a plan to provide K15,000 [a month] for mothers with children up to age two, but [whether it starts this coming financial year] depends upon the government budget allowance," she said.

'Unity' lawyer submits final appeal

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THE Supreme Court could accept within a month to review the case of the "Unity five" – the four reporters and the newspaper's CEO jailed under the 1923 State Secrets Act – according to a lawyer involved.

U Robert Sann Aung, who represents the reporters, told *The Myanmar Times* yesterday that he had presented arguments in favour of an appeal on March 9.

"The court will hear this case again within 30 days. I believe they can be acquitted or have their sentences reduced because the case was unfair under the law and under human rights standards," he said.

The Supreme Court rejected an appeal last November on behalf of the four reporters – Ko Lu Maw, Ko Sithu Soe, Ko Paing Thet Kyaw and Ko Yazar Oo – who were convicted last July on charges of trespassing in a restricted area and taking photos of a Ministry of Defence facility without permission. *Unity* CEO U Tint San was convicted alongside them.

The charges stemmed from the publication of an article alleging that chemical weapons were being produced at a military facility in Magwe Region.

Reporter Ko Lu Maw's wife, Ma Lwin Lwin Myint, said she hoped the Supreme Court would accept her husband's appeal and that his sentence would be reduced.

While he was not involved in gathering information for the report, Ko Lu Maw was convicted on the basis of typing up other reporters' notes and emailing them to editors in Yangon.

The original 10-year sentences caused widespread shock and outrage



The *Unity* defendants attend sentencing in July 2014. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

in Myanmar and abroad, amid suggestions that the government could be backpedalling on the path to greater democracy and openness.

On October 2, Magwe Region court reduced sentences from 10 years'

imprisonment with hard labour to seven years. They are being held in Pakokku Prison.

The government has said it will not consider an amnesty until the judicial process is completed.

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Dated. 11th March, 2015

Views

Peace in Myanmar: not dead yet

Critics are questioning whether the peace process is in danger of collapse, but the view from the inside is vastly different



AUNG NAING OO

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THERE has been speculation of late that the peace process in Myanmar is dead. At a recent lecture in Nay Pyi Taw, one foreign expert on Myanmar surmised that it would be impossible to sign a nationwide ceasefire agreement. Other outsiders who have been following the peace process think that it is sliding backward. Within the country, critics have also called the peace process "as good as dead". Likewise, social media is full of negative comments on the peace process.

On the contrary: The peace process is very much alive and kicking.

I do not blame the critics for their views. The media coverage on the peace process is naturally negative. Their stories are black and white. Recent fighting in the Kokang region and other skirmishes in northern Myanmar have also reinforced this view. The fact that it has taken several months to arrange the next round of formal negotiations has also encouraged observers to believe the peace process is finished.

The peace process in Myanmar is extremely complicated. It is understandable that some who examine it from afar, or from the outside, have reached the simple conclusion it is faltering. It is also not uncommon to only see the shortcomings.

But for us inside the peace process, nothing is simple; we cannot view it from a black-and-white perspective. We cannot afford to treat it as an undertaking that can be accomplished overnight. One has to look at the whole process, as well as the conditions under which the peace process was initiated.

I have stated over and again the raw facts: the multiplicity of protagonists and issues; the disparate political and geographical conditions; the multifarious interests; the geographical differences; and the various negotiating cultures. In addition, there is the politically correct and beautiful-sounding all-inclusive policy, which chief negotiator and



People shout slogans and hold placards as they march through the streets of Yangon to mark the International Day of Peace on September 21, 2014. Photo: AFP

Union minister U Aung Min often describes as "leaving no one behind". While critically important, it is exhausting at the same time.

The critics simply forget, or overlook, where we were a few years ago. Due to the unwavering commitment of the government, the parliament, the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups, the 14 bilateral ceasefires have largely been effective. As a result, Myanmar has never before been so peaceful: 2014 had the least number of clashes and casualties since civil war broke out in 1948, within months of independence.

This is an achievement all Myanmar citizens should be genuinely proud of.

The military government that ruled Myanmar from 1988 was able to secure some 40 ceasefires. It

was an incredible feat. Many have remained effective. But they were a different breed of ceasefire than the current batch. Unlike the military regime, the government of President U Thein Sein is following them up with

Myanmar has never been so peaceful: 2014 had the least number of clashes and casualties since civil war broke out in 1948.

a political solution to the problem of the armed conflict.

The government of Myanmar remains committed to the peace process. Despite the numerous problems it has had to face on the road to peace, it has soldiered on. Since September 2014 the government has met ethnic armed groups many times. The president invited them to the Independence Day parade in Nay Pyi Taw. Many groups also showed up for the Union Day gathering. During these occasions, they met the president as well as the commander-in-chief of the Tatmadaw. Furthermore, the president put pen to paper on a historic pledge to work for democratic federalism in Myanmar. These meetings, and the government's pledge for peace and national reconciliation, have

contributed hugely to building trust and understanding.

In recent weeks, the technical team from the Myanmar Peace Center has met the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team, which is negotiating on behalf of 16 armed groups, several times in Chiang Mai in northern Thailand. This has resulted in an agreement to meet for the seventh round of formal talks in Yangon from March 16. Both sides have agreed to spend as much time as possible to complete negotiations on the outstanding sections of the draft ceasefire.

As well as the nationwide ceasefire, several other critical issues will be discussed. These include ways to manage tensions and potential clashes, and key mechanisms such as joint ceasefire monitoring and codes of conduct.

Five other armed groups that are not part of the NCCT, including the United Wa State Army, the All Burma Students Democratic Front, and the Restoration Council of Shan State-Shan State Army-South, have also been invited as observers.

The NCCT will bring a big delegation - the largest since it began its negotiations with the government more than a year ago.

I cannot emphasise enough that the peace process is not only alive but also on track. No one has turned their back on peace.

It is unfortunate that clashes are still able to occur from time to time. But piecing together the peace puzzle requires patience, tolerance, understanding, stamina, mutual respect, empathy, flexibility and an inclusive strategy. These qualities are well understood, appreciated and practised by all involved in the peace process. They do not believe in a quick solution to almost seven decades of conflict.

Indeed, they see the value in criticism, too. But given the intractability of the armed conflict, we should also appreciate what has been achieved so far.

Aung Naing Oo is associate director of the Peace Dialogue Program at the Myanmar Peace Center. The opinions expressed here are his own.

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Business

Bird flu prompts flight from poultry

Restaurants and shops in Yangon are crying foul as consumers avoid chicken, though there has not yet been a confirmed H5N1 case in the city



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YANGON shoppers are staying away from poultry, following outbreaks of H5N1 bird flu in Sagaing Region.

Chicken farmers are also organising in places like Mon State to contain the spread of the disease, which required a cull of hundreds of thousands of birds in Monywa.

Yangon chicken sellers say that while at first there was little impact from concerns of bird flu, custom has been increasingly dropping off over the past few days.

"People didn't care about H5N1 bird flu at first, but the chicken market is growing cold," said U Aung Thant, a chicken broker at Tarmwe chicken and duck market.

Prices fell for three days straight, though perked up by about K200 on the fourth day. Lower-quality chicken sold for K4000 a viss (1.6 kilograms or 2.6 pounds) before the outbreak, and is now selling for K3100 a viss, according to retailers.

Higher-quality chicken has continued to cost K6000 before and after the outbreak, though U Aung Thant said a large amount of supply had also been taken off the market with the cull.

Restaurateurs say that while customers are still coming, they are staying away from poultry and eggs.

Daw Thuzar, owner of Shwe Myanmar restaurant, said seafood has become a popular replacement for chicken and eggs.

"Customers are eating fish, prawns and red meat these days," she said.

"They don't want to eat chicken, duck, quail and even eggs."

The restaurant is still cooking some chicken curry for customers who cannot do without the dish, adding staff are taking care to cook it properly.

The Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development has confirmed finds of H5N1 in Monywa, Sagaing Region. The discovery prompted a cull of about 250,000 birds by March 1.

'Customers are eating fish, prawns and red meat these days. They don't want to eat chicken, duck, quail and even eggs.'

Daw Thuzar
Restaurant owner

Industry officials say that authorities are taking steps to deal with the outbreak, adding no cases have yet been found in Yangon.

Myanmar Livestock Federation vice chair Daw Hla Hla Thein said she stressed there are no confirmed cases of bird flu in Yangon at present.

A combination of experts from the federation and ministry are now holding classes and seminars to educate poultry farmers and dealers on safeguards they should be following.

"After the bird flu started in



A man collects eggs from a chicken farm in Myanmar. Photo: Staff

Monywa, many educational classes opened in all of Yangon's townships for chicken and bird health, discussing how to prevent bird flu," she said.

Some consumers say that even with all the preventative measures being taken, they think it is best to stay away from poultry for now. "I don't want to eat chicken because of the Monywa

bird flu, but I think it won't spread to Yangon," said Ma Phyo Phyo, a 25-year-old housewife. "But there are many different foods to choose from, so I can avoid chicken, ducks and eggs for now."

The Ministry of Health has said that to protect against bird flu, people should avoid breeding chicken, ducks and birds in or under their house; wash with water after touching fowl;

and not let children play in areas where birds and ducks frequent.

Those in close contact with poultry that may have been infected ought to wear gloves and masks, avoid chicken and duck markets if possible, and visit the hospital if they have signs including serious illness, muscle pain and frequent coughing, the ministry has said.

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(For.Ella Cheong LLC, Singapore)

Dated: 11th March, 2015

H5N1: Are buyers staying away from fowl?

Magwe farmers are working to stem the spread of bird flu, after it emerged in Sagaing last week, requiring hundreds of thousands of birds to be culled.

News of the disease has spread to Yangon, and *The Myanmar Times* reporter Tin Yadanar Htun took to the streets of Yangon to find out if people are staying away from poultry.



Htun Thet Aung, 28, designer

I order my lunches from a restaurant on a monthly basis, and I've kept eating the chicken they send me. I don't think bird flu has spread to Yangon because it would be widespread if it arrived. If the bird flu arrives in Yangon, the Ministry of Health will announce chicken must be avoided. Besides, many of my friends eat chicken. Some people are afraid of bird flu and don't eat chicken for any good reason.



Ma Nay Chi, 20, student

I didn't know about the flu at first and I kept eating chicken, after reading about bird flu in Sagaing. Bird flu can spread easily, so the virus may reach Yangon and I decided not to eat chicken. We should particularly stay away from undercooked chicken and ducks. But there are many foods out there besides poultry and we have lots of choices, so it's no problem not to eat chicken - I just eat seafood instead.



Daw Tin Tin Win, 40, housewife

I kept eating at first even after hearing the news, but now I am not eating poultry and watching out for bird flu. The bird flu can hopefully be controlled in Monywa and prevented from spreading to Yangon. But there are other meats and seafoods to eat instead of chicken, so eating these foods is safer.

Spa heats up in Yangon's north end for Korean fans

BUSINESS 10



Apple reveals further Watch details, but will it catch on?

BUSINESS 12

Exchange Rates (March 10 close)		
Currency	Buying	Selling
Euro	K1138	K1156
Malaysia Ringitt	K307	K308
Singapore Dollar	K756	K764
Thai Baht	K31	K32
US Dollar	K1049	K1053

Rice market hinges on China

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INTERNATIONAL rice prices have declined steadily in the past six months, driven lower partly by a flood of Thai rice following last year's coup.

Local exporters say they initially weathered the competition well, given strong and expanding demand from China.

U Lu Maw Myint Maung, one of the country's top rice exporters and joint secretary of the Myanmar Rice Federation, said world prices for local rice had been about US\$360 a tonne, though this dropped to \$300 once the Thai floodgates open.

"But Myanmar has a strong market with a good price in China. Yunnan province is far closer to Muse, and that route saved market prices from dropping too much," he said.

The Ministry of Commerce had targeted exports of 2 million tonnes for this fiscal year, though exports have reached about 1.5 million tonnes, with less than a month left in the fiscal year. About 1 million tonnes were exported to China.

The Bangkok Post reported last week that Thailand has held five auctions since last May that have sold over 1 million tonnes of stored rice, with more auctions planned.

The previous Thai administration had stockpiled rice in a failed attempt to corner the world market, though this policy was reversed following the 2014 military coup.

The road to China has not been without trouble, however.

Starting last September, Chinese authorities began a clampdown on the trade. While it is technically illegal from Beijing's point of view, its officials at the Muse crossing often turned a blind eye to imports.

Myanmar and Chinese officials have now been discussing legalising the trade. As part of the deal, the Myanmar Rice Federation chose nine companies qualified to begin legal trade by sea to China's eastern seaboard.

The selection of the nine companies prompted criticism, as rice traders took to social media to vent their frustration at begin left out.

U Lu Maw Myint Maung said the plan had always been to register 10 companies at a time, until the more-than-100-member companies of the Myanmar Rice Federation are registered for the China trade.

Following the initial outcry, a second round of licensing was organised after the first round, but no companies submitted bids - while over 100 had submitted bids the first time around.

U Law Myint Maung said that companies may be satisfied with the usual way of conducting experts overland in Muse, which has so far taken place unlicensed.

"Some companies are not too interested in normal [official] exports so that may be the reason why no companies applied the second time," he said.

He added that rice traders, SMEs and the Myanmar Rice Federation are now attempting to tackle the disputes to developing the China trade.

Electrification needs aid

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PROJECT financing is increasingly critical in achieving ambitious plans to achieve 100 percent nationwide electrification by 2030, according to experts.

The Ministry of Electric Power currently needs more than US\$600 million to extend electricity to 1.7 million more households from 2015 to 2019 as part of the National Electrification Plan push, according to ministry officials.

"We are trying to reach 50pc electrification rates in five years, and are drafting the National Electrification Plan with the help of the World Bank," said U Aung Than Oo, deputy electric power minister, during a speech at the opening of the 3rd Myanmar Power Summit in Yangon yesterday.

"We would like to request our development partners contribute financial aid [to support] the plan."

U Aung Than Oo pegged current electrification rates at about 34pc, or 3.5 million households, though different organisations have slightly different figures. Using the ministry's figures, adding 1.7 million more households to the grid by 2019 would result in an electrification rate above 50pc.

Donors have begun offering investment with the plan.

The World Bank has so far offered loans of about \$400 million, including \$300 million to the ministry for expansion of the national grid and \$90 million for the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development to extend off-grid electrification in rural areas.

"We have made a presentation to the Ministry of Finance and Union Parliament about the loan from the World Bank," he said. So far, the rest



A man walks by three generators in Yangon. The government hopes to significantly increase electrification. Photo: Boothee

of the five year plan will be funded from the state budget, he added.

Experts have pegged the entire cost of the plan at \$5.8 billion until 2030.

An additional 1300 megawatts in installed capacity has been added over the last four years, from

3412MW in 2011-12 to 4714MW at present.

The government has sought extensive outside support to develop its energy sector, receiving assistance from a range of organisations.

The Ministry of Electric Power is drafting its National Electricity Master Plan with help from the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, while its Power System Planning is supported by China's Three Gorges Corporation, its National Electrification Plan supported by the World Bank and its Off-Grid Renewable Plan receiving Asian Development Bank assistance.

The ministry and international institutions are involved in a range of activities planning and developing the legal and regulatory frameworks for the industry, as well as working on improving financial sustainability,

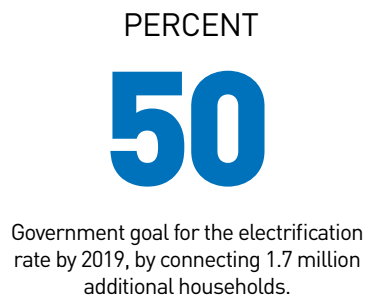
transmission and distribution, generation, and rural energy.

Myanmar has some of the lowest per capita consumption rates in the world, working out to 180 kilowatt hours (kWh) at present. The rate is slated to increase by 15pc a year until 2030, when the figure could reach 1493kWh.

Wang Xiapoing, senior energy specialist at the World Bank Group, said the entire National Electrification Plan will cost \$5.8 billion, or \$800 per connection.

"Additional investment will be needed for generation and transmission," he said at yesterday's event.

Current electricity consumption is around 2000 megawatts, while the ministry is running 44 hydro, gas and coal-fired power stations, with a much higher official installed capacity.



Experts deride large-scale Chinese loan

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A LARGE US\$700 million loan extended by China has come under attack from prominent community figures and social media users, who complain the terms are unfair for the country.

Some experts say the loan reflects poorly on the Ministry of Cooperatives, which is to be its beneficiary, as it may prove a challenge to pay back.

Much of the money is to be lent to farmers, but some question whether they are capable of repaying. Ministry of Cooperatives officials countered that collection rates have significantly improved, though some say farmers are a significant credit risk.

"If farmers don't pay back their loans, how can the ministry?" said U Zaw Pe Win, principal of the

Human Development Institute, during a March 6 seminar on the national budget at business association UMFCCI.

"Cooperatives have never succeeded in their plans throughout their history, and corruption still exists in the ministry. The loan will definitely be a burden on the country."

The government persuaded the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw to accept a \$300 million portion of the \$700 million loan from Exim Bank of China on February 25.

Parliament had turned down the loan the previous session due to concerns over high interest rates and difficult repayment schedules.

The loan is to include a 4.5 percent annual interest rate, with a 10-year repayment period with an additional two-year deferment possible.

Many other loans have been granted on concessionary terms with little or no interest.

Parliamentarian Daw Sandar Min said the public should not

blame the hluttaw for accepting the loan, but rather President U Thein Sein, who pushed it through.

MPs had initially sided against the loan "but it is not an issue the hluttaw can decide," he said.

The loan's interest rate is likely to rise further for farmers.

"We [parliamentarians] are all pushing to avoid loans. We only want loans that create jobs, as it is something of a tradition for

farmers to take loans and not pay them back. But it failed again," said Daw Sandar Min.

U Zaw Pe Win added that the loan does not undermine parliament's legitimacy as it was only consulted in the matter, with the final decision resting with the ruling government.

Government officials said so far it has had success collecting on loan payments from farmers, meaning there is little chance of the loan becoming a burden.

Ministry of Cooperatives deputy director general of business management U Myo Aung said that only \$100 million of the total \$700 million in loans have so far been received, adding that losses from on-lending to farmers have so far been non-existent.

"We will receive another \$300 million in April or May, as the hluttaw has approved the loan," he said. "We don't know the amount of failure of lending in the past, but now we can handle loans in all 15 regions and states, including Nay Pyi Taw."

'Cooperatives have never succeeded ... The loan will definitely be a burden on the country.'

U Zaw Pe Win
Human Development Institute

SMALL BUSINESS

Lone spa caters to K-poppers



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SOUTH Korea-inspired culture is happily taken up by many local young and young-at-heart.

K-pop music and Korean television dramas fly off the shelves, and a range of Korean eateries have also set up shop. Growing demand for Korean-inspired goods and service inspired the introduction of Yangon's first Korea-style spa, which looks to cater to the K-poppers.

Ma Shwe Po is 19 years old and a frequent consumer of all things Korean. She was something of a spa-goer already, but after watching enough of her favourite actresses and actors visiting spas in Korean film, she decided to give the Korean version a whirl.

"I was so happy to visit because I'd seen them many times on Korean dramas," she said. "I went to visit with my friends as soon as I learned there was one in Yangon."

Korean spas, called *jjimjilbang*, are popular get-aways in the north-east Asian nation for people to sweat and relax. In Korea, they usually operate 24 hours and are segregated by gender.

At Yangon's Golden Park spa, opened last year, customers are also able to stay overnight for a slightly steeper fee - K9000 for a day visit,



Spa-goers relax at Yangon's Golden Park. Photo: Zarni Phyo

and K11,000 if staying overnight.

Officials from the Golden Park spa, in Yangon's North Dagon township, said business has been brisk, although Korean and Myanmar weather is completely different.

It has over 100 staff, aiming to feel something like a small, indoor Korea. The interior could be the setting of one of the famous Korean soap operas, stuffed with products from Seoul.

Golden Park - which operates a number of other Korean-inspired businesses, such as a bar, restaurant and health and beauty enterprises - saw the opportunity to tap into trends.

"Actually, operating a sauna is not easy in Myanmar, but we operate to show Korean culture to Myanmar people," said Ji-Hoon Park, Golden Park operation manager.

Although Myanmar outdoors can already feel like a sauna, he said customers still come to feel clean, refreshed and relaxed.

"We have difficulty, but not from the weather," he said. "It is the electricity that is the problem. Our sauna relies on machinery, and electricity is the main problem." Despite the power trouble, Golden Park has no plans at present to move or open another location closer to downtown.

Mr Park said it is important to provide full service and focus on one shop rather than branch out too quickly. "And we want people to relax," he said. "The downtown area is crowded and not relaxing, so we chose to locate in the suburbs."

Ma Wai, a periodic customer, said that while there are plenty of restaurants, cinemas and shopping malls vying for attention, Golden Park stands out as it is currently one of a kind. "I've been with my friends, but I visit only once every three months, because it's a little expensive," she said. "But it was good, and I had a pleasant time."

IN BRIEF

Hluttaw signs on to single window

The Union parliament has approved plans to join the ASEAN Single Window, following up an agreement inked in Yangon last week.

The plan passed the hluttaw with no dissension on March 9. It aims to streamline the flow of goods and services between ASEAN member states by lowering non-tariff trade barriers and easing restrictions.

Minister of Finance U Win Shein said all of ASEAN except Myanmar has already signed onto the agreement. He added it was necessary that Myanmar join the agreement ahead of the ASEAN Economic Community, which is slated to begin at the end of December.

"For the situation to be smooth, we must sign onto the ASEAN Single Window agreement," U Win Shein said at the parliamentary meeting.

A new customs system will also launch at the end of next year, which aims to smooth clearance processes. - Nyan Lynn Aung

Ooredoo expands in states

Ooredoo has launched network coverage to several towns in Shan and Mon states, according to a press release.

The firm's service is, as of March 9, available in Aungban, Shwe Naung and Aye Thar Yar towns, all near Taunggyi in Shan State, it said.

Ooredoo spokesperson Daw Thiri Kyar Nyo said the firm hopes to increase the speed of its expansion in Shan State. Ooredoo users also say the service has been improving in major cities. "In Yangon Region, we can call each other much more easily, and internet quality is getting better," said Ooredoo user Ko Myint Kyaw Soe.

- Aung Kyaw Nyunt

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Debate rages on waterfront's future



MYAT NYEIN AYE

THE port facilities ringing Strand Road on the Yangon River are being upgraded even as some experts are calling for increased public use of Yangon's waterfront.

Myanmar Port Authority is overseeing the construction of 10 new jetties by a range of companies, all of which are slated to open this year. Plans include constructing more warehouses and commercial buildings near the waterfront, while three of the new jetties have already opened.

Re-doubling construction along the waterfront is a missed opportunity for Yangon, as there is a shortage of public space already and citizens should be able to enjoy the waterfront, according to some experts.

"The waterfront needs to be made [open] for the public," said Yangon Heritage Trust director Daw Moe Moe Lwin.

"The Yangon waterfront can be adapted to allow more free public space. We constantly urge authorities to move in this direction."

Private commercial concerns should not universally overrule the public's need for pleasant, free spaces.

"Yangon rarely includes spaces for the public," she said. "When spaces are limited to private concerns, then they are not open to all people, just those who can pay. If waterfront areas can

be opened to the public, they will be happy."

Myanmar Port Authority chief engineer U Mya Than said earlier this week that three jetties - built by Myanmar Industrial Port, Myat Myitta Mon and Anawa - have been completed this year, with a total of 10 are under construction. The others are owned by Myanmar Economic Corporation, Myanmar Port Authority, Asia World, Shwe Nar Wha, Shwe Taung and Max Myanmar.

'The Yangon waterfront can be adapted to allow more free public space.'

Daw Moe Moe Lwin
Yangon Heritage Trust

Port facilities at Thilawa Special Economic Zone, south of the city, are also being expanded, which may in the future take up some of the traffic currently headed to Yangon's ports.

Daw Moe Moe Lwin said the waterfront area is also near the city's downtown, the four blocks running north-south that contain much of the Yangon's heritage architecture. Upgrades near the Yangon River risk overshadowing downtown's heritage.

Myanmar Port Authority invited private companies to take part in wa-



Downtown Yangon as seen from a ship in Yangon River. Photo: Zarni Phyo

terfront upgrades through tenders. Authorities ought to consider the possibility that high-rises may block waterfront views and degrade downtown heritage.

"Upgrading should always consider the city's heritage," said Daw Moe Moe Lwin.

The latest information from Myanmar Port Authority shows that high-rises at Pansodan port will be 10 storeys, with several other large buildings planned. Yangon City Development Committee officials said they agreed it is important a balance is struck be-

tween private and public space at the waterfront.

Consultant and urban planner U Toe Aung said the public is presently able to visit two locations - Botahtaung and Nanthida harbours - that are not unpleasant.

"YCDC also wants to open the waterfront for public spaces, and wants better recreation facilities than now," he said. "Recently it's become difficult for people to come and rest comfortably." U Toe Aung said he would like to see the public request more space at the waterfront, but claimed requests

had so far been minimal.

"Maybe they don't know who to ask," he said. "We need to provide awareness when we meet with them."

Yangon Heritage Trust has been vocal about increasing the amount of recreation space along the waterfront, which U Toe Aung said YCDC supports.

"We welcome Yangon Heritage Trust's ideas for waterfront recreation. We also want it to be like that," he said. "The waterfront should provide fresh air, but with buildings along the waterfront, that may be blocked."

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SAN FRANCISCO

Apple brings watches to wrists in shake-up

APPLE aims to have its smart watch on wrists in China, the US and beyond in April, and ignite its first new gadget category since the debut of the iPad.

The Apple Watch will be available in nine countries from April 24, at a starting price of US\$349. A limited edition gold Apple Watch will be available with a price topping \$10,000.

"Apple Watch begins a new chapter in the way we relate to technology," said chief executive Tim Cook, who starred at an Apple Watch media event in San Francisco on March 9.

Mr Cook said "the most personal device we have ever created" can display a variety of displays ranging from a classic watch face to an animated Mickey Mouse.

Connecting wirelessly to a user's iPhone, the watch is designed as a wrist device for messaging, calls and a cornucopia of apps, especially those geared toward health or fitness.

Users can send a real-time display of their heartbeat to another Apple Watch to "let someone know you are thinking about them".

"I hope someone sends me one of those," quipped Mr Cook.

Apple enters a market that has a number of players, ranging from South Korean giants Samsung and LG to Japan's Sony and startups such as Pebble.

But analysts expect Apple to invigorate the market by integrating the watch with the iPhone and its mighty software ecosystem.

"Apple will outsell all the rest of them combined in 2015," said Forrester analyst James McQuivey.

"But in so doing, Apple will bring very valuable attention to the market,

essentially releasing a rising tide that will float all their boats."

Apple Watch offers a range of communication apps and can be used as a sort of wrist-radio from the Dick Tracy comics.

"With the built-in speaker and microphone, you can receive calls on your watch. I have been wanting to do this since I was five years old," Mr Cook said.

The watch is integrated with Apple Pay's mobile wallet and can be used to view pictures, monitor news and connect to social media.

Apple said that the ranks of businesses accepting Apple Pay is booming, and that it recently sold its 700-millionth iPhone.

"Now it's on your wrist, not in your pocket or your pocketbook," Mr Cook said.

Apple demonstrated using the watch to find out lyrics to songs being heard, remotely opening home doors and displaying barcodes that act as airline boarding passes.

But a key focus was health and fitness applications.

The watch has an accelerometer, a heart rate sensor and sensors for "a comprehensive picture of your all-day activity and workouts".

It will prompt a user to get up and walk if sedentary too long.

Mr Cook boasted that the device will have "all-day battery life" - or some 18 hours.

Entry price will be \$349 in the United States, with the price climbing through three style categories, the top being the luxury gold model.

Initially, it will be available in Australia, Britain, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan and the

United States. Pre-orders will be taken from April 10.

Moor Insights and Strategy founder Patrick Moorhead, who attended the event, said, "The secret weapon here is the ability to message each other by tapping on the watch. I think people, particularly kids, are going to go nuts over that."

"Apple has a big chance of success, and what that is going to do is set the bar for the [smartwatch] experience," he added.

Jan Dawson at Jackdaw Research said he expects Apple to sell around 20 million of the devices this year, which will "catalyse the overall smartwatch market and help other vendors even as Apple comes to enjoy levels of market share it hasn't had since the iPod".

At the event, Apple unveiled a new MacBook laptop computer that weighs less than 1 kilogram (2.2 pounds).

The new MacBook starting at \$1299 is 0.5 inches (13.1 millimetres) at its thickest point, and its features include all-day battery life, a high-resolution 12-inch (30-centimetre) edge-to-edge screen and greatly-enhanced keyboard and trackpad.

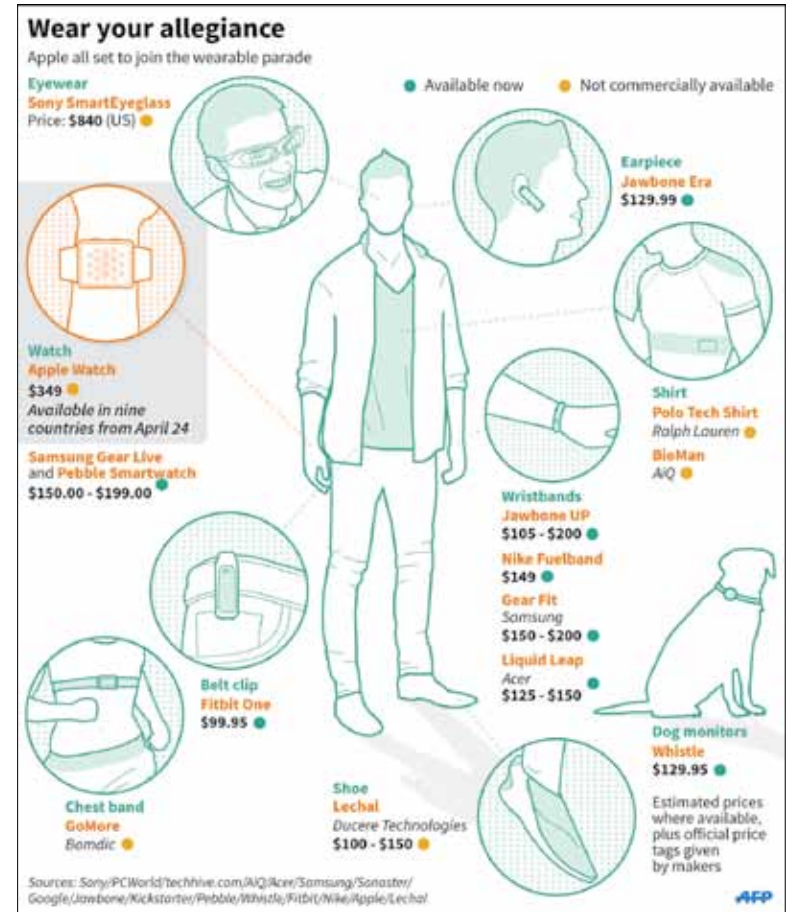
Apple also announced that it cut the price of its Apple TV set-top box to \$69 and that the service will next month handle the exclusive launch of an HBO Now streaming movie service.

Known for shows like *Game of Thrones* and *Boardwalk Empire*, HBO enters the streaming-only video market dominated by Netflix as part of a partnership with the California tech giant.

The service called HBO Now will cost \$14.99 per month and launch in April. - AFP



The Apple Watch will debut in nine markets starting next month. Photo: AFP



SHANGHAI

Crest overhyped teeth whitening: China

CHINESE regulators have fined US consumer goods giant Procter & Gamble nearly \$1 million for "false advertising" over claims a type of Crest toothpaste can whiten teeth, a government statement said yesterday.

The Shanghai Administration of Industry and Commerce said a television ad for Crest brand toothpaste featuring a popular Taiwan talk show host used "excessive" digital enhancement to make her teeth appear whiter and levied a fine of 6.03 million yuan (US\$980,000).

China's official Xinhua news agency said the fine was the country's largest ever in a false advertising case.

In the ad, actress and host Dee Hsu - also known by the stage name Xiao S - says "See my whiter smile, it only takes one day."

P&G said the ad stopped airing last year and defended its products, according to a statement posted on the Chinese microblog for Crest. It did not confirm the fine.

The company said that the toothpaste, marketed in China under the name "3D White", together with proper brushing and its whitening strips "can effectively remove external stains, making teeth whiter".

An official of the Shanghai regulator said digital enhancement can only be used in adverts in which the changes were irrelevant, such as making the sky more blue in a car ad, Xinhua reported.

Over the past two years, Chinese authorities have stepped up scrutiny of foreign companies, launching sweeping investigations into alleged malpractice in sectors ranging from autos to pharmaceuticals.

A recent survey by the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai found over half of its member firms felt that China's regulatory investigations were more likely to target foreign companies than domestic ones.

"Lack of transparency in how

MILLION YUAN

6.03

Size of the penalty levied against Procter & Gamble by Chinese regulators.

companies are selected for investigation is the biggest challenge for foreign firms confronting anti-monopoly and anti-corruption actions, followed by an unclear regulatory basis for an investigation," the association said in its annual business climate report.

"Both factors help create an environment in which companies feel anxious and vulnerable." - AFP

MUMBAI

Generic Hep C drug sells for 1% of the normal price

A US\$10 version of Sovaldi, the Gilead Sciences hepatitis C treatment that sells for \$1000 a pill in the US, is now available in Bangladesh and could make its way to other parts of the world where the US company does not have patents.

Incepta Pharmaceuticals, which does not have a license from Gilead, launched its version last month, managing director Abdul Mukhtar said. The company also aims to sell the drug overseas, including to parts of Southeast Asia and Africa.

The generic drugmaker has beaten to the market a number of larger Indian competitors that were licensed by Gilead to produce low-cost versions of Sovaldi for 91 countries that are mostly poor. Nations not covered by Gilead's license, including Thailand, Malaysia and Morocco, and countries where Sovaldi is not patented could benefit from the new source of cheap copies.

Incepta's price of about \$900 for 12 weeks is the same price at which Gilead will offer its branded version of the drug in India. Even so, the Bangladeshi version shows the challenge facing Gilead from companies it doesn't have agreements with in countries where the drug is not patented.

The World Health Organization said it is in talks with Incepta for its prequalification program, which assesses drug quality. International aid agencies and countries look to this WHO certification as a reference when picking drugs for bulk purchases.

Hyderabad-based Natco Pharma, one of Gilead's licensees, launched its generic sofosbuvir in Nepal this month. Natco in a statement on March 9 said it had priced its generic medicine at 19,900 rupees (\$318) for a bottle of 28 tablets in Nepal.

Gilead is "aware of unauthorised generic versions of sofosbuvir being offered in the marketplace," the company said in an e-mail. "We're focused on enabling our eleven Indian generic partners to launch their authorised generic versions as soon as possible."

Under a World Trade Organization agreement, Bangladesh, as one of the world's least developed countries, does not have to protect pharmaceutical patents.

In the US, Sovaldi has sparked a backlash from commercial health insurers because of its cost of \$84,000 for a 12-week course of treatment. In the rest of the world, the price of the drug is already set to plunge as Gilead's licensees start selling.

A number of other Sovaldi generics besides Incepta's, also not authorised by Gilead, are in the works in Egypt, according to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.

The WHO is in talks with Incepta along with a "handful" of companies in India and Egypt on pre-qualification of Sovaldi generics, said Peter Beyer, senior adviser in WHO's department of essential medicines and health products in Geneva.

Dhaka-based Incepta is currently

preparing quality and dissolution studies on its version of sofosbuvir to submit in support of its international applications, Mr Mukhtar said.

"We are just a little ahead of them," said Mr Mukhtar of his Indian competitors. "So, maybe we should be able to launch these products wherever it is required. In some countries in Africa, and some of the Southeast Asian countries where the burden is very high - these are the countries we are looking at."

Incepta's sofosbuvir is approved for sale by the Bangladeshi drug regulator, said Mohammad Salahuddin, assistant director at the Directorate General of Drug Administration.

Gilead's hepatitis drugs, including Sovaldi and the related pill Harvoni which combines Sovaldi with another drug, have transformed the way liver infection is treated, with most patients being cured after a 12-week course.

Nearly a dozen Indian manufacturers are part of Gilead's licensing pact for low-income countries, including Cipla, Hetero Labs, Mylan Laboratories, Ranbaxy Laboratories and Natco.

"I think everybody is very excited about this product because it offers such a wonderful treatment option," Mr Mukhtar said. "But the price is going to come down, and the treatment regimen is only for three months. So, I don't think it's going to be a big money-earner."

Sovaldi was Gilead's top-selling product last year. - Bloomberg

IN BRIEF

Bulls seize onto German DAX

Bulls are betting that the best start to a year since 1975 for German stocks has more to go.

With the European Central Bank buying its first government bonds to shore up the region's economy, options traders are showing little concern that the DAX Index might decline. Implied volatility is at its cheapest relative to historical volatility in three years. In other words, hedging costs are cheap.

The DAX reached more than 20 records in two months, its valuation is at a five-year high, and yet Europe's favourite stock market is still luring investors.

Wilson exits GM after buyback

General Motors said it will buy back US\$5 billion in shares by the end of 2016 and that activist investor Harry Wilson will give up his request for a board seat after reaching an agreement with the automaker.

Mr Wilson had requested a board seat and asked the automaker last month to use some of its cash to buy back \$8 billion in shares.

GM said it will adopt a strategy to return free cash flow to shareholders while keeping investment grade credit and a minimum balance of \$20 billion.

The agreement with Mr Wilson ends two months of discussions in which he urged chief executive officer Mary Barra to return money to shareholders. – Bloomberg

No easy growth for Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe faces a "difficult" economic outlook with negative growth this year as the country battles to clear long-standing arrears with its international lenders, the International Monetary Fund said.

"Growth has slowed down and we expect it to weaken further in 2015. Despite the favourable impact of lower oil prices, the external position remains precarious and the country is in debt distress," said Domenico Fanizza, head of an IMF team that has completed a mission to assess Zimbabwe's progress in addressing hindrances to economic growth and debt clearance.

Zimbabwe's economy has been on a downturn for more than a decade with low growth, low liquidity and high unemployment.

US dollar climbs against yen

The dollar climbed toward an eight-year high against the yen yesterday on mounting speculation that the Federal Reserve will lift interest rates by mid-year as the US economy picks up strength. In Tokyo, the greenback fetched 121.76 yen, up from 121.15 yen in New York and heading toward levels not seen since July 2007.

The euro was mixed as the European Central Bank embarked on its long-awaited bond-buying stimulus program. – AFP

BEIJING



A butcher waits for customers at her stall in a market in Qingdao, east China's Shandong province. Photo: AFP

Deflation concerns persist as China's inflation rebounds

CHINA'S consumer inflation rebounded in February from a more-than-five-year low, official data showed yesterday, but a plunge in factory gate prices added to persistent concerns about deflation in the world's second-largest economy.

The 1.4 percent increase in the consumer price index (CPI) compared with a gain of 0.8pc in January, according to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) figures.

The result, which exceeded the median forecast for a 1.0pc gain in a survey of analysts by Bloomberg News, came largely due to higher prices for food and services surrounding China's annual Lunar New Year holiday, which economists largely saw as a one-off.

In contrast the producer price index (PPI) – a measure of costs for goods at the factory gate and a leading indicator of the trend for CPI – declined for the 36th straight month in February.

The PPI fell 4.8pc year-on-year, the NBS said, more than the 4.3pc decline recorded in January, and the worst result since October 2009.

Moderate inflation can be a boon to consumption as it encourages consumers to buy before prices go up, while falling prices encourage shoppers to delay purchases and companies to put off investment, both of which can hurt growth.

"We continue to expect inflation to remain relatively low and still see disinflationary pressures in the economy," Nomura economists said in an analysis of the February data.

"To offset headwinds to economic growth, we expect monetary policy to be loosened further," they added.

Economists are increasingly worried that China – a key driver of global growth – is heading for a debilitating deflationary spiral, such as that which has plagued Japan for years, citing consistently weak CPI figures as well as accelerating falls in factory prices.

The central People's Bank of China cut benchmark deposit and lending interest rates in February for the second time in three months, citing "historically low inflation", as the economy expands at its slowest annual pace in nearly a quarter of a century.

"The weak inflation profile suggests that further monetary policy easing will be needed to fight against rising deflation risk," ANZ economists Liu Li-Gang and Zhou Hao said in a report, adding that despite the rate

cuts "the easing effort so far has been limited".

They expect the PBoC to further cut the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) – the amount of cash banks must keep on hand – "to lower the funding costs for the real economy". Cutting the RRR theoretically frees up more cash for lending.

They also expect a further 0.25 percentage point cut in the deposit interest rate.

China's gross domestic product (GDP) expanded 7.4pc last year, its worst result since 1990, as authorities seek to transform the Asian giant's growth model to one in which consumer spending takes over as the key engine.

And last week leaders lowered their 2015 GDP growth target to "approximately 7pc", while the CPI objective for was set at "around 3pc".

Consumer prices rose 2.0pc last year. Senior NBS analyst Yu Qiumei said in a statement regarding the February CPI data that fresh food demand rose during the holiday, "leading prices to rise by large margins". – AFP



ATHENS

Greece joins technical talks after partners cry foul

GREECE agreed to start urgent technical talks on extending its crucial bailout for today after its eurozone partners accused debt-stricken Athens of wasting time in previous negotiations.

The main talks will be in Brussels but teams from Greece's creditors will also be on the ground in Athens, Eurogroup chief Jeroen Dijsselbloem said, despite the new left-wing government's earlier insistence that they should not return.

The announcement came after a meeting of eurozone finance ministers in Brussels at which the Greek government outlined the reforms demanded by lenders in exchange for further cash.

The ministers agreed last month to extend Greece's current bailout until June as long as Athens comes up with suitable proposals, but Mr Dijsselbloem

accused the Greeks of wasting time.

"We have spent two weeks discussing who meets who where and in what format, and it's a complete waste of time," Mr Dijsselbloem, who is also Dutch finance minister, said at a press conference after the meeting.

"We agreed [yesterday] that there is no further time to lose. Discussions between the Greek government and the institutions will start [today] in Brussels ... In parallel, technical teams from the institutions will be welcomed in Athens."

Greece's new Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras had previously vowed that the "institutions" – formerly known as the widely loathed "troika" of the EU, European Central Bank and IMF – should not return to Athens.

The Greek government said the

result of the talks was "positive" and noted a "willingness to resolve [Greece's] financial problem rapidly", although it only mentioned the Brussels talks.

The euro dove to an 11.5-year low against the dollar as fears grew over Greece's future and Europe's main stock markets closed mostly lower, despite the European Central Bank's launch on March 9 of its 1.1 trillion euro (US\$1.2 trillion) economic stimulus program for the eurozone.

The thorny question of a likely third bailout to tackle debts that amount to around 175 percent of Greece's annual economic output did not appear to feature at the talks in Brussels.

Mr Tsipras vowed on his election in January to renegotiate Greece's debts and end austerity measures imposed

under two bailouts worth 240 billion euros since 2010, although Athens has since backed down on several points.

It won an extension of its current bailout until June but the payout of the next tranche of some 7 billion euros at the end of April is dependent on a review of the reform plans, meaning that Athens is rapidly running out of time.

Mr Dijsselbloem warned Greece that it would not get any payments until there was a full agreement and implementation of the reforms.

"There cannot be disbursement ... if we do not have implementation," he said. Greek finance minister Yannis Varoufakis, the tie-eschewing former professor whose hard-charging style has irritated several of his counterparts, sent a letter with seven main reforms to the Eurogroup on March 6.

They include a much-derided proposal to have tourists pose as amateur sleuths to crack down on tax dodgers, as well as proposals to streamline the country's notorious bureaucracy and raise revenue from online gambling, while savings would be used to help the poorest.

German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble said Athens – which has long been at odds with Europe's most powerful economy over the austerity measures included in the bailout conditions – should avoid "unilateral" changes.

With speculation mounting about a chaotic Greek exit from the euro, MR Varoufakis had fuelled uncertainty at the weekend about a possible referendum if the reform plans were rejected by Brussels. – AFP

World

WORLD EDITOR: Kayleigh Long

SIHANOUKVILLE

Big trouble in Cambodia

Blood feuds and big bucks: cancelled music festival brings old grud

AS the feud between Sihanoukville's two richest and most powerful Russians intensifies, things are heating up on Cambodia's coast.

"It's like Russia in the 1990s. That era has come here," says long-time Sihanoukville businessman Nikolai Doroshenko.

"Very dangerous people are coming."

Mr Doroshenko is speaking from a dimly lit room above his home base of Snake House, a restaurant and guesthouse with a mini-zoo filled with hundreds of snakes and crocodiles, located on a lush patch of land in Sihanoukville's aptly named Soviet Street.

'It's like Russia in the 1990s. That era has come here.'

Nikolai Doroshenko
Sihanoukville businessman

These dire times will continue, he promises, as long as his archival, the fugitive Russian property tycoon Sergei Polonsky, remains in the Kingdom.

Over the past few months, the feud between the two men has spiralled into an increasingly complicated vortex of allegations and reprisals, including an alleged murder attempt.

But the dispute has expanded beyond the Doroshenkos and Mr Polonsky in part thanks to ill-fated Russian music festival kaZantip, the imminent arrival of which sparked incidents that seemed to prove Mr Doroshenko's prophecy of violence.

To understand the tangled web of accusations, egos and money in the coastal community, it's probably best to start with the Doroshenkos themselves.

"My story here is very long," says the patriarch of the family.

Nikolai moved to Cambodia in May of 1993. Since then, he has acquired Cambodian citizenship and built his family a small business empire with interests ranging from concrete to condo development.

He is well-connected to the city's power structure, with his 32-year-old

son Ostap Doroshenko a captain in the local police force.

Ostap, a pale, gregarious ethnic Russian with a penchant for luxury vehicles, looks proud in his Cambodian police officer uniform as he shows off a large medal he says is Cambodia's "second highest" honour.

The Doroshenkos love Cambodia, they say. But their lives were forever changed by the arrival of a man who was once one of Russia's richest - Sergei Polonsky.

Mr Polonsky first started buying islands in Cambodia in the 2000s, working with Doroshenko to develop them.

Mr Polonsky was a good partner - fabulously wealthy and willing to pay vast sums to build his James Bond-style lair on Koh de Koul and luxury resorts on virgin Cambodian islands.

But the relationship between the two Russian businessmen soured in 2012, when Mr Polonsky was jailed for allegedly forcing Cambodian sailors to jump off a boat at knifepoint.

Although he was eventually freed on bail - he has still never been tried - he hasn't forgiven the men he says arranged his imprisonment.

"Everybody understands that the first time I ended up in prison was because of Doroshenko, you understand?" Mr Polonsky says, claiming Nikolai's lawyer helped write the sailors' statement to the police.

"When I was sitting in prison, he sold my islands."

The Doroshenkos deny this, saying Mr Polonsky misinterpreted the situation and rejected their help.

"Already [when] he see our faces, he say, f-k you to my father, and f-k you to me also," says Ostap.

Nikolai claims Mr Polonsky sent hit men to murder Ostap who only narrowly escaped. Mr Polonsky sued him for defamation and his legal team suggested the attack was a tactic over their ongoing legal disputes, which now features some 16 cases at the provincial court.

But on his idyllic island of Koh Damlong, about 60 kilometres off the Cambodian coast, Mr Polonsky isn't letting the dispute worry him.

It was there in December that he ran a workshop for budding entrepreneurs. About a dozen Russians paid \$2,500 each to come "pimp [their] personality" and "pimp [their] business" during the 10-day training session with Mr Polonsky.

As the event kicked off, all stood



Nikolai Doroshenko milks the venom from one of his many snakes. Photo: Daniel Quinlan

awkwardly gathered around their relaxed idol at his tropical island's tiki-themed bar. Seemingly in awe, no one was willing to say anything. Mr Polonsky, wearing only a pair of grey sweatpants, finally ended the tension.

"Relax!" he boomed, putting the participants at ease. And thus the "business trainings" began.

Mr Polonsky, something of a Donald Trump-like celebrity in Russia, enjoys almost worshipful admiration from his fans.

"He uses this immense energy, which I think was given to him by the cosmos or a higher being," said real estate agent Natalya Ganina in front of a series of bungalows.

Mr Polonsky's business courses are, like the man himself, a little eccentric.

For a business seminar, many of the "games" attendees participated in were surprisingly physical. Losers were made to run around a large tree in the middle of the island as a punishment.

In one session, attendees sat around a campfire lit in the middle of the jungle and asked Mr Polonsky about philosophical themes: Socrates, the meaning of life, succeeding in business. At one point, Mr Polonsky stood and howled at the top of his lungs into the pitch darkness.

Back on the mainland, the legal

cases involving the tycoon were piling up: Mr Polonsky was ordered off Koh de Koul, his lavish headquarters, which is also claimed by Doroshenko.

He refused to move, and before long, the tide seemed to turn to his favour: another judge charged Nikolai with breach of trust over four islands he claims to co-own with Mr Polonsky.

Adding insult to injury, authorities showed up at the Snake House and seized a red Humvee, which Mr Polonsky claimed was his.

But the legal tit-for-tat would soon be pushed out of the spotlight by a new event.

On Koh Puos, a tropical island connected to Sihanoukville by a massive concrete bridge, strange bamboo structures were popping up on its white-sand beach. Tall, spindly ladders reached into the sky. Cylindrical bamboo cones topped off with a mysterious, oval-shaped egg towered over the landscape.

Electronic music festival kaZantip was coming to Cambodia, and it would bring an entirely new kind of drama.

"You can classify this as an attempted killing, an attempted beating ... because the people purposefully beat his head on the concrete. And they did it professionally," says

Oleg Tikhanov, a heavy-set Sihanoukville businessman whose business interests range from a biker bar to a kindergarten.

On February 13, at Sihanoukville's Queenco casino where tickets to kaZantip - Russia's answer to Burning Man - were being sold, a vicious brawl erupted between two groups of men with connections to the festival, leaving three men wounded, according to police.

The two groups, one representing kaZantip tour operator Lotus Tours, the other there on behalf of Tikhanov's company Oceania, blame each other for starting the fight.



Ostap after hitmen allegedly tried to kill him. Photo: Supplies



Disappointed kaZantip festival-goers at a consolation party. Photo: Max Elvinger

Saudi executes
40th person
for 2015

WORLD 16



US urges
patience on war
against IS

WORLD 18

's little Russia

ges to the fore in Sihanoukville



Sergei Polonsky's Bond villain-style island lair, Koh de Koul. Photo: Griff Tapper

But Vladimir said his men were merely acting in self-defence, as Oceania's armed men were lying in wait just out of frame. "They come with guns and knives outside," he said.

In the ensuing days, other characters entered the fray, penning their own breathless, even fanciful, accounts of what happened that night.

Roman Dragomir, a local businessman who claims to have brokered the relationship between kaZantip and Oceania, alleged in a more than 1,000-word statement that Vladimir brought in 15 wrestlers from Thailand to intimidate Oceania.

Dragomir, who was fingered as the supposed Snake House employee who led the Queenco attack, also claimed that Mr Polonsky helped frame him to get back at the Doroshenkos, which Polonsky denied through his lawyer.

But Fyodor Pankratov, an Oceania employee, claimed in his own public statement that Dragomir led a "vicious racketeering plot" and was the one who demanded money.

To a man, everyone tied to the incident said it was the other side that is part of Sihanoukville's Russian "mafia."

For kaZantip, already hanging by a thread with authorities put off by tales of potential drug use and "naked dancing", the incident would prove the final nail in the coffin.

Four days after the incident at Queenco, officials finally, unequivocally, banned the festival, deploying police to the bridge to Koh Puos.

With Koh Puos off limits, the party spread to different areas in Sihanoukville.

Clubs were flying kaZantip flags and hiring Eastern European dancing girls in an effort to attract the would-be revellers, but the festivities didn't last for long. The authorities announced they would crack down on copycat kaZantip parties, and bashes organised on other islands dissipated due to police attention and lack of interest.

As the investigation into the Queenco attack continued, it came to light on February 26 that Oleg Tikhanov was wanted by Interpol for

activities in Russia: alleged gun running with links to organised crime.

Mr Tikhanov, who hasn't answered calls or emails from since the Interpol warrant was discovered, is now rumoured to have fled to Phnom Penh.

His former lawyer, Prom Vichet Akara, said he didn't know where Tikhanov was.

Vichet Akara added that the two had stopped working together, although he declined to elaborate why.

On the same day it was discovered that Tikhanov was wanted by Russian authorities, another attack occurred in Sihanoukville.

Police say a group of Russians opened fire at 11pm on a Lexus driven by a Turkish national, injuring a Khmer bystander.

he Turk was himself was said to have a chequered past and was taken into custody the next day, although the Russian attackers themselves have not been found.

Tikhanov is not the only Russian in Sihanoukville wanted by Interpol, and far from the most high profile.

The fact that Mr Polonsky has thus far evaded the clutches of the international police on a warrant for embezzlement in Russia bothers the Doroshenkos considerably.

"Interpol is looking for him. And no matter where they check, nothing happens," said Ostap in January.

But that could be changing.

On March 4, at a joint press conference in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said there were plans to finally sign an extradition treaty with Cambodia that would clear the path for Mr Polonsky's deportation.

Whether this is the final step in Polonsky's Cambodian adventure remains to be seen. But it seems unlikely it will spell the end of tensions in this developing Little Russia.

Valentin Hitorin, a Russian journalist and writer who joined Mr Polonsky's December business seminar, said he was optimistic the feuding would one day be over.

"This country doesn't need a war," he said.

- The Phnom Penh Post

BANGKOK

Meeting delayed in monk graft scandal

CONTROVERSIAL monk Phra Dhammachayo of the Phra Dhammakaya monastery on the outskirts of Bangkok has postponed a meeting with Thailand's Department of Special Investigation (DSI), where he had been scheduled to front on March 10 to defend allegations he received money from the 12-billion baht (US\$367 million) Klongchan Credit Union Cooperative embezzlement scandal.

Pol Lt Col Pakorn Suchivakul, head of the DSI team investigating the scandal and links to Wat Phra Dhammakaya, said the monk's assistant informed the DSI deputy chief Pol Lt Col Paisit Wongmuang that he would not turn up today but will do so at a later date.

Phra Dhammachayo is the abbot of Wat Phra Dhammakaya.

The DSI deputy chief told the assistant that Phra Dhammachayo has to make a written request to the department regarding the postponement, according to Pol Lt Col Pakorn.

The officer also insisted the DSI will not make special arrangements to question the abbot outside its office.

Phra Khru Palat Wichan Thirangakuro, a former secretary to Phra Dhammachayo, who has been named by the DSI as a recipient of a 119 million baht cheque paid to him by Supachai Srisupa-aksorn, has

also asked to postpone his meeting with the department.

Mr Supachai was the former chairman of the cooperative and is a key suspect in the scandal.

Phra Khru Palat Wichan, who is now an assistant abbot of Wat Khlong Ket in Lop Buri province, informed the DSI on March 8 that he wanted to come in for questioning on March 19 instead of March 9 as scheduled, according to Pol Lt Col Pakorn.

He also has to submit a formal request to the DSI.

On March 9, the DSI decided to summon four out of a total of 38 companies found to have received cheques from Mr Supachai.

The four companies are Global Integrated Solution Co, Concut Co, GIS Engineering Co, and Sun Space Multi-system Co.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) raided a home office of GLOW Development Co that is owned by Watchanon Navaisarak, whom the AMLO found to have received 135 cheques from Mr Supachai between 2009 and 2012, said Noppadol Uthen, director of the DSI's Bureau of Special Crime One.

A source said a check of the security cameras at the company showed computers and files were removed on March 6. - Bangkok Post

MANILA

Bail for key figure in Philippines massacre

A KEY defendant in the worst political massacre in the Philippines, which saw 58 people murdered, has been freed on bail.

The court granted the provisional release of Sajid Ampatuan on March 9, ruling against the government which wants him kept in prison along with more than 100 other suspects in the 2009 slaughter.

"He was released. He is free to travel anywhere in the Philippines," Alan Moral, an official from the regional court handling the case told AFP. He is, however, barred from leaving the country while on bail.

Mr Moral said the defendant had paid a US\$262,000 bond.

Sajid Ampatuan could not be reached for comment.

He is a son of Andal Ampatuan Senior, a Muslim political clan leader accused of masterminding the massacre in his southern bailiwick of Maguindanao province on November 23, 2009.

Nine clan members are among 111 people detained for the mass killings that prosecutors allege were part of a bid to quash an election challenge from a rival clan.

Thirty-two media workers were among those killed, making the attack one of the deadliest ever recorded globally against journalists.

Prosecutors have opposed the clan members' bail bids amid fears their release could intimidate witnesses.

Four people who had already given testimony or were scheduled to,

as well as three relatives of potential witnesses, have been mysteriously murdered in recent years.

"We're aghast, we're frustrated," Harry Roque, a lawyer for some of the victims' families, told AFP.

"We are apprehensive that the Ampatuans could regain influence," he added, noting the ruling came just over a year ahead of the May 2016 national and local elections.

Andal Ampatuan Senior had ruled Maguindanao as governor for about a decade under the patronage of then-president Gloria Arroyo, who had funded a private army for the clan as a buffer against Muslim separatist rebels.

Justice Secretary Leila de Lima said state prosecutors will challenge the bail ruling in appellate courts in a bid to get the defendant back behind bars.

"I already gave instructions to the [state prosecution] panel ... to avail of the proper remedy as soon as possible," she told reporters.

Mr Moral said the state has yet to complete the presentation of its witnesses and evidence, adding to concerns the trial could take years.

He said the court has yet to rule on the bail petitions of the other clan members, while more than 70 other murder suspects remain at large.

Mr Moral said 16 police officers also accused in the murders were earlier granted bail but remained in jail because they could not afford to pay the bond.

- AFP

ADDIS ABBABA

Lions of Zion struggle for survival

ETHIOPIA'S black-maned lions once represented a former emperor, "Lion of Judah" Haile Selassie, and were immortalised in a song by reggae legend Bob Marley. Today, they struggle for survival.

A booming human population, widespread habitat destruction and growing livestock numbers mean the animal that once graced Ethiopia's flag - and is still a potent symbol for Rastafarians through the song "Iron Lion Zion" - is on the wane.

They live on in only small pockets of the Horn of Africa nation, and conservationists warn that without action, all that will remain of the powerful creatures are the stone sculptures and statues dotted in the flourishing capital, Addis Ababa.

"There were lions everywhere in Ethiopia, but their habitat is shrinking," said Zelealem Tefera, country head of the Born Free Foundation, a conservation group.

"Human settlements are expanding, prey is disappearing and there is nothing to eat for the lions," he said.

In decline across Africa, lions have been put on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's "red list" of threatened species, but Ethiopia's rare lions - seen as unique though debate continues over their DNA - are even more vulnerable.

In the past few decades they have disappeared from much of Ethiopia. With 96 million people, it is Africa's second-most populous



A black-maned lion rests from the heat of the day in Ethiopia Photo: AFP

nation, and the number is growing by some 2 million people every year.

Conservationists estimate there are, at most, 1000 lions left. They are to be found mainly in remote areas bordering the war-torn countries of South Sudan and Somalia, as well as in a handful of national parks in the centre and east.

"The black-maned lion is very unique and only found in a few locations in Ethiopia," Mr Zelealem said.

"It makes them very important in our culture. I don't think the lion population will completely disappear from Ethiopia in the coming few years, but if we don't protect

their habitat there is no reason why this couldn't happen," he said.

In a forest area some 30 kilometres (20 miles) south of Addis Ababa, the Born Free Foundation has taken in seven of the lions, all captured by villagers or soldiers.

Many have suffered physical abuse - a far cry from how Haile Selassie used to keep them as palace pets - and unlike other wild animals seized from traffickers, such as cheetahs and monkeys, the lions cannot be released back into the wild.

Their remaining habitat is very small and the risk of conflict with humans too great.

One young male, Kebri - a powerful cat with a dark brown mane just beginning to appear - is just such a victim of growing conflict with farmers.

"His mother killed some livestock here and as a result the local village poisoned her," said Derek Bretts, who looks after the animals at the centre.

"They fed her meat that had been laced with poison and she ended up dying," he said. "We got a call saying that there was a young cub, so we went and took him."

While Ethiopia has a dozen national parks where wild animals can find safe havens, pressures on the lions continue to grow.

"Wildlife preservation is not given priority in Ethiopia. Not all protected areas in Ethiopia are actually well protected," said Fikirte Gebresenbet, an Ethiopian lion expert from Oklahoma State University in the United States.

"People reside in the park for half the year, or pastoralists come to the park every now and then to graze their cattle. And it results in conflict with the lions," she said.

The future of the lions of Ethiopia may lie in the development of tourism, but it is an industry still in its infancy.

"If we take lessons from Kenya and Tanzania, the future could be brighter," Ms Fikirte said. "We have to convince the government that people would pay to see lions in well-protected areas." - AFP

SAUDI BEHEADINGS

Saudi at 40 executions

SAUDI Arabia beheaded a Filipino convicted of murdering his boss on March 9, bringing to 40 the number of executions this year.

In just over two months, Saudi Arabia has beheaded almost half the number of foreigners and Saudis executed during all of 2014, according to AFP tallies.

Joven Esteva was found guilty of stabbing his Saudi employer in the chest, an interior ministry statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency said.

"The perpetrator had worked as a driver for him," the statement said.

Authorities carried out the sentence against him in Riyadh, adding to what Amnesty International calls an unprecedented pace of executions in the kingdom this year.

Amnesty says the number of death sentences carried out so far has been almost four times that for the same period in 2014.

The death penalty for murderers aims "to maintain security, serve justice, and implement the provisions of God", the interior ministry says.

But human rights groups have expressed concern about the dangers of the innocent being sentenced to death.

Rape, murder, apostasy, armed robbery and drug trafficking are all punishable by death under Saudi Arabia's version of Islamic sharia law.

There have been around 80 executions annually in the kingdom since 2011, with 87 last year.

Saudi Arabia is among the world's top executioners, according to Amnesty. - AFP

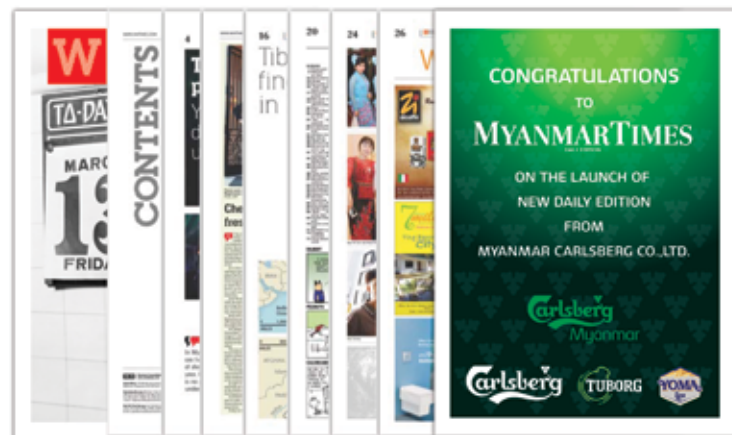
MYANMAR TIMES

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BAGHDAD

US top brass urges patience in Iraq

A TOP US military officer has urged patience in the battle against the Islamic State group during a March 9 visit to Baghdad, as Iraqi forces pressed their largest operation yet against the jihadists.

General Martin Dempsey, chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, flew in on a C-17 military transport aircraft and was due to hold talks with top Iraqi officials.

Some 30,000 men have been involved in a week-old operation to recapture Tikrit, one of the jihadists' main hubs since they overran large parts of Iraq nine months ago.

And on March 9, Kurdish peshmerga forces launched an offensive south and west of the oil city of Kirkuk, further increasing the pressure on the last IS strongholds east of the Tigris river.

The US began carrying out air strikes against IS in August, the first of what is now a 60-nation coalition of mostly Western and Arab states supporting Baghdad's fightback.

But its jets, drones and 2600 military advisers on the ground have not directly been involved in the battle for Tikrit, which Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced on March 1.

Washington has been uneasy about the leading role played by Iran, which is not part of the coalition, in the Iraqi government's efforts to reconquer jihadist-held provinces.

Qassem Soleimani, who is in charge of foreign operations for Tehran's Revolutionary Guards, has been ubiquitous on the front lines and become a cult figure among Iraqi Shiite fighters.

During a visit to a French aircraft carrier in the Gulf taking part in the air campaign, Mr Dempsey appealed for "strategic patience" in the fight against the IS group in Iraq and Syria.

"Carpet bombing through Iraq is not the answer," he said on March 8.

Mr Dempsey stressed that training the Iraqi army, which imploded when IS attacked in June 2014, would take more time, as would initiatives to bring Iraq's Sunnis back into the fold.

"I do think it's going to require some strategic patience," he said, adding that "these underlying issues have to be resolved".



Members of the Iraqi paramilitary Popular Mobilisation units patrol near Tikrit on March 9. Photo: AFP

Iraqi soldiers, police and the increasingly influential paramilitary Popular Mobilisation units, which are dominated by Shiite militias, have been closing in on Tikrit in recent days.

On March 8, those forces retook the village of Abu Ajil, where some Sunni tribesmen have been accused of involvement alongside IS militants in the June 2014 massacre of hundreds of new, mostly Shiite recruits from the nearby base of Speicher.

The leader of the Popular Mobilisation units, Hadi al-Ameri, had described the Tikrit operation as an opportunity for revenge, sparking wide fears over the fate of Sunni civilians in the area.

Shiite military commanders, including among the most hardline, have since toned down their language and publicly urged their fighters to exercise restraint.

Dozens of families displaced by the fighting fled to Samarra, the other main city in Salaheddin province, to receive assistance and be sheltered in camps.

"I am a farmer. I left my sheep and my cows behind," said Atta Abu Alaa, a 50-year-old who had fled with 12 members of family from a village near Abu Ajil.

"We did not have any relations with IS. We were oppressed," he said, adding that those who fled were held and interrogated by the Asaib Ahl al-Haq Shiite militia for one day and released.

The militia's leader, Qais al-Khazali, spoke to his fighters on the front line Sunday and urged them not to do anything that could tarnish a victory over IS in Tikrit.

The UN said last week that around 30,000 people were displaced by fighting around Tikrit.

Jihadists militants, holding out in

Tikrit with only a few hundred men, are increasingly surrounded.

Kurdish security official Westa Rasul said the operation was backed by coalition air support.

Police Brigadier General Sarhad Qader said security forces were proceeding cautiously to avoid explosives planted by IS.

Some commanders have described the Tikrit operation as both a launchpad and a test for plans to retake Mosul, the jihadists largest urban hub, which is located farther north.

Mr Dempsey's visit to Iraq comes days after a Pentagon official suggested such an operation could take place in April or May.

The announcement irked Iraqi top brass, who argued the timing was their call, not Washington's. Most officials and experts have since indicated a Mosul offensive would need much more preparation. — AFP

GENEVA

UN Gaza probe extends

UN investigators tasked with probing the 50-day war in Gaza last year have asked to postpone their report after the head of the team quit under Israeli pressure.

The Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza conflict had been scheduled to present its findings to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 23.

But in a letter addressed to the head of the council, the investigators requested to delay their presentation until the next council session in June, saying they needed "to adjust our work due to the late resignation of [our] former chair".

Canadian international law expert William Schabas resigned as chair of the commission last month after Israel complained he could not be impartial because he had prepared a legal opinion for the Palestine Liberation Organisation in October 2012, the United Nations said.

Mr Schabas strongly denied this, reluctantly stepping down to avoid the inquiry into the July-August conflict being compromised in any way.

Israel was not satisfied, insisting the commission and Human Rights Council are inherently biased against the Jewish state.

Mr Schabas's resignation left the commission with two members: former New York judge Mary McGowan Davis, who took over as chair; and Doudou Diene of Senegal, who served as the UN's watchdog on racism and on post-conflict Ivory Coast.

In her letter, Ms McGowan Davis explained they were facing a "large number of additional submissions received over the past few weeks from both sides," which it needed to "analyse with the utmost objectivity".

Joachim Ruecker, the president of the Human Rights Council, has supported the request for extra time "to allow them to finalise a comprehensive report as mandated." — AFP

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Thailand's ghost myth-busters

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FROM exorcism ceremonies to spirit houses and amulets claiming to make wearers bulletproof, Thailand is a culture soaked in superstition – an obsession critics say is holding the nation back.

On a popular episode of *Humans defy ghosts* – a weekly Thai TV program that delves into the supernatural – a two-year-old girl who survived three days next to the dead body of her mother was asked a series of questions by one of the show's panellists.

"Who prepared your milk?" Kapol Thongplab enquired. "Who played with you? Who opened the door?"

"Mummy," the little girl replied, as genuinely convinced as her adult interlocutors that her mother's ghost continued to sustain her in those harrowing days.

In Thailand, a show like this is more than just entertainment. "In all countries, people believe in the afterlife," Kapol, one of Thailand's most famous ghost experts, said.

"Westerners may believe in Satan. In the nations of Southeast Asia, we believe in ghosts. This kind of belief helps people refrain from doing bad things. Mr A may think, 'If I kill Mr B, he may become a ghost and come back to haunt me.'"

The spirit world is everywhere in Thailand where animism and folk beliefs are deeply infused with Buddhism.

Most buildings boast a "spirit house" – a shrine placed in an auspicious corner of a property where offerings can be made to appease ghosts lest they turn malevolent.

From time to time Thailand's notoriously fractious politics also draw on the occult.

Competing camps have openly used black magic curses against each other, while protesters often deck themselves out in amulets that they believe make them impervious to bullets or harm.

But some Thais say they are fed up with what they describe as naive superstitions that lead their countrymen to make poor decisions or leave them vulnerable to exploitation.

One man, who wished to remain anonymous, is leading an internet campaign against Thai beliefs in ghosts.

The man, who goes by the pseudonym "FuckGhosts" and runs a popular Facebook page with the same name, recently caused uproar when he posted a photograph of himself stepping on a row of zebra figurines at a busy road junction in Bangkok known for fatal crashes.

Zebra statues are a common sight at accident spots due to the belief that their stripes – which remind people of pedestrian crossings – will fend off the unhappy ghosts of previous traffic victims that many believe cause new crashes.

"I thought about destroying them, but there is CCTV. I am

afraid society would not accept it," he said.

The man's main gripe – which has received significant support on his Facebook page – is that Thais would rather put their faith in statues and amulets than take concrete steps to reduce personal risk, such as driving more safely.

"These kind of beliefs keep Thailand an underdeveloped country," he fumes.

Thailand has the second-highest traffic fatality rate in the world, with 44 deaths per 100,000 population, according to a 2014 study based on World Health Organization figures.

But while drivers cover their cars with protective trinkets to keep safe, many still speed and drink-drive. Mototaxis are laden with amulets but those at the wheel rarely use helmets, and often overload passengers.

The "FuckGhosts" campaign appears to be having a partial effect, with authorities in January removing hundreds of statues that had built up around the accident black spot – known locally as "Kong Roi Sop", the curve that claims 100 lives.

But the removal could only go ahead once a Buddhist monk had initiated a ceremony making sure any evil spirits would leave the area.

"At the beginning, the workers were quite concerned," admitted Supit Kraimak, head of the local sanitation department.

"But after the monk chanted, they felt more comfortable about the job."



Non-believers in Thailand are leading an internet campaign against the beliefs in ghosts



For many of Thailand's soothsayers and astrologers, belief in the superstitious is also undoubtedly lucrative.

Exorcisms, protective spells and trinkets are all readily available at a price, while books and films about haunting spirits are hugely popular. Businesses often pay monks to make annual visits to chase away evil spirits.

Thais believe a violent or unexpected death is more likely to result in the creation of an angry ghost when a soul departs.

And few ghosts are more famous than "Nak", a woman who Thais believe lived in Bangkok in the 19th century and died during childbirth while her husband was away fighting a war.

There are many versions of the story, but in general they all describe how the husband returned to find his wife seemingly still alive.

Nak was so devoted to him that she had remained as a ghost, but became a malevolent spirit when her husband discovered the truth and ran away.

"On the eve of a lottery, this temple is open all night," reads the sign on a shrine dedicated to Nak in Bangkok where locals make offerings to the ghost asking for cures, good luck and exemption from military service.

Fortune-tellers ply their trade outside the shrine and devotees also release fish, turtles and frogs into a nearby canal to earn "merit".

According to the merchants selling the animals, the release of an eel will bring professional success and a frog can reduce sins.

The head of the temple declined to be questioned. But those visiting were convinced their offerings to Nak would be rewarded.

"I believe in her and I believe in ghosts," said Netnaran Janvanu, a young mother at the temple, before adding matter-of-factly, "My friends believe in ghosts too." - AFP

Art from behind barbed wire

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WHILE he was walking along Sule Pagoda Road one day, artist Yee Nan Thike noticed a foreigner taking photos of a barbed wire fence in front of City Hall: an unusual choice of subject, he thought, given the grandeur of the building itself.

"I liked his idea of focusing on the wire fence, and I echoed this theme in some of my paintings. I was struck by the idea that our city is in a period of transition," said the artist and filmmaker, who was awarded the Daw Aung San Suu Kyi Award at the 2013 Human Rights Human Dignity International Film Festival for his film *Survival in Prison*.

The thorny fence inspired Yee

Nan Thike to make a documentary entitled *Call for Change*, a 26-minute film about people's views on the change in Myanmar's constitution. Later, his passion for art led him to create a series of paintings depicting the city landmarks such as Independence Monument and Shwedagon Pagoda behind a veil of barbed wire.

"I pictured Shwedagon Pagoda and the colonial-era buildings on Pansodan Road closed off to the public by barbed wire, and painted what I saw in my mind," he said.

The series, entitled *Transition in Yangon*, will be on display along with paintings by three other artists - Kin Maung Yin, Bo Saw and Bagyi Lynn Wunna - at Yangon's Peace Gallery until March 22.

The paintings by late artist Kin Maung Yin - a leading figure in the first-generation modern art



Yee Nan Thike's barbed wire-inspired art will be on display at the Peace Gallery until March 22. Photo: Zon Pann Pwint

movement in Myanmar - are from the personal collection of gallery founder Tin Maung Lwin, who also collects watercolour paintings by artist U Kyin Moe. One of Kin Maung Yin's paintings portrays the historic Student Union Building which was

destroyed on July 8, 1962.

"I've collected about 600 paintings, and it became a burden to preserve such a big collection so I opened the gallery to share the artwork with other interested people," said U Tin Maung Lwin.

Transition in Yangon is open to the public until March 22 at the Peace Gallery, room 10 (2nd floor), 352/366 Mahabandoola Garden Street.



Speakers (from left to right) U Kyaw Zwa Moe, Daw May Thingyan Hein, Daw Tin Mar Shein, Ma Thida and Mon Mon Myat participate in a discussion about women in the media, hosted by the British Council, on March 8. Photo: Cherry Thein

Women are not sex objects, says panel

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WOMEN are not second-class citizens, participants in a "Women in Media" seminar heard on March 9. To mark International Women's Day the day before, the British Council hosted the panel discussion, where speakers from *Pae Tin Tharn Weekly*, *Irrawaddy News Magazine*, Myimakha Media Group and Gender Equality Network shared their views on the topic.

GEN's research coordinator, Daw Tin Mar Shein, said women were being used for sex entertainment, as commodities in advertisements and as objects in the media.

"When women are being used, or accept to be used, in this way, it prolongs the structural stereotyping. The consequences create the wrong norms and messages by signalling that women are primarily for the use of others," she said, adding that the media were critically important to reshaping that image to promote

gender equality.

An editor with *Irrawaddy*, U Kyaw Zwa Moe, said most news reports about women perpetuated these stereotypes, reflecting the social environment media. "I would appreciate more diversity in terms of gender, ideas, culture, attitudes and interests to produce more colourful stories," he said, calling for greater gender equality.

Chief editor of *Pae Tin Tharn* Ma Thida (Sanchaung) spoke of the consumer's perception of the media, saying the media contributed to gender perceptions. "We need to change the mindset of both media and society," she said, describing this as a long-term process.

The CEO of Myitmakha Media Group, Daw May Thingyan Hein, called for better enforcement of existing laws and changes in the judicial system to establish reliable and legitimate governance. She said women who were victims of rape were blamed rather than the rapists, both by society and by their own families, because of long-standing cultural norms. Many

stories of sexual violence remained untold because the judicial process was unreliable, and judges were lacking in gender sensitivity.

"The media provide the best platform to explore these untold stories, but first the media themselves should become more aware of gender concepts," she said.

Myitmakha introduced a women's corner in early March to enable information-sharing and consciousness-raising on gender and to promote the introduction of sex education targeting women at the grassroots level.

The Myitmakha CEO also advocated promoting ethnic languages to share more widely information on gender concepts, as well as the greater use of community media such as radio to spread knowledge and information for people with limited access to education, information and transportation. "We have a lot of work to do, but we need cooperation to achieve our goal of gender equality within a harmonious society," Daw May Thingyan Hein said.

East-meets-West drama 'Mudra Calling' set for April release

CHIT SU
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IN Christina Kyi's East-meets-West drama *Mudra Calling*, Myanmar characters use English dialogue against a musical background drawn from both cultures.

The movie is now in post-production and scheduled for release in late April, says Kyi, who says the time and the place of screening will be announced on her Facebook page.

Zen, a Myanmar-American man, comes back to the old country to research his master's project on music and meets a traditional dancer, Hla Yin Kyay. They set off together to Bagan, Inle and Mandalay to research Zen's family history.

Unfortunately, its release will come too late for inclusion in some of the big film festivals. "Festivals don't want to screen movies that have already been screened in cinemas. Maybe I could screen it first in Hollywood and then show it here in 2016," said Kyi.

Mudra Calling is produced by Mona Stressburger, CEO of House of Media and Entertainment, a Yangon-



Photo: Supplied

based production company.

Kyi returned to Myanmar in 2009 after spending years in the United States, where she studied digital filmmaking and multimedia in New York.

"For my next film, which will be called *Broken*, I will use Myanmar dialogue. I want to promote our country and show the world the reality of our people and unique culture," she said.

What's on

TODAY

'Transition in Yangon'. Paintings by Yee Nan Thike, Kin Maung Yin, Bo Saw and Bagyi Lynn Wunna. Peace art gallery, 352/366, room 10 (2nd floor), Mahabandoola Garden Street (until March 22 - see page 22)
Jazz music & dinner. The Rendez-Vous, Institut Francais, 340 Pyay Road, Sanchaung 7:30pm

Got an event?
List it in What's On!
whatsonmt@gmail.com

TOMORROW

Live Music. Kokine Bar, 34 Kokkine Swimming Club Lane, Saya San Road, Bahan 6-11pm
Folk on Fire with LN'R band. Mojo Bar, 135 Inya Road, Bahan 9:30pm



the same Yesterday, Today and Forever . . .



since 1947

Kyet Shar Soon

Biriani & Various Curries

- ပင်ရင်း - အမှတ် (၆၅)၊ ၁၁၉ လမ်း၊ မင်္ဂလာဈေးအနီး၊ မင်္ဂလာတောင်ညွန့်မြို့နယ်၊ ရန်ကုန်မြို့။ ဖုန်း - ၀၁ - ၂၉၄၈၆၇၊ ၀၁ - ၂၀၅၆၆၅
- ဆိုင်ခွဲ (၁) - အမှတ် (၅)၊ ဗိုလ်မိုးလမ်း (မြေနီကုန်း)၊ စမ်းချောင်းမြို့နယ်၊ ရန်ကုန်မြို့။ ဖုန်း - ၀၉ - ၅၀၁၈၂၆၅
- ဆိုင်ခွဲ (၂) - အမှတ် (၃၅၉)၊ မဟာဗန္ဓုလလမ်းနှင့် ဆိပ်ကမ်းသာလမ်းထောင့် (မိုးကောင်းမုန့်တိုက်အနီး)၊ လွှစလမ်း၊
ကျောက်တံတားမြို့နယ်၊ ရန်ကုန်။ ဖုန်း - ၀၉ - ၅၀၄၁၄၄၃
- ဆိုင်ခွဲ (၃) - (၁၄၇)၊ ဦးချစ်မောင်လမ်း၊ နှစ်ကျိပ်ရှစ်ဆူဓမ္မာရုံရှေ့ ဗဟန်းမြို့နယ်၊ ရန်ကုန်မြို့။ ဖုန်း - ၀၉ - ၃၃၆၂၄၄၄၄

မြန်မာ့နှင့် ကျောက်တံတားမြို့နယ်ရှိ ဆိုင်ခွဲများကို အောက်ပါလိပ်စာအတိုင်း ပြောင်းရွှေ့ပွင့်လှစ်ထားပါသည်။

DOMESTIC FLIGHT SCHEDULES

YANGON TO MANDALAY				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
Y5 775	Daily	6:00	7:10	
W9 515	1	6:00	7:25	
YH 909	Daily	6:00	7:40	
YH 917	Daily	6:10	8:30	
YJ 891	Daily	6:00	8:05	
YJ 811	3	6:30	7:55	
K7 282	Daily	6:00	8:10	
W9 201	Daily	7:00	8:25	
YH 835	1,7	7:00	8:40	
YH 831	4,6	7:00	8:40	
W9201	1	7:00	8:25	
7Y 131	Daily	7:15	9:20	
K7 266	Daily	8:00	10:05	
8M 6603	4	9:00	10:10	
YJ 751	5	10:45	14:50	
YJ 211	5,7	11:00	12:25	
YJ 601	6	11:00	12:25	
YJ 201	1,2,3,4	11:00	12:25	
YH 911	2	11:00	12:40	
YJ 761	1,2,4	11:00	12:55	
YJ 233	6	11:00	12:55	
YH 729	2,4,6	11:00	14:00	
YH 737	3,5,7	11:15	13:25	
YH 727	1	11:15	13:25	
W9 251	2,5	11:30	12:55	
7Y 941	1,3,4,6	11:45	13:10	
7Y 841	2,5	11:45	13:10	
7Y 943	7	11:45	13:10	
K7 822	4,7	12:30	16:55	
YJ 151/W9 7151	1	13:00	16:45	
K7 622	1,3,5,7	13:00	14:25	
K7 226	2,4,6	13:30	14:55	
7Y 241	Daily	14:30	16:25	
YH 731	Daily	14:30	16:40	
Y5 234	Daily	15:20	16:30	
W9 211	4	15:30	16:55	

YANGON TO NYAUNG U				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
K7 282	Daily	6:00	7:20	
YJ 891	Daily	6:00	7:20	
YH 909	Daily	6:00	8:25	
YH 917	Daily	6:10	7:45	
YJ 141	1	6:20	7:40	
YJ 881	7	6:30	7:50	
YJ 881	1,2,4,5	6:45	8:05	
YJ 801	6	7:00	8:20	
K7 242	Daily	7:00	8:20	
7Y 131	Daily	7:15	8:35	
7Y 121	1	8:20	9:40	
K7 264	Daily	14:30	16:40	
7Y 241	Daily	14:30	17:10	
YH 731	1,2,3,4,5,7	14:30	17:25	
W9 129	1,3,6	15:30	17:35	
W9 211	4	15:30	17:40	
W9 129	1	15:30	17:35	

YANGON TO MYITKYINA				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YH 829	5	7:00	9:40	
YH 835	1,7	7:00	10:05	
YH 831	4,6	7:00	10:05	
YH 826	3	7:00	10:05	
YJ 201	1,2,3,4	11:00	13:50	
YJ 233	6	11:00	16:05	
W9 251	2,5	11:30	14:25	
7Y 841	5	11:45	14:35	
K7 622	1,3,5,7	13:00	15:55	
YJ 151 / W9 7151	1	13:00	16:45	

MANDALAY TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YH 910	Daily	7:40	9:45	
Y5 233	Daily	7:50	9:00	
YJ 811	3	8:10	10:05	
YJ 891	Daily	8:20	10:15	
K7 283	Daily	8:25	11:30	
YH 918	Daily	8:30	10:45	
W9 201	Daily	8:40	10:35	
7Y 132	Daily	9:35	11:30	
K7 267	Daily	10:20	12:25	
YH 830	5	11:05	14:55	
YH 836	1,7	13:20	14:45	
YH 832	4,6	13:20	14:45	
YJ 212	7	15:00	16:25	
YJ 212	5	15:00	17:05	
YJ 752	5	15:05	16:30	
YH 912	2	15:30	17:25	
YJ 202	1,2,3,4	15:30	16:55	
YJ 762	4	15:50	17:00	
YJ 602	6	16:25	17:35	
YJ 762	1,2	16:35	18:00	
YH 732	6	16:40	18:05	
7Y 242	Daily	16:40	18:45	
YH 732	1,2,3,4,5,7	16:40	18:45	
YH 728	1	16:45	18:10	
W9 152/W97152	1	17:05	18:30	
Y5 776	Daily	17:10	18:20	
W9 211	4	17:10	19:15	
K7 823	2,4,7	17:10	18:35	
8M 6604	4	17:20	18:30	
K7 227	2,4,6	17:20	18:45	
8M 903	1,2,4,5,7	17:20	18:30	
YH 738	3,5,7	17:25	18:50	
K7 623	1,3,5,7	17:40	19:05	
YH 730	2,4,6	17:45	19:10	
YJ 234	6	17:45	19:10	
W9 252	2,5	18:15	19:40	

NYAUNG U TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YJ 891	Daily	7:35	10:15	
YH 918	Daily	7:45	10:45	
YJ 141 / W9 7141	1	7:55	10:55	
YJ 881	7	8:05	10:10	
YJ 881	1,2,4,5	8:20	10:25	
YH 910	Daily	8:25	9:45	
YH 835	6	8:35	9:55	
K7 242	Daily	8:35	11:45	
7Y 131	Daily	8:50	11:30	
7Y 121	Daily	9:55	14:10	
K7 283	Daily	10:10	11:30	
K7 265	Daily	16:55	18:15	
7Y 242	Daily	17:25	18:45	
W9 129	1,3,6	17:50	19:10	
YH 732	1,2,3,4,5,6	17:25	18:45	

MYITKYINA TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YH 832	4,6	11:55	14:45	
YH 836	1,7	11:55	14:45	
YH 827	3	11:55	14:45	
YH 830	5	12:30	14:55	
YJ 202	1,2,3,4	14:05	16:55	
YJ 152 / W9 7152	1	15:35	18:30	
K7 623	1,3,5,7	16:10	19:05	
YJ 234	6	16:20	19:10	
W9 252	2,5	16:45	19:40	

YANGON TO HEHO				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YJ 891	Daily	6:00	8:50	
K7 282	Daily	6:00	9:00	
YH 917	Daily	6:10	9:35	
YJ 141/W9 7141	1	6:20	8:35	
YJ 811	3	6:30	8:40	
YJ 881	7	6:30	8:45	
YJ 881	1,2,4,5	6:45	9:00	
K7 242	Daily	7:00	9:15	
YJ 201	1	7:00	9:10	
7Y 131	Daily	7:15	10:05	
K7 266	Daily	8:00	9:15	
7Y 121	Daily	8:20	10:35	
Y5 649	Daily	10:30	12:45	
YH 505	1,2,3,4,5,6	10:30	11:55	
YJ 751	3,7	10:30	11:40	
YJ 751	5	10:45	11:55	
YJ 761	1,2,4	11:00	12:10	
YJ 233	6	11:00	12:10	
YH 727	1	11:15	12:40	
YH 737	3,5,7	11:15	12:40	
7Y 941	1,2,4,6	11:45	13:55	
K7 828	1,3,5	12:30	13:45	
K7 822	2,4,7	12:30	13:45	
K7 264	Daily	14:30	15:45	
7Y 241	Daily	14:30	15:40	
YH 731	Daily	14:30	15:55	
W9 129	1,3,6	15:30	16:40	

YANGON TO MYEIK				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
Y5 325	1,5	6:45	8:15	
7Y 531	1,5	7:00	8:38	
K7 319	2,4,6	7:00	9:05	
Y5 325	2	15:30	17:00	

YANGON TO SITTWE				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
W9 309	1,3,6	11:30	12:55	
K7 422	Daily	13:00	14:55	

YANGON TO THANDWE				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YJ 141/W9 7141	1	6:20	9:50	
K7 242	Daily	7:00	10:35	
YH 505	1,2,3,4,5,6	10:30	13:10	
W9 309	1,3,6	11:30	13:50	
7Y 122	Daily	12:15	13:05	
K7 422	Daily	13:00	13:35	
Y5 421	1,3,4,6	15:45	16:40	

YANGON TO DAWEI				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
K7 319	2,4,6	7:00	8:10	
7Y 531	1,5	7:00	7:48	

YANGON TO LASHIO				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YJ 751	5	10:45	13:00	
YJ 751	3,7	10:30	12:45	
YH 729	2,4,6	11:00	13:00	
7Y 741	1,5	11:30	13:18	
K7 828	1,3,5	12:30	14:50	

YANGON TO PUTAO				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YH 831	6,4	7:00	11:00	
YH 826	3	7:00	11:00	
YH 835	7,1	7:00	11:00	
W9 251	2,5	11:30	15:25	

HEHO TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YJ 141 / W9 7141	1	8:50	10:55	
YJ 811	3	8:55	10:05	
YJ 881	7	9:00	10:10	
YJ 891	Daily	9:05	10:15	
K7 283	Daily	9:15	11:30	
YJ 881	1,2,4,5	9:15	10:25	
W9 201	Daily	9:25	10:35	
K7 243	Daily	9:30	11:45	
YH 918	Daily	9:35	10:45	
7Y 132	Daily	10:20	11:30	
7Y 121	Daily	10:50	14:10	
K7 267	Daily	11:10	12:25	
YH 506	1,2,3,4,5,6	11:55	14:00	
YJ 752	5	14:20	16:30	
YJ 762	4	15:50	17:00	
YJ 762	1,2	15:50	18:00	
7Y 241	Daily	15:55	18:45	
YH 732	1,2,3,4,5,6	15:55	18:45	
K7 829	1,3,5	16:10	17:25	
YH 728	1	16:00	18:10	
YJ 602	6	16:25	17:35	
K7 264	Daily	16:30	18:15	
YH 738	3,5,7	16:40	18:50	
YJ 752	3,7	16:45	17:55	
W9 129	1,3,6	16:55	19:10	

MYEIK TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
Y5 326	1,5	8:35	10:05	
7Y 532	1,5	10:45	12:18	
K7 320	2,4,6	11:30	13:35	
Y5 326	2	17:15	18:45	

SITTWE TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
W9 309	1,3,6	13:10	14:55	
K7 423	Daily	15:10	16:30	

THANDWE TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YJ 141/W9 7141	1	10:05	10:55	
K7 243	Daily	10:50	11:45	
YH 506	1,2,3,4,5,6	13:10	14:00	
7Y 122	Daily	13:20	14:10	
W9 309	1,3,6	14:05	14:55	
K7 422	Daily	14:10	16:30	
Y5 422	1,3,4,6	16:55	17:50	

DAWEI TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
K7 320	2,4,6	12:25	13:35	
7Y 532	1,5	11:30	12:18	

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(For. Ella Cheong LLC, Singapore)

Dated: 11th March, 2015

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(For. Domnarn Somgiat & Boonma,

Attorneys at Law, Thailand)

Dated. 11th March, 2015

Got something to say?
The Myanmar Times



newsroom@mmtimes.com

French sports stars killed in helicopter crash

FRENCH sports stars, including an Olympic champion swimmer and one of the world's best sailors, were among 10 killed in a helicopter crash while filming a reality TV show in Argentina.

Champion sailor Florence Arthaud, Olympic gold medallist swimmer Camille Muffat, Olympic boxer Alexis Vastine and seven others died when two helicopters filming the survival series *Dropped* smashed into each other in the rugged mountains of La Rioja province, local officials said.

“Apparently, the two helicopters collided as they were filming. There are no survivors,” provincial spokesman Horacio Alarcon told AFP.

He said the weather conditions were good and the cause of the crash, which happened late afternoon local time on March 9, was unknown.

Eight French passengers and their

two Argentine pilots died in the crash, a police source said.

Arthaud, 57, was considered one of the best sailors in the world, a woman who conquered what had been a strictly male-dominated sport. Her titles included the 1990 Route du Rhum, the most prestigious race to cross the Atlantic solo.

Muffat, 25, was one of the top swimmers in French history, winning three medals at the London Olympics in 2012, including gold in the 400-metre freestyle.

She shocked the sporting world in June 2014 by announcing her sudden retirement at the age of 24, exhausted by the long hours of training in the pool.

Vastine, 28, won a bronze medal at the Beijing Games in 2008 in the light welterweight category.

President Francois Hollande led the tributes, saying the “brutal death of our

compatriots is an immense sadness”.

“The whole of France is in mourning this morning,” said Prime Minister Manuel Valls.

The reality TV show, involved eight sports stars being dropped into inhospitable environments for an adventure- and survival-themed show.

A fellow contestant, former France and Arsenal football star Sylvain Wilford, said on Twitter he was “sad” and “horrified”.

The other stars participating in the show - none of them hurt in the accident - were swimmer Alain Bernard, cyclist Jeannie Longo, snowboarder Anne-Flore Marxer and figure skater Philippe Candeloro.

“We’ve got people who are way beyond average for their record of achievements, that’s clear,” said the show’s presenter, Louis Bodin, in a recent interview with French radio station RTL.

FOOTBALL

UAE promises spectacular stadia

THE United Arab Emirates promised a fitting spectacle complete with a glittering new stadium and plenty of fans on March 10 after winning hosting rights for the 2019 Asian Cup.

UAE Football Association chief Yousuf Al Serkal told AFP the Gulf state could host the regional showpiece “next week” if it had to, but that it planned to build a new venue in Dubai.

Games will be played in Dubai, Al Ain, Abu Dhabi and possibly Sharjah, in an event which comes just three years before neighbouring Qatar hosts the 2022 World Cup.

But Al Serkal said the UAE, whose national team finished an impressive third at this year’s Asian Cup in Australia, had no plans to bid for a World Cup of its own.

“Now that Qatar is hosting in 2022, it will be a long period of time to rotate and come back to this part of the world,” he said in a phone interview.

“We will leave it to the coming generation.”

UAE, chosen ahead of Iran by the Asian Football Confederation’s executive committee, has a tough task in following Australia where the total attendance soared to 650,000 and games sold out in all five host cities.

But Al Serkal said UAE drew fans in 1996, when it first hosted the Asian Cup, and that it successfully held both the 2003 U20 World Cup and the 2013 U17 World Cup.

“We managed to fill the stadiums on that occasion [1996], I think we can do the same [again],” he said. “It will not be a problem.”

He added; “If we needed to host the competition starting next week we could still host it successfully.”

“The infrastructure is there, we have enough stadiums, we have enough facilities, training fields. Everything is there.”

Elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula

renowned British architects Foster and Partners was named on March 9 as the designer of the stadium that will host the final of the controversial Qatar football World Cup in 2022.

The 80,000-seater stadium will be built in the purpose-built city of Lusail, some 15 kilometres (10 miles) north of the capital Doha.

The stadium will be the centrepiece of a huge US\$45 billion construction project which will see an entire new city rise from the desert in time for football’s biggest tournament in seven years’ time.

The decision was announced by Qatar’s Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, which is overseeing preparations for the World Cup in the tiny, energy-rich Gulf kingdom.

Hassan Al Thawadi, the committee’s secretary-general, said; “We look forward to working with them [Foster and Partners] in creating an iconic, contemporary stadium inspired by Qatari culture.”

CRICKET

World Cup unites across political boundaries

BANGLADESH’S opposition called a temporary halt March 10 to its campaign to topple the government as the deeply divided nation united to celebrate its qualification for the quarter-finals of cricket’s World Cup.

Newspaper front pages, usually dominated by reports of protests and firebombings as part of a month-long political crisis, all led with the March 9 dramatic win over England in Adelaide which guaranteed the Tigers’ place among the tournament’s last eight for the first time.

And as the press hailed the cricketers for giving the country a much-needed lift, the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party called off the latest in a series of nationwide strikes to allow people to celebrate the “unforgettable triumph”.

More than 100 people have died in political unrest since the start of the year when BNP leader Khaleda Zia launched a campaign to force fresh elections but police said there were no reports of violence overnight.

It is the first time that the BNP

has halted its campaign against the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was among the first to congratulate the team for their victory.

With political hostilities suspended for the day, hundreds of supporters of Hasina’s Awami League party staged a victory procession at Motijheel, the main commercial district in the capital Dhaka.

“Who has won? Who has won? Bangladesh! Bangladesh!” they chanted amid a sea of green and red national flags.

“It’s heartening to witness the exhilaration of fans and see spirits uplifted at a time when the country is clouded in political crisis,” said the main editorial in the Dhaka Tribune newspaper on March 10.

“We will not be exaggerating if we say that at a time of crisis, especially the one Bangladesh finds itself in, the Tigers have brought us together,” said the Daily Star.

Many newspapers described the 15-run victory as the country’s greatest sporting triumph since it gained independence from Pakistan in 1971.

IN BRIEF

CYCLING

Boost for Africa’s first Tour team

MTN-Qhubeka were given further opportunities on March 9 when they were handed tickets to three one-day classics in April to warm up for their July debut as the first African outfit to feature in the Tour de France.

As with the Tour, MTN-Qhubeka have been given wild-card entries to the Paris-Roubaix on April 12, the Fleche Wallonne April 22 and the Liege-Bastogne-Liege on April 26.

The team boasts several top African cyclists, including Eritrean climber Natnael Berhane, who won the Tour of Turkey, as well as experienced Europeans such as Norwegian sprinter Ewald Boasson Hagen, one of the top names signed from the successful Sky team.

MOTOR SPORT

Merhi to Manor in Melbourne

Spaniard Roberto Merhi was confirmed on March 10 as the newly reformed Manor team’s second driver for this weekend’s Australian Grand Prix.

The team formally known as Marussia which went into administration at the end of October and missed the final three races of last season, has been rescued by fresh investment just in time to take the grid in Melbourne.

FOOTBALL

Eto'o honoured for anti-racism

FOOTBALL star Samuel Eto'o was honoured March 9 for his "inspiring" stand against racism, as the organisers behind the award warned that prejudice still stalked the game in Europe.

The former Cameroon and Barcelona, Chelsea, Inter Milan and Real Madrid striker received the Medal of Tolerance from the European Council on Tolerance and Reconciliation at a gala dinner at London's Kensington Palace.

Eto'o, who now plays with Sampdoria in Italy, famously tried to walk off the pitch during a Spanish match in 2006 due to the racist abuse he was suffering.

"Since that day, I decided I will stand up and fight against abuse," he said after receiving his award, with Chelsea winger Eden Hazard, Liverpool defender Kolo Toure and former Barcelona midfielder Deco looking on in support.

"The only path is to stand up and shout."

The four-time African Player of the Year urged footballers to take a moral stand.

"Only we can make it stop. Because for certain, nobody is going to do it for us," the 33-year-old said.

He also urged authorities to issue stiff punishments for those caught in the act.

The ECTR is a non-governmental organisation founded in 2008 which promotes understanding between communities and monitors xenophobia in Europe. It is largely made up of European former presidents and primeministers.

The council's president, Moshe Kantor, said recent racist incidents among football supporters showed the problem was still "very much alive and well" in the game.

"There is a very strong crisis in Europe of racism, radicalisation, neo-Nazism and anti-semitism," he told AFP, citing events in Paris, Belgium and Copenhagen.

Kantor said when these things were present in society, they also manifested themselves in football stadiums.

"We can no longer pretend that hate is a marginal issue in Europe."

He said after French footballer Nicolas Anelka performed the "quenelle" hand gesture, which looks like an inverted Nazi salute, people all round the world saw it and searched for it online because the sport is so hugely popular.

"That's why we decided that we have to turn this interest into something positive," he said, and highlight Eto'o's "inspiring" and courageous stand.

"Samuel Eto'o is well-known as not only a victim of racism but also as a hunter against racism," he told AFP.

The ECTR's first Medal of Tolerance was conferred in 2010 on King Juan Carlos I of Spain, with the second given jointly to Croatian President Ivo Josipovic and former Serbian President Boris Tadic.



IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP

Brigham Young Cougars defeated the Portland Pilots 84-70 in their semifinal of the West Coast Conference Basketball tournament to take them within one game of guaranteeing a place in this year's March Madness playoffs.

UNIVERSIADE

South rules out joint Korean team

SOUTH Korea on March 10 ruled out forming a joint team with North Korea for this year's World Student Games because of high tensions with its neighbour.

North Korea has said it is ready to send athletes to the July Games in the South Korean city of Gwangju, but a South Korean official said a unified team was "not appropriate".

"Forming a unified team with North Korea is not in our consideration," a unification ministry official told reporters. "It's not appropriate, given inter-Korean relations and public sentiment here."

North and South Korea have been fraught over Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions and this month's South Korean military drills with the United States.

However, the official said Seoul would consider subsidising the team from the North by applying "international norms and previous instances".

South Korea paid more than 70 percent of the \$700,000 costs incurred by North Korea when it took part in the Asian Games hosted by the western city of Incheon last year.

Seoul has supported visiting sports teams from the North because its delegations need special transport and accommodation arrangements for security reasons.

North Korea has offered to send 75 athletes and 33 officials for the Universiade, often a stage for future stars to shine, which is scheduled from July 3 to 14.

The two Koreas competed alongside each other at the 1991 World Table Tennis Championships and World Youth Football Championships, but never at a multi-sports event.

Both teams marched together under the blue and white Unification flag at opening ceremonies of the 2000 and 2004 Olympics, and the 2006 Winter Olympics and Asian Games.

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Sport

Bangladesh political crisis takes back seat to cricket

SPORT 26



FOOTBALL

Ayeyawady United frustrated by 'friendly' decisions

MATT ROEBUCK

AYEYAWADY United head coach Marjan Sekulovski had strong words for the Myanmar Football Federation decision that means he must field a side without four first-team players in their March 11 3:30pm AFC Cup Group H clash with Indonesian champions Persib Bandung.

At a pre-match press conference held at the Myanmar Football Federation headquarters on March 10, the Macedonian took time to point out that although his starting line-up would not suffer at the hands of suspension or injury, the decision to fly the Myanmar U23 squad to Japan for a friendly match to be held on the same day had severely disrupted his plans.

"For a friendly match, this is nonsense," said Sekulovski.

"Of course playing for the national side is a big honour and this motivates players, so of course it is very important for us to support serious international games or competitions, but friendly games? For a friendly match this is nonsense and I will say so every time," added the coach.

United will have to make do without defenders Phyo Ko Ko Thein and Hein Thiha Zaw, midfielder Nay Lin Tun and forward Thiha Zaw for the clash in Asia's second-tier continental championship.

Sekulovski had been hoping to field a full-strength side after having several key players - including two of his foreign stars - unavailable for the first AFC Cup clash, the away trip to Lao Toyota on February 25.



The coaches and captains of Ayeyawady United (left) and Persib Bandung (right) meet at the pre-match press conference.

Photo: Matt Roebuck

On that occasion his side failed to hold on to a two-goal lead when last year's Lao League runners-up launched a second-half comeback with two goals in three minutes in a game that ended 2-2.

The coach maintained a point in Laos was still a positive result; "Yes we had a two-goal lead which we lost to two goals in three minutes but this was because we were still looking for the third."

He also seemed to suggest that his team would again look to take the

attack to the opposition.

"Persib are the biggest team to ever visit Myanmar in the AFC Cup," pointing to the team's AFC ranking as evidence. "In my opinion they are very strong and are in pole position for this group, while we must fight with the others for second place. Every point against Persib is a success."

"Persib are an experienced team. Only two of their players are under 25. Most are 28, 29 or older. Many are national team players past or present and they have two very strong foreigners."

Sekulovski added he was glad to have his experienced foreign players back but the loss of the four U23 internationals would affect the consistency of line-up he has managed to maintain in the domestic league. Before the suspension of the league for international activities, Ayeyawady had won seven and drawn one of their contests.

Persib Bandung coach Emral Abus pointed to this record suggesting that Ayeyawady would present his side with a much tougher contest than

New Radiant of the Maldives, whom they beat 4-1 in their first group game.

"Our first away game will be very difficult. I know Ayeyawady will be very strong. Here the weather is very hot and the 3:30 kick-off will be a problem for us. We hope tomorrow to come away with a point," said the Persib boss.

Pointing to the weather is a theme almost every manager visiting Myanmar picks up on as many Asian leagues prefer an evening kick-off to avoid the mid-afternoon sun. This is a factor that Myanmar's representatives to continental competitions - used to the earlier start - like to exploit.

Ayeyawady's Sekulovski also made the most of his opportunity at the press conference to point out that his team was unable to capitalise on other benefits of the home advantage.

"Yes, we have a strong home record, but this is not our home, our home is five hours away in Pathein; there we have big support. Tomorrow in Yangon, if we get 1000 supporters I will eat my cap," joked the coach.

"Home support is very important. At their last game Persib had 30,000. That kind of support gives something extra to a side. I hope that we can take our future games to Pathein."

Myanmar's other representative to the AFC Cup, Mandalay's Yadanarbon FC travel to South China FC for their March 11 tie.

After losing 3-2 to a late goal in their home match against Malaysia's Pahang FA they will have to up their game considerably to come away with a result against the Hong Kong side high from their 6-1 away victory over the Philippines' Global FC.

Far-East Friendly for U23s

KYAW ZIN HLAING

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MYANMAR'S male U23 footballers will take on their Japanese counterparts on March 11 at Ichihara's Fukuda Denshi Arena.

The match marks the squad's first steps in preparation for their Asian Football Confederation U23 Championship qualifying group which they will compete in from March 27 to 31 in Taiwan and June's SEA Games in Singapore.

Japan will provide a tough test for the Young White Angels, having beaten Singapore U-23 last month 8-1.

Following this game Myanmar will head to Bangkok for a friendly triangular tournament with the Laos and Thailand U23 sides, playing against each respectively on March 16 and 18..

The squad of 20 includes five players from Magwe FC, four from Ayeyawady United and three from Yangon United and Yadanarbon FC.

Road to Rio 2016 starts in Mandalay

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MANDALAY's Mandalay Thiri Stadium will play host to Myanmar's female footballers as they face off against Sri Lanka and India in their first steps toward 2016 Olympic qualification on March 11-15.

The three teams will contest Group A of the Asian qualifying round one, the first of three rounds that must be negotiated to win a berth in Brazil. Only one team can progress to the September's second stage to be hosted in Thailand.

March 11 will see Myanmar match up with Sri Lanka, before facing India on March 15. Sri Lanka will play against the Indian side on March 13.

Myanmar attempted to qualify for the London 2012 Olympics but fell at the first stage, after suffering defeats to Thailand and Vietnam.

Myanmar last met India in 2013, when they ran out 2-0 victors in their successful qualification campaign for the 2014 AFC Women's Asian Cup.

Sri Lanka have little international experience beyond the South Asian Football Federation Women's Cup. In the 2014 edition of that competition they reached the semi-final before suffering a 5-0 defeat at the hands of India.



The Myanmar team in training at Mandalay's Mandalay Thiri Stadium. Photo: MFF/Facebook