

# MYANMAR TIMES

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DAILY EDITION

ISSUE 5 | FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2015



**FEARS FOR FUTURE OF NGAPALI AFTER SAND EXTRACTION APPROVED**

NEWS 7



**MOBILE SUBSCRIBERS TOP 15 MILLION AFTER MARKET SHAKE-UP**

BUSINESS 15

**EDITORIAL**

## Questioning the direction of democracy

RECENT events in Letpadan and in front of the Yangon's City Hall will have prompted many to question the path that Myanmar's quasi-civilian government has chosen. Is this country moving in the right direction with prudent leadership? Surely no political leader would knowingly commit or ask their subordinates to commit such brutal suppression, particularly in such an important year for the country - one when millions of voters will head to the polls for a general election. Were these acts then the result of poor judgement, miscommunication and a lack of leadership? Or were they deliberate and coordinated? Significantly, there has been no public indication of remorse to date.

The student unions and the authorities have a long history of confrontation, dating back to 1920. Many student-led protests have resulted in political upheaval and change. The authorities have some right to be concerned about students marching with their fighting-peacock flags. Still, these circumstances were different. The students at Letpadan were not trying to overthrow a government. They were simply asking to be allowed to walk, under police guard, toward Yangon and then disperse after offering prayers and a solemn oath at Shwedagon Pagoda. With a bit of patience, sympathy and some discipline, the protest could have ended peacefully, with all sides retaining their dignity.

While we recognise that the process of reconciliation is a delicate and sensitive political endeavour, all parties have to understand that there is no alternative.

**MORE ON NEWS 3**

## Agricultural concessions: The great land grab

New report finds millions of acres of pristine forest have been lost due to agricultural concessions awarded to private firms in Kachin State and Tanintharyi Region. **BUSINESS 12**

Land cleared for a palm oil plantation lies fallow near Myeik in Tanintharyi Region. Photo: Wa Lone



## MIC gives Landmark approval

Yoma Strategic Holdings says Myanmar Investment Commission has approved a lease for its US\$400 million Landmark development in Yangon and has instructed the railways ministry to green-light the project. **BUSINESS 13**

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# Page 2

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## THE INSIDER: Felicitations to Lithuania on the anniversary of its independence

### Pots, kettles ... and batons

Well, tensions have flared once again in Ferguson, Missouri, following the resignation of the police chief and the shooting of the umpteenth black person and two police officers, bringing simmering racial tensions to the surface. Following unrest last year when people took to the streets in protest, North Korea moved to condemn the United States' human rights record.

In a story entitled "US urged to mind its own business" published in *The Pyongyang Times* on Juche 103, 2014 (Saturday, August 30), DPRK Foreign Ministry spokesperson described the US as "a gloomy society where people are subjected to discrimination and contempt for no other reason than their races and skin colour and are in constant fear of being shot to death".

It continued: "Styling itself 'international human rights judge', the US has annually graded 'human rights situations' in other countries. But this time it has become the butt of ridicule and criticism from the international community. Instead of finding a solution in the clampdown on the protestors, the US should reflect on its true colours as a human rights desert and have a correct understanding of genuine human rights and true protection for them."

And, while North Korea's own "human rights situation" is apparently not that peachy, it does raise a valid point about pots calling kettles - y'know - black.

In the March 12 edition of *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, Information Minister U Ye Htut made a similar point about the scenes that played out on Tuesday in Letpadan, when the police went whack-a-mole with their batons on students and media alike, which he described as "a sorrowful incident".

"When [Occupy] demonstrators on Wall Street were removed by police, or when protesters in Ferguson were dispersed with the use of tanks, nobody spoke of US democracy having backtracked," he said. While he obviously isn't a regular reader of *The Pyongyang Times*, U Ye Htut raises a valid point. If Myanmar were to, say, hike the price for a journalist visa to US\$8000 there would be a major outcry - but that's what has happened for Australia's detention centre on Nauru. Similarly, Prime Minister Tony Abbott said Australians were "sick of being lectured to by the United Nations" after a report found the country's treatment of asylum seekers breaches

an international anti-torture convention.

U Ye Htut invoked the Gitmo defence in February last year, pointing to the US rejection of calls from civil society and various foreign governments to allow an independent investigation into alleged abuses at the detention facility in order to fend off criticisms about the impartiality of the Human Rights Commission's probe into whatever it was that did or didn't happen in Du Chee Yar Tan.

President U Thein Sein has signed an order for a commission of inquiry into the "dispersal of protesters" at City Hall on March 5, with findings to be delivered by the month's end.

So far various officials have come forward saying that police showed restraint which, arguably they did - until they didn't. U Ye Htut took to Facebook earlier in the week to declare that 16 police were injured at Letpadan (just how is not yet entirely clear), and apparently just eight students.

The EU has copped a lot of flak from civil society and protesters for its police training program, to which it has reemphasised its commitment, saying the events of the last week have highlighted the need for "more training, not less". And that's commendable - although the use of plainclothes thugs who are playing by a completely different set of rules and answering to who-even-knows probably ought to give pause. There'll also be the matter of establishing what the orders were that saw police go from "human chain" to "indiscriminate clubbing".

There are things that can be done on both sides to avoid flare-ups. For example, the authorities could try not barricading protesters in a monastery, allowing things to get to such a point that they try to force their way out.

When you find yourself saying things like "well, at least no one was shot", it's time to raise the bar.



### Merchandise corner

Do you wish that, as a diplomat, there was a way you could show the world that you're deeply concerned about something, without having to issue time-consuming statements whenever a human rights abuse is committed? Or just generally, do you sometimes worry that the world's going to hell in a handcart and the decline of human civilization as we know it is imminent, much closer than most people realise, and it will all be our own doing? Do you ever get accused of being inconsiderate in your personal life? Are you just a generally anxious person? Whatever the case, Yangon-based social enterprise startup Page 2 Solutions has just the product for you. Our #deeplyconcerned t-shirts are now available in a range of colours and sizes, and are produced in a very nice factory from organic, gluten-free, single-source cotton. We already have some satisfied customers. "I'll wear this every day - to be honest, it will probably save me a lot of time," said Human Rights Watch's David Scott Mathieson.

A portion of profits will go toward our nascent training program, building capacity for vigilante forces in conducting non-violent citizen's arrests. Stay tuned for information about our #ruleoflaw sweatbands, so you can exercise in style.



'Caption this' contest: Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at the opening of the Ahlone Port facility Photo: GNLM

### In brief

"What's best for us" billboard for Lactacyl intimate whitening product on Sule Pagoda Rd in trouble with community advertising standards board, which has questioned whether or not bleaching one's junk is indeed the "natural way" to achieving "fairness and confidence"

Update: Former Aryan child model and the face of condensed

## Once was Burma...

Archival material courtesy of Pansodan Gallery

First floor, 286 Pansodan, upper block, Kyauktada township



Record magazine, August 1990

milk brand known only as "My Boy" denied bail following Pattaya barfight

Man and woman hastily abandon Tinder chat session as they realise they're both using Wi-Fi in the Shangri-La lobby and had already dismissed one another as unattractive

### Next week

"Convenience store baked goods will outlive us all," declares Food and Drug Administration in new speculative post-apocalyptic report entitled "Who's eating those cheese sandwiches now?"

Bus driver admits he compiled the overnight journey playlist with "mostly revenge" in mind

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# Govt frees first batch of students

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JUST under half of the student demonstrators arrested on March 10 at Letpadan have been green-lighted for release, the government said, as calls grew yesterday for the release of all of those detained.

The government said it would release from Tharyarwady Prison only those who could prove they are "real" students.

Of the 127 people detained at Letpadan, only 65 were students, according to the government. The 62 non-students include activists, family members and other supporters of the students' demand to amend the new education law, as well as some residents of Letpadan.

Police Lieutenant Zaw Min Oo of Tharyarwady district in Bago Region said that authorities released 17 of the students without charge yesterday, and that 10 more would be released when their parents arrived to collect them.

The release came a day after those detained at Letpadan on March 10 appeared in Letpadan Township Court, where they were told they could face charges under five different sections of the penal code. They face up to nine-and-a-half-years in prison if charged and convicted.

U Nay Win, the father of student leader Ma Phyo Phyo Aung, said the government's distinction between students and non-students was unnecessary and called for all demonstrators to be freed immediately.

"Some of those arrested were not

involved in the protesting, and others were helping take care of students," he said.

His daughter took part in the September 2007 protests and subsequently received a four-year sentence, which ended with a presidential pardon in 2011. After her release she was refused permission to re-enrol at university so will have difficulty proving she is a "real" student, he said.

U Mya Aye, one of the leaders of 88 Generation, also urged the government to drop the arbitrary distinction between demonstrators.

"The government should stop making poor decisions that degrade [the country's] international image," he said, adding that the government should release the protesters and pursue charges against police for violating the law.

Some relatives of students who remain in jail said they are having difficulty drumming up the necessary proof to show they are "real" students.

The father of Mg Myat Min Maw, 22, said his son's activism in recent months meant he failed his classes. As a result, his teachers are loathe to provide recommendations confirming his enrolment in university.

Even if recommendations or documents are furnished, parents said they have been given no promises that their children will be released.

"I asked the authorities, 'If I can prove my son is a student will they release him immediately?' But the authorities didn't make any guarantees," said Daw Lae Lae Moe, the parent of a student protester from Natatin township in Bago Region.

"The government is making unfair demands and is violating human rights," she said.

damage at Letpadan may not have considered the impact of their thoughtless actions. However, the decision-makers should be aware of the possible consequences.

The Myanmar people seem to be having second thoughts about the direction of the country. Some question the irrevocability of the reforms, fearing the process might be moving backward. But one brilliant cartoonist, a Harvard graduate and an engineer, expressed his doubts about the transition thus: Rather than going forward or back, are we simply moving in a circle - a vicious one?



88 Generation leader Min Ko Naing speaks at the Free Funeral Service Society in Yangon yesterday. Photo: Zarni Phyo

# Activists and celebrities gather to denounce police crackdown

### Prominent monk joins call for the unconditional release of demonstrators

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ACTIVISTS and celebrities packed a Yangon hall of the Free Funeral Service Society yesterday to denounce police violence against students and other protesters in Letpadan and to demand their release from prison.

The gathering brought together several hundred politicians, students, education experts, lawyers, authors, film stars and singers, among others.

U Kyaw Thu, chair of the FFSS, whose ambulance workers were among those attacked by police in Letpadan on March 10, said the government should release the protesters and their supporters. He denounced the violence as damaging to the image of the country.

"If the government has been elected by the people, they don't need to crack down on the student protesters. The government should not say that they are the government of the Myanmar people," he said.

Adding to the growing outcry against the police violence and arrests of 127 people, the All Burma Federation of Student's Union announced yesterday that they would not part in talks with parliament on draft amendments to the National Education Law unless all the protesters were released.

The statement indicated a split within the student movement, after the

Action Committee for Democratic Education said a day after the crackdown that it would attend a meeting with lawmakers in Nay Pyi Taw scheduled for March 16.

The students, who are campaigning against a law that they say gives the central government too much control over education, also received a message of support from one of Myanmar's most venerated monks.

**'If the government has been elected by the people, they don't need to crack down on the protesters.'**

U Kyaw Thu  
Free Funeral Service Society

Sayardaw Ashin Sandadika said in a message that just as those who leave their religious order to be a layman never forget habits practised in religious life, the government that changes into a civilian government from dictatorship does not forget its past behaviour.

"This was proved clearly in the violent crackdown at Letpadan. Brutally beating students who are peacefully

protesting reveals the true colours of dictators. Students are proudly winners in this game," said Ashin Sandadika, a widely respected monk who has intervened to cool inter-religious tensions in the past.

Monks were among those beaten by police at Letpadan. Officials said 10 monks were detained and later released after they promised to stay out of party politics and away from student protests.

Min Ko Naing, leader of the 88 Generation student group, said the people needed to unite. "We don't believe in the government ... We need to unite in 2015. I think we may face many difficulties," he said.

U Thein Lwin, a member of the Nation Network for Education Reform, which has held consultations with the government over changes to the National Education Law, promised to help the students make the education system more democratic.

U Thein Lwin, who was controversially removed from the opposition National League for Democracy's central executive committee for his role in the NNER, denounced the violence and called for the release of all detainees.

Daw Nyo Nyo Thin, also a member of the NNER, said the government should apologise to the students and take action against police who had beaten them.

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PRONTO is sponsoring a project "Educational Support for HIV+ Children in Magway City", which is being implemented by Positive Action (a local CBO led by PLHIV). BE PART OF IT!

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## Six-way talks likely next week

Meeting between political leaders will precede debate on a constitution amendment bill, according to MPs

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THE six-way talks called for by parliament to discuss a range of prominent issues, including constitutional reform, will probably be held next week, MPs believe. Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann alerted representatives of 19 parties on March 11 that the talks, demanded by the hluttaw last November, were now imminent.

The participants would be President U Thein Sein, military Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Amyotha Hluttaw and Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speakers U Khin

Aung Myint and Thura U Shwe Mann, opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and a representative of the ethnic parties, U Aye Maung of the Rakhine

**‘We hope the parliament can take action very soon after the meeting.’**

Sai Boe Aung

Pyithu Hluttaw representative

National Party.

U Aye Maung said yesterday it was time for the leaders to get together because the constitutional amendment bill would be discussed in parliament next week. “The speaker told us not to go anywhere,” he said.

Despite pressure from MPs for more clarity and decisiveness over the vital issues surround the constitutional reform movement, neither the president nor the commander-in-chief has seemed eager to take part in discussions with a limited membership.

Though such high-level meetings have been held, none has yielded concrete results.

Thura U Shwe Mann’s intervention

came after a March 2 meeting between the president and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, which was said to concern the constitution and the general election scheduled for November.

Daw Nan Khin Htwe Myint, an NLD central executive committee member, said Daw Aung San Suu Kyi had asked the president to arrange the six-party talks, a request to which he has apparently acceded.

U Sai Boe Aung, Pyithu Hluttaw representative for the Shan Nationalities Democracy Party, said the meeting would be very helpful in advancing constitutional reform. “We hope the parliament can take action very soon after the meeting,” he said.

## Livelihoods fund gets its first private sector donor

JAPANESE firm Mitsubishi Corporation has become the first private sector donor to a major multi-donor trust fund aimed at improving food security and livelihoods in rural areas. Mitsubishi signed an agreement with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to contribute US\$200,000 to the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT) yesterday.

“Despite good progress poverty and food security continue to be major challenges in Myanmar,” UNOPS executive director Grete Faremo said in a statement. “One in four people live below the national poverty line. The challenge is immense.”

The agreement was signed by Ms Faremo and Mitsubishi executive vice president Yasuhito Hirota in Tokyo.

LIFT was set up in 2009 and has to date reached 3 million people, or about 5 percent of Myanmar’s population. Funded by the European Union and 11 governments, donors have so far committed US\$205 million to LIFT.

LIFT fund director Andrew Kirkwood said that Mitsubishi, like all other donors, would contribute to a pooled fund rather than specific projects.

He said Mitsubishi initially approached LIFT to fund specific projects but after learning how the fund operates elected to join as a donor.

“LIFT is talking to the private sector about partnerships of different kinds relating to food security and livelihoods. We would also welcome other contributions,” he said.

– Thomas Kean



## IN PICTURES

PHOTO: THIRI LU

A participant adds the finishing touches to a creation at an international food and beverage exhibition at the Myanmar Convention Centre in Yangon on March 12. The exhibition runs until March 14 and brings together almost 100 brands and companies from Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Germany, as well as Myanmar. – *Ei Ei Thu*

## Swan Ar Shin accused of beating journalist

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A REPORTER from *Popular News Daily* sought an interview but instead wound up with a beating this week when he contacted a member of the paramilitary organisation Swan Ar Shin, according to an editor.

A junior reporter from the daily, Ko Aung Zaw Htoo, called a contact at the notorious Swan Ar Shin after plain-clothed vigilantes helped police disperse a student protest outside City Hall on March 5. Ko Aung Zaw Htoo, who had been working for the daily for 18 months, requested an interview about the clashes, said U Phoe Naing Lin, editorial and technical director at Asian Fame Media Group, which runs the daily.

On March 10, the reporter went to

Hlaing Tharyar township for the interview and was met by three members of the group, U Phoe Naing Lin said.

The reporter asked to conduct the interview in a teashop but the men instead ushered the journalist into a private residence.

At the house, one of them allegedly hit the reporter’s head and neck while the others searched his backpack, removing his mobile phone and voice recorder. After deleting some messages, they returned the phone but kept the recorder, according to the newspaper’s account.

U Phoe Naing Lin said that the Swan Ar Shin members told Ko Aung Zaw Htoo, “All you [journalists] are troublemakers, not collaborators. How can we believe you?”

The reporter was released, and the following day filed a complaint with

police in Hlaing Tharyar.

The station could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The beating of the reporter comes amid a wave of recent violence against journalists.

A photojournalist and four reporters from *7Day Daily* were detained by police while covering the Shwe Pyi Thar Industrial Zone workers’ strike on March 4, but were released a few hours later.

During the crackdown on student protesters at Letpadan on March 10, *The Myanmar Times* saw several journalists beaten by police. A reporter from the *Union Daily*, U Maung Maung Myo, was given a thrashing by five police while he attempted to move away from the clashes. The *Union Daily* reporter was detained and later released, but

a reporter from the *Myanmar Post* weekly journal, U Nyan Linn Tun, remains jailed at Tharyarwady.

On March 10, the Myanmar Press Council (Interim) issued a statement condemning the attacks on journalists as a violation of the constitution and the News Media Law.

The council said the journalists were reporting on, not participating in, the demonstration and called for the immediate release of those detained.

“[The police] are now targeting journalists because they don’t want the journalists to make the crackdowns public,” U Sithu Aung Myint, a columnist and freelance journalist told *The Myanmar Times* yesterday.

“Now, all media groups and agencies need to protect and treasure their journalists more than ever.”

– *Additional reporting by Ye Mon*

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# Electrical fault blamed for fire in downtown

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A FIRE at an electronics retail outlet in downtown Yangon was caused by an electrical problem in the roof of the shop, according to police.

Five refrigerators were damaged in the March 11 blaze at the showroom on the middle block of Pansodan Street, along with K150,000, police said.

Police Major Yu Naing said 20 trucks attended the blaze and no injuries were reported.

The fire was reported by Ko Kyaw Thu, who described seeing smoke coming from the shop shortly after he had dropped his children at a nearby school.

"I saw three staff from the shop out the front. They were calling for help" to put out the fire, he said.

- Translation by Khant Lin Oo



Firemen attend the blaze on Pansodan Street on March 11. Photo: Zarni Phyo

## IN BRIEF

### Ministry lending tops K218b

Microfinance loans handed out by the Ministry of Cooperatives over the past 13 months amount to more than K218 billion (US\$210.7 million), cooperatives minister U Kyaw San told a workshop on March 11.

He said the program was set to expand on the basis of a projected increase in savings, as current savings account for more than K87 billion of the loans made so far, as of February 20.

The ministry lends K100,000 per household at a monthly interest rate of 1.5 percent, which brings in more than K4 billion a month in interest payments, the minister said.

The ministry expects this year to be able to raise its borrowing to as much as K500,000 per household thanks to loans from China totalling hundreds of millions of US dollars. - Pyae Thet Phyo, translation by Thiri Min Htun

### Hluttaw approves \$40m loan

Parliament on March 11 overwhelmingly voted to accept a 246 million yuan (US\$40 million) loan from China to buy vehicles and boats for the police.

Brigadier General Kyaw Zan Myint, deputy home affairs minister, told Pyidaungsu Hluttaw that the police had fewer than 3000 vehicles instead of the nearly 10,000 they needed - a shortfall of nearly 70 percent. The new loan would pay for 790 vehicles and eight boats, to be put out to tender.

The loan contract with China's Exim Bank would allow the government to buy any brand of vehicles and machinery on the tender system, without limiting purchases to Chinese-made goods, Union minister U Kan Zaw said.

But Daw Khin San Hlaing and U Myint Oo from the National League for Democracy opposed the loan, fearing that the high interest rate would deepen the government's debt.

"I don't understand why the government has to borrow more after selling the country's precious resources so cheaply," said U Myint Oo, representing Thanatpin in Bago Region.

Daw Khin San Hlaing, the MP for Pale township in Sagaing Region, said the government was misleading parliament on the interest rate, as there are also annual fees of 0.8pc. The loan was approved by 397 votes to 51. - Htoo Thant, translation by Thiri Min Htun

# Charges upgraded against Chinese arrested for logging

Tatmadaw to continue operation against illegal logging, which it says is funding arms purchases by ethnic groups

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POLICE in Kachin State have tightened the screw on scores of Chinese citizens arrested last month in connection with illegal logging. They say they will charge the suspects under a law that carries penalties of up to 10 years in prison.

In January, Tatmadaw troops announced the capture of nearly 150 people, mostly Chinese citizens, in Waingmaw township, Kachin State. The army also seized 240 logs, a total of 455 vehicles, nine motorcycles, methamphetamines, opium and 12,000 yuan (US\$1920), as well a document apparently issued by the Kachin Independence Army that appeared to permit logging activities. The Tatmadaw says the operation is designed to cut off armed ethnic groups' access to natural resources, which are illegally exported in order to raise money for

arms purchases.

The KIA has denied authorising illegal logging.

The Chinese people arrested were initially charged under immigration laws, as well as under section 6 of the Public Property Protection Act. Following an initial hearing, the men have now been detained in Myikyina prison, Police Captain Tun Lwin, head of the Waingmaw police, told *The Myanmar Times* yesterday.

The original charges could have resulted, in the event of a conviction, of sentences of up to seven years' imprisonment. However, the police have now requested the Ministry of Home

Affairs for permission to file charges under section 3 of the Public Property Protection Act, which carries a potential 10-year penalty, said Pol Cap Tun Lwin.

Despite a government decision to suspend timber exports in April last year, timber smuggling has flourished against a background of instability in the state arising from sporadic armed clashes between the Tatmadaw and the KIA.

Forestry officials said they would prosecute both Myanmar nationals and foreigners engaged in timber smuggling. "We have been instructed to take action strictly against those who are trying to extract our natural resources by illegal means," said Forest Department director U Pyaw Sone Myo.

The Chinese embassy said it has been in close contact with the government concerning its citizens arrested in Kachin State. "The embassy has provided consular protection for these Chinese citizens," said Pan Xuesong, spokesperson and chief of information and public affairs at the embassy.

Forestry department statistics

show the government seized more than 140,000 tonnes of illegal timber and arrested 23,175 Myanmar nationals and 134 Chinese citizens between 2011 and November 2014.

The Tatmadaw said yesterday it planned to continue its operation against the illegal timber trade in northern Myanmar. An article in the army-run *Myawady* newspaper and other state media outlets yesterday blamed armed ethnic groups for the problem, and accused them of cutting and exporting timber illegally to raise money for arms procurement.

The article said two Chinese citizens had been arrested as a result of raids in Kachin and Shan states conducted between February 15 and March 10, with 3228 logs and 48 vehicles also seized. "Ethnic armed groups in these areas are exporting this timber to get money in order to buy weapons with the intention of destroying the stability of the state," the report said. "Therefore, Tatmadaw troops have been continuing to clear the territory in order to protect national resources from going to neighboring countries."

# 3228

Timber logs seized by the Tatmadaw in Kachin and Shan states between February 15 and March 10



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IN DEPTH

# Fears for future of Ngapali Beach as authorities permit sand excavation

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HOTELIERS at Ngapali in southern Rakhine State have warned that beaches in the area could be irrevocably damaged unless the authorities stop allowing sand to be taken for construction projects.

Local authorities have formally allowed construction firms to take sand from three beaches in the area, in apparent violation of the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism's Directives for Coastal Beach Areas.

Photos provided to *The Myanmar Times* in recent weeks, including on March 11, show privately owned trucks taking sand from several beaches at Ngapali. Hoteliers in the area said sand is being taken both day and night.

Oliver E Soe Thet from Laguna Lodge described the problem as a "grave disaster in the making" that was already annoying tourists.

"It will affect the beauty of the beach and destroy the whole ecosystem forever," said Mr E Soe Thet, who is also a former adviser to the government on environmental issues in coastal Rakhine State.

"The trucks are also going on the beach very close to tourists on their sunbeds and honking their horns ... It is just to make some quick money and short-sighted."

Another hotelier whose property is close to where sand is being taken said the beach had been "clearly eroded". Recently eight trucks have been taking up to a total of 50 truckloads a day from this single beach, said the hotelier, who asked not to be named for fear of retribution from local authorities.

"Sometimes it stops and you think, thank goodness. But then it starts again. Wait until the rainy season when there is nobody here to witness it - it will really take off, even on the main



Sand is loaded on a truck at Ngapali on January 20 (top, bottom right) and March 11 (top right). Photos: Supplied

Ngapali beach," said the hotelier. "Certainly there is less sand. As a result the sea is coming in much more - even some of the coconut trees have fallen down. I'm not an environmental expert, I just manage a hotel, so I can't say how long it will be until there is no beach left. "But Ngapali will not be Ngapali if it continues. A lot of investment has been put into hotels here but it's just such a pity to spoil the environment."

**'Wait until the rainy season when there nobody here to witness it - it will really take off, even on the main beach.'**

**Hotelier at Ngapali**

The hotelier said the sand was being sold for K60,000 a truckload for use in local construction projects, while local labourers are getting K5000 a day to fill the trucks with sand.

This makes it cheaper than darker sand taken from Thandwe River, which is sold by the government.

The taking of sand from the beach is not a new issue. In December 2013, *The Myanmar Times* reported that the Rakhine State government had issued a stern warning to Max Myanmar for allegedly pumping sand from Ngapali beach for use in construction. The company was eventually cleared of wrongdoing.

Photos published by *The Myanmar Times* at the time clearly showed sand being taken illegally from the beach, although it was not clear who owned the trucks. Some resorts have taken sand to backfill concrete beachfront walls or to build up low-lying areas of hotel compounds, while it has also been used on local construction sites, despite sea sand generally not being suitable for use in reinforced concrete structures

because of its high chloride content.

Thandwe township administrator U Than Zaw Han said the authorities had granted permission to construction firms to take sand from three beaches in the area: Zeephyukone, Got and Linntha.

"The Rakhine State government gave permission to [use sand from these beaches] for regional development, such as construction projects," he told *The Myanmar Times*.

On the apparent conflict with the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism directive, he said that the constitution grants the regional government the right to issue orders related to regional development.

The Department of Water Resources and Department of Environmental Conservation and Forestry inspected the sites to ensure the environmental impact of taking the sand is minimised, he added.

Meanwhile, a "Ngapali Beach Conservation Committee", of which U Than Zaw Han is a member, has been "watching out for the digging of sand

in unpermitted places".

Introduced in 2004 to manage development at Myanmar's beach resorts in line with the Myanmar Hotels and Tourism Law, the Directives for Coastal Beach Areas explicitly forbid the "digging of beach sand".

A Thandwe-based Ministry of Hotels and Tourism official confirmed that the ministry had prohibited the taking of sand from the beach, but said it only applied to hotels and guesthouses.

"We had forbidden digging sand ... in the beach areas because it could be destroying the beauty of nature and environment," U Win Maung Maung said on March 11.

"We can control tourism-related development, such as limiting the height of hotels and keeping the beach clean. But this case [taking sand] depends on the respective authorities," he said.

He added that the three sites had been chosen to keep the impact on the environment to a minimum, after consulting with "the respective professional experts".

One hotelier on the main Ngapali beach said he was unconcerned about the impact.

"They allowed the digging of sand for use in the construction of roads, bridges, clinics, hospitals and schools at villages, not for commercial use," said U Phoe Yee Aung from Memento Hotel. "But we need to make sure that we maintain these resources because that is why tourists visit in the first place."

Mr E Soe Thet said there were other sources of sand in the area that could be used to supply construction projects.

"Linthar beach is very narrow and flat so it is worse to take sand from there than other areas. Very quickly there will only be rock left," he said. "It would not harm anyone if the sand was taken from north of Thandwe River, as well as south of the Salone villages. The government should do a proper environmental impact assessment."



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400g

Price range from:  
**Ks.900 to Ks.1,200**

**HOSEN**  
-Rambutan with Pineapple/  
-Whole Rambutan/ Langan/  
-Lychee  
In Syrup 565g  
-Fruit Cocktail/ Peach Halves  
-Peach Slices  
In Syrup 825g

Price range from:  
**Ks.1,580 to Ks.2,780**

**Soy Sauce**  
Dark/ Light/  
640ml

**Ks.2,480**  
**2,250**

**Premium Light/  
Premium Dark**  
640ml

**Ks.3,650**  
**3,280**

**100% Black Sesame Oil**  
320ml

**Ks.2,480**  
**2,250**

**Fragrant Sesame Oil**  
320ml

**Ks.3,250**  
**2,950**

**Black Sesame Oil**  
320ml

**Ks.4,680**  
**4,200**

**Black Sesame Oil**  
605g

**Ks.4,780**  
**4,300**

**White Sesame Oil**  
320ml

**Ks.8,700**  
**7,850**

**Pure Sesame Oil**  
430ml

**Ks.7,480**  
**6,750**

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# Ministry clears four people of bird flu virus



SHWE YEE SAW MYINT

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FOUR people with flu symptoms have tested negative for the bird flu virus H5N1, the health ministry confirmed yesterday. Dr Nyan Win Myint, deputy director-general (disease control), told *The Myanmar Times* that the National Health Laboratory in Yangon had found no trace of the virus in the four, who work at the Monywa Fowl and Quail Livestock Special Zone.

Hundreds of thousands of birds have been destroyed since the outbreak was first reported, and chicken and egg prices have dropped as consumers avoid bird products.

"All these people tested negative for H5N1 virus, but the health department is still on the alert," he said, adding the alert status would be maintained until March 15.

Veterinarians have conducted training on bio-security measures for poultry farmers and chicken vendors in Myanaung.

A spokesperson for the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department said culling had been completed last

week, but the sale and export of chickens was still being controlled.

"The Ministry of Livestock Breeding and the Veterinary Department have deployed to monitor bird flu in the poultry markets and the border area," she added.

Dr Ko Ko Gyi, a spokesperson for the Myanmar Veterinary Association, said the bird flu virus came from imported birds and eggs from China, Malaysia or Thailand.

**'The health department is still on alert.'**

**Dr Nyan Win Myint**  
Ministry of Health

Warning that the virus could be transmitted to humans through chicken waste and dust, he said the virus could not survive in food that was cooked for more than 30 minutes. However, consumers should avoid roast chicken, and should clean vegetables carefully if bought from a market selling bird products.



**IN PICTURES**

PHOTO: NAING WYNN HTOON

Students stand outside Basic Education High School 6 Botahtaung on Anawrahta Road after completing one of their matriculation exams on March 11. The exams run through to March 20.

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# Business

## Vast agribusiness concessions mask unprecedented deforestation: report



GUY DINMORE

WA LONE

MYANMAR has embarked on an unprecedented campaign of land and forest clearance driven by concessions for large-scale, private agribusiness projects, mostly in contested border territories close to China and Thailand, according to a report released yesterday.

Forest Trends, a Washington-based non-profit organisation, said its two-year study revealed that the government had allocated at least 5.2 million acres and identified another 11 million acres of some of Southeast Asia's last remaining "bio-diversity rich high value forests" as suitable for clear-cutting, although the agribusiness projects often never materialised after the timber was removed.

"Many of these forest areas overlap with historical land claims made by Myanmar's ethnic minority groups who could permanently lose their land, further enflaming decades-old armed conflicts with the national government," the report said.

"As local communities lose land, wildlife habitat is destroyed and carbon emissions increase, while elite businessmen with strong connections to military-state officials profit."

Two case studies focused on Kachin State bordering China, where forests are making way for rubber and biofuel plantations, and Tanintharyi Region near Thailand, where biodiverse forests are being cleared for oil-palm and rubber. Military-backed "crony" businesses that acquired the concessions are named, while in Kachin State, paramilitary and non-state groups and Chinese enterprises have also benefited.

The two regions account for nearly 3.3 million acres, or 60 percent, of Myanmar's total concession area. But as of 2013 agricultural crops were planted in only 15pc of the area, the lowest rate in the country.

Forest Trends said the 170pc increase in the amount of land slated for agribusiness - much of it under forest cover - since president U Thein Sein's government took over in 2011 contradicted official statements purporting



Deforestation marks a hill in Tanintharyi Region. Photo: Wa Lone

to protect remaining forests and land rights.

"As Myanmar opens to global markets and concessions for global food production are on the rise, agribusiness has become the primary driver of deforestation in Myanmar," said Michael Jenkins, Forest Trends president.

"Claims that agribusiness ventures bring employment and economic development to local communities are left as hollow promises when villagers' farming fields and forests are confiscated. Seventy-five percent of these cleared lands - nearly 4 million acres - are still not planted, and concessions do not follow any kind of regulation to protect the environment or local communities from negative impact," said report author Kevin Woods.

Forest Trends said timber clear-cut from concessions was fuelling exports of wood products that jumped from US\$1 billion to about \$1.6 billion between 2011 and 2013.

Timber producers and traders are gearing up to export high-value timber, such as Myanmar teak, to European and North American markets following the lifting of Western sanctions. Forest Trends notes that these markets are governed by legislation

prohibiting the import of wood products that are illegally harvested and traded, but that "the legality of timber harvested from the cleared lands is questionable and difficult to verify."

Forest Trends said in total that Myanmar was losing more than 1.15 million acres of forests a year, some

**'Farmer-led protests - many of which are violent - are growing in number and strength across the country.'**

Forest Trends report

of them the region's last remaining sub-tropical high conservation value forests.

"Farmer-led protests - many of which are violent - are growing in number and strength across the country, challenging the new government's

political legitimacy and more liberal economic model of development. Thousands of past and recent land concessions are now being challenged by forcibly evicted communities across the country," the report said.

"Local [Kachin] populations who have been forcibly displaced from their upland swidden agro-forestry lands for the Chinese agricultural estates are further contributing to poverty, drugs production and trade, and social and political conflict," the report said, noting that the largest agribusiness concession, Yuzana Company, was located in and along the world's largest tiger reserve in western Kachin State.

Palm concessions in Tanintharyi Region were owned by about 40 Myanmar businesses with strong ties to political and military leaders, the Ministry of Industry, and Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd, a military conglomerate, the report said. Many are on lands formerly inhabited by ethnic Lauom populations who were forcibly evicted.

The growth of agribusiness has led to an institutional conflict between the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry and the Ministry of Agriculture and

Irrigation as they compete for different uses of forestlands, with the latter rising in prestige and power in its push for industrial agricultural expansion, the report said.

U Tin Ko Ko, an environmental activist and member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, told *The Myanmar Times* that deforestation in Tanintharyi - designated a global biodiversity hotspot - was spreading.

"You might see green on the mountain, but almost all old trees have gone," he said. Agribusiness concessions had also been given to three companies from China, Malaysia and Thailand, he said.

But U Aung Min Thu, manager of Myanmar Stark Prestige Plantation, said that they had no permission for logging, only for growing oil-palm. But he said the companies had cut trees for workers' houses and to clear land for planting. The government had given a concession for 40,000 acres of which 25,000 would be planted, he said.

As *The Myanmar Times* reported earlier this month, locals have complained that they had received no compensation for their lands that had become part of the plantation.



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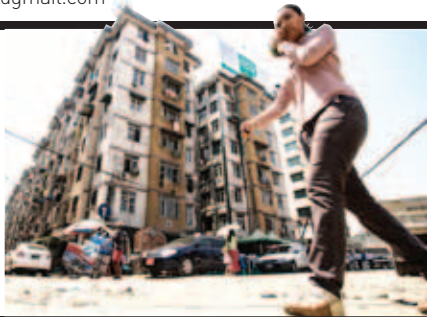
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## Bringing Yangon's middle-class housing up to scratch

**BUSINESS 17**



## US inequality debate turns to the decline of America's unions

**BUSINESS 18**

Exchange Rates (March 12 close)		
Currency	Buying	Selling
Euro	K1089	K1107
Malaysia Ringitt	K307	K308
Singapore Dollar	K763	K770
Thai Baht	K31	K32
US Dollar	K1063	K1068

# Central Bank plans change to reserve requirement rate



**AYE THIDAR KYAW**

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THE reserve requirement rate is set to change in the 2015-16 fiscal year, though commercial banks are concerned about how it will play out.

The current reserve ratio - the percentage of a bank's deposits that it must hold on to and not lend out - is 10 percent. The reserve ratio for April 1 is slated to be changed 5pc - though it comes with strings attached.

Of the current 10pc requirement, 25pc can be kept in cash at hand and the remaining 75pc must be deposited at the Central Bank of Myanmar - though that 75pc can be stored in bonds.

However, the entire 5pc new reserve requirement must be stored at the Central Bank and cannot be kept in bonds, in keeping with advice from international experts, according to banking insiders.

CB Bank managing director U Pe Myint said the period from April to June will be a trial, and banks will be punished if they do not follow the rule.

"We hear this is common practice in the ASEAN community, but banks can have difficulty following it," he said.

One complaint from banks is that the reserve requirement cannot be stored in bonds. Myanmar has recently re-started its bond buying program, though only about 50pc of its issues have sold so far.

Kanbawza Bank vice president U Than Lwin said banks would be more interested in buying bonds if they could use them to meet their reserve requirements.

Money from the reserve requirement is also money that cannot be lent out, meaning banks cannot make profit on it.

Deposit accounts must receive a minimum 8pc annual interest payment regardless as to whether the money is used for loans or sits idle due to the reserve requirement. Most banks now offer slightly higher rates around 8.25pc.

"Banks in ASEAN have settled with international practice for many years that we are not yet comfortable with," said U Than Lwin.

"The Central Bank should check its history. Relatively speaking, we just started a few days ago."

Banking consultant U George Soe Win said domestic banks have few options for funding, unlike international institutions. Most local banks rely on deposits, with about 80pc of deposits then lent out.

"The Central Bank should relax banking restrictions for public sector development," he said.

"We want a safe and sound banking sector. We should not just impose rigidity on them. It is for the public trust."

The reserve requirement is also seen as a way to increase or decrease the money supply, thereby affecting inflation rates.

**'Banks in ASEAN have settled with international practice for many years that we are not yet comfortable with. The Central Bank should check its history. Relatively speaking, we just started a few days ago.'**

**U Than Lwin**  
Kanbawza Bank

A larger reserve requirement for instance means there is less money circulating in the economy, reducing the price of goods and inflation.

The Central Bank is aiming to stabilise inflation through a range of tools, its deputy governor Daw Khin Saw Oo recently told parliament. This includes options such as treasury bills and control over deposits.

So far it has been difficult for the Central Bank to stabilise inflation, though, as banks do not have enough surplus deposits or inclination to participate in some of the efforts.



The former headquarters of Burma Railways will be re-made as a five-star hotel. Photo: Naing Win Htun

# Yoma receives MIC nod for Landmark extension



**JEREMY MULLINS** **AYE NYEIN WIN**

SINGAPORE-LISTED Yoma Strategic Holdings received a letter from the Myanmar Investment Commission stating it has approved a lease extension for the firm's large Landmark Development, according to a statement issued yesterday.

Although the MIC has thrown its weight behind the project, a lease extension must still receive approval from the Ministry of Rail Transportation.

The company's full plans for re-development of the prominent 10-acre piece of downtown property opposite the Sule Shangri-La hotel on Bogyoke Aung San Street have been held up by the need to secure the lease extension.

The full US\$400 million project is to include removal of some existing properties including the shuttered Grand Mee Ya Hta Executive Residence, and to replace them with modern structures, including a business hotel, serviced apartments, a high-end condominium, and retail and office space.

The site also contains the heritage-listed Burma Railways headquarters

building, constructed in 1877, which is to be rehabilitated as a five-star Peninsula Hotel.

Yoma has a number of international heavyweights partnering in the project, including The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Mitsubishi, the International Finance Corporation and Asian Development Bank.

The firm announced in June last year it would acquire an 80 percent interest in the development from its sister company SPA Group, with leases of about 24 and 26 years at the time. It has been in discussions for a new 70-year master lease on Build-Operate-Transfer terms with government authorities since December 2013. Company officials have previously said the \$400 million investment it now plans was going to be much larger than its original lease anticipated, hence the need for the longer lease.

The MIC letter dated March 10 marks another step toward receiving the longer lease, though Yoma still must finish negotiations with the Ministry of Rail Transportation.

"[Yoma] is delighted that this decision has been reached by the MIC after a protracted period of negotiations with the relevant authorities and will commence immediately on the necessary steps with the Ministry of Rail Transportation to finalise the lease extension of the sites for the Landmark Development," it said in a statement yesterday.

The statement also said MIC's letter was "directing the Ministry of Rail Transportation to proceed to take the necessary steps to extend the lease".

U Aung Kyaw Win, deputy general manager at Myanma Railway business department, said the Ministry has not received an official report from the MIC by yesterday, so could not comment on the situation.

"We are still on the look-out for the report," he said. "We haven't received any direct information from MIC."

Myanmar Investment Commission officials could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Property market observers said they welcomed the move yesterday, saying it is a sign that business is still moving forward.

Colliers Myanmar managing director Tony Picon said that while the MIC's support is good news for the development, it also shows that action is still being taken prior to the election to develop business. "It was quite a big decision to be made," he said.

Mr Picon added the key is the refurbishment of the Burma Railways building into a five-star hotel, which will be something of a landmark within the Landmark development.

"It's a combination of old and new, including one of the best heritage buildings in Yangon."

Heritage buildings can be difficult to renovate and must be something of a "labour of love", he added.

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## Entrance fees to be removed for most of Yangon's park entrances

MYAT NYEIN AYE

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SEVERAL of the city's most famous parks will be free to all comers beginning on April 1, though those which are privately owned will charge for now, said U Ko Ko Lin, head of the Department of Playgrounds, Parks and Gardens at Yangon City Development Committee.

"We will allow free entrance to all the parks under control of the department, starting next month," he said.

Parks to be made free to enter include Myakyunthar park on Kabar Aye Pagoda Road and seven of the entrances to Kandawgyi nature garden, while other parks like Mahabandoola park are already free.

The area of Kandawgyi at the lake's eastern shore near the Karaweik is a concession owned by Zaygarbar company. Its two entrances at Karaweik and Myaw Sin island will not be free under YCDC's plan.

Nature World is the private company running the Nature



Two women pay to enter the eastern portion of Kandawgyi – one of the few parks that will not be free as of April 1. Photo: Naing Win Htun

World amusement park at People's Square and Park, and that portion of the park will likewise require an entrance fee.

"These two parks are run privately, so they won't be free as it is still part of the contract period,"

said U Ko Ko Lin. "After the contract is over, we will negotiate fees again."

"We want people to be comfortable and relax in the park. We are trying to make things better in every park in the city," he said.

## Coal-fired power planned, but on hold



AUNG SHIN

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COAL-FIRED power plants are still on the way despite concern over their social and environmental impacts raised by civil society groups.

"We are explaining coal-fire power projects in public," said deputy minister of electric power U Aung Than Oo. "We are still trying to get peoples' understanding. Coal-fired projects will move to the next step when they are accepted by the public."

The ministry has not started work on any of the planned coal-fired plants, though it has signed memorandums of understanding with foreign and local companies for 12 different projects around the country.

Four of the plants are to be near Yangon, another four in Tanintharyi Region, and one each in Shan State and Ayeyarwady and Sagaing regions.

Presently, the coal-fired projects are only at MoU status. The next steps are memorandum of agreement and joint venture agreements, he said in Yangon on March 9.

"Some companies have done feasibility studies, some have not – but none have broken ground on the projects," said an assistant director

from the ministry.

The planned coal power plants have larger capacity than several gas-fired plants, ranging between 200 to 600 megawatts installed capacity.

U Aung Than Oo said the country has not been implementing larger hydro projects and gas-fired power projects due to issues of environmental concerns, financing and a strong gas supply.

"We want people to know the environmental and social impact of greater power projects are guaranteed," he said. "We will implement these projects in ways that cause the least social and environmental impact."

Coal plants are also cheaper than hydro or gas plants, and therefore more helpful to address the urgent need to increase electrification. It is also a reliable source of power, as generation can be increased or decreased at will, said U Aung Than Oo.

The Ministry of Electric Power has set a target of 67 percent electricity generation by coal and gas-fired power plants by 2030, though some experts say hydropower and natural gas should not be forgotten.

"Myanmar has the potential to export up to 100,000MW from hydro," said Ken Tun, Parami Energy chief executive officer. "The country is also the largest natural gas exporter in Southeast Asia. It is questionable for Myanmar to rush for power plants which use coal."

## List of major coal power plants

### Yangon Region

- Thailand's Toyo-Thai plans a 650-1200MW plant at Thilawa Special Economic Zone
- India's Orange Powergen, Singapore's Global Adviser and Myanmar's Diamond Palace Services plan a 500MW plant in Kyauktan township
- Huaneng Lancang and Htoo Company plan a 270MW plant in Htantabin township
- Virtue Land, subsidiary of Asia World, plan a 300MW plant in Kwan Chan Gone

### Tanintharyi Region

- Thailand's RATCH and Blue Energy & Environment, Myanmar's Vantage and Kyaw Kyaw Phyo plan a 2460MW plant in Myeik
- Cwave Global and 24 Hours Mining & Industry plan a 500MW plant in Boat Pyin

### Mon State

- Thailand's Toyo-Thai Group plans a 1280MW plant in Yay township

### Ayeyarwady Region

- India's TATA Power plans a 660MW project in Nganyoutkaung township

### Shan State

- Thailand's Lumpoondum plans a 500MW plant in Kyneton

### Sagaing Region

- Singapore's ISDN and Myanmar's Tun Thwin Mining plan a 270MW plant



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# Millions more mobile subscribers added

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MORE people than ever before have purchased SIMs and become mobile subscribers, analyst company Ovum said yesterday.

SIM cards on every corner - and at prices people can afford, instead of the thousands of dollars they once cost - have opened up mobile services to record percentages of the population.

The country's number of mobile users grew by millions since 2013, driven by the availability of SIM cards and affordability of service, said Ovum research analyst Vivek Roy in a press release.

At the end of 2014, mobile subscribers had reached 14.8 million in Myanmar, the release said. About 5 million people subscribed to mobile services between September 2013 and 2014, representing a major up-tick in Myanmar users and an 87.4 percent year-on-year boost.

International firms Ooredoo and Telenor, who both officially launched their services across Myanmar's major cities last year, have propelled growth forward, as has the liberalisation of the telecoms market.

Prior to liberalisation, SIM cards were prohibitively expensive and the government controlled their distribution. Now, they cost K1500 - and with Ooredoo and Telenor selling their own, the black market has lost most of its sting, according to the release.

SIMs are now more affordable than ever, and those previously shut out due to insufficient supply are now able to make purchases.

## IN BRIEF

### Water transport law to bring changes to licence rules

Coastal and river transport companies must apply for a new operating licence under a water transportation law adopted on March 5.

The details will be spelled out in bylaws expected to be released in the next three months, the government announced yesterday.

The new law updates legislation dating back to 1963 and 1954.

U Htain Lynn, information officer for the Ministry of Transport, said the new Myanmar Coastal and Inland Water Transport Business Law governed the terms of the licence required by water transportation companies once their current licences expired.

Unlicensed businesses face six months' imprisonment or a K500,000 fine, or both.

- Shwegu Thitsar, translation by Emoon

### Ooredoo's roaming service expanded to 24 foreign countries

Ooredoo has begun roaming service with operators in 24 foreign countries, allowing Myanmar subscribers to use mobile phones abroad.

The destinations include regional countries such as Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia, as well as a few countries that are further afield such as Oman and New Zealand.

Users will need to be sufficiently topped-up to take advantage of the service, though Ooredoo has launched a hotline and a web portal to help out its roamers.

Ooredoo user U Myint Myat Thu said mobile subscribers are likely to be world travellers who want to continue using their phones, adding he welcomed additional roaming options.

- Aung Kyaw Nyunt

"[Previously,] I never had the chance to get a K1500 SIM card and I didn't want to buy one from the black market. But three months ago my daughter bought me a mobile phone because she couldn't contact me when she was at her office," said 58-year-old housewife Daw Than Than Htay, who just started using a phone four months ago. "I know mobile phones are very useful because I can contact my family when I am alone at home."

Last year, state-owned Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (MPT) lost its monopoly, but it teamed with Japanese firms KDDI and Sumitomo and stepped up its competitive game. The telco recently launched a new pricing plan in order to do battle with Telenor and Ooredoo.

The incumbent firm has spoken out against engaging in price wars as the market develops, saying in a previous interview with *The Myanmar Times* that they causes customers to suffer and could impede investment in expansion and services.

"Operators should refrain from



A second-hand phone seller looks to make a deal in Yangon. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

price wars and look to improve profitability in the short-to-medium term by differentiating their services via adding more value and features," Mr Roy said in the Ovum press release.

Mr Roy also said it will be crucial for firms to increase customers' data

usage and tackle rural expansion for long-term profitability.

More than two-thirds of Myanmar currently lives in rural areas. Getting these people connected will ramp up mobile subscriptions, which Ovum predicts will escalate by a compound annual growth rate

of 21pc through 2019.

At that year's end, Myanmar - whose mobile users numbered 5.4 million a few years ago - could count 38.5 million people as mobile subscribers, representing a leap from about 10pc to 75pc penetration by population in less than a decade.

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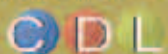
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# Property

BUSINESS EDITOR: Jeremy Mullins | jeremymullins7@gmail.com



Critics say much of Yangon's housing is inhumane – and it is time for a change. Photo: Zarni Phyo

## Bringing housing up to scratch



NOE NOE AUNG

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HOUSING is a notoriously mixed bag in Yangon. While there are a growing number of quality buildings, there is also a wide range of basically unlivable homes.

Urban planner U Kyaw Latt said liveability was not always at the top of mind when housing was built.

“In the last few decades, housing was constructed with inhumane designs,” he said.

U Kyaw Latt defined inhumane design as residential buildings that are clustered too tightly together, with little thought put to building character and leaving space.

Many of these buildings are over 20 years old. They were often built through public-private partnerships, but with no incentive to build quality units.

“Under that system, private companies built a lot of housing that mostly gained them a lot of money,” he said.

U Kyaw Latt, 38, lives in a row house in South Okkalapa township. His home is old and in poor condition and he would like to upgrade

through a deal with a contractor, but so far has not found anyone who is interested. Demolishing the entire structure would require 10 separate home owners to agree, though, and to him it seems impractical.

“Given the structure of our building, it would not withstand another storm like Nargis,” he said. “But I love my home as I grew up in it.”

U Aung Kyaw Linn says his house is relatively spacious and can accommodate his nine-member family. However, there is a lack of fresh air, with no windows in the home apart from the front veranda.

“I’ve been working in Thingangyun township for quite some time. I see more new buildings constructed there than the neighbourhood I live in,” he said.

Urban planner U Kyaw Latt is an advocate for a more humane approach to housing. He said development should not skip over places like playgrounds for children, car parking and waste disposal systems. Yet with supply still limited, many of Yangon’s lower and middle classes are

crammed in to these homes.

Living in these buildings takes a toll, he said. “Look at the buildings that were put up 20 years ago, buildings with no windows, no light during the day and no ventilation,” he said.

“A living area should have proper ventilation. For instance there should be a window in the kitchen and the washroom.”

Yangon City Development Committee rules stipulate contractors must add in a range of features designed to make housing more humane. Developers are required to install an electricity metre, emergency exit, effective waste water system, fire security and in some instances roads. Yet it is obvious that much of even the city’s newer construction is not following these rules.

Buildings that are three storeys or taller are expected to have emergency exits, such as a back stairwell, for use if the building catches fire.

An official from YCDC’s Fire Services Department said that before 2014 the department rarely paid attention to this requirement when providing certification.

“In 2012, the Fire Services Department issued a notice that all buildings at three storeys or above that have their fire security system and emergency exits checked by the department. But it didn’t work out,” he said.

The official said the department has begun being much more strict in enforcing these requirements since 2014. Still, the number of buildings that do not have properly certified fire prevention and escape measures far outweighs the number that do.

YCDC Building Department head U Nay Win said the department has been strict in not handing out permits declaring a newly built structure habitable until it receives an official green light from the Fire Services Department.

“There was a time when buildings were constructed already out of order,” he said. “They had no emergency exits and back stairs, no fire security system.”

Later, contractors began installing emergency exits, but in practice they rarely worked and were generally only for show. “The stairs were not useful. They were rusted and damaged in only a few years because construction and materials were low-quality,” he said.

Although safety is a major concern, others are pushing to simply make housing more people-friendly.

One researcher who requested anonymity said around 1990, buildings and structures declined significantly in quality.

“Old buildings were built with high ceilings, providing natural light and nice ventilation,” he said. “If you compare an old building with one built later, around 1990, you can see the newer building crams two floors into a space that used to hold one.”

U Kyaw Latt said Yangon City Development Committee is doing its best to provide more humane designs for housing, though said these structures cost a minimum of K25 million (US\$25,000) a unit.

“In Yangon’s future urban planning, we need humane housing design, humane housing estates and the beginning of a way to finance house improvements,” he said.

**MORE ON BUSINESS 18**

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WASHINGTON

# US inequality debate turns to declining unions

THE US debate over inequality has turned its focus to an old front: the role labour unions play in boosting incomes of workers.

After decades on the decline, some economists and activists are saying that the lack of organised labour power is an important reason why wages are not rising for middle- and lower-class Americans.

President Barack Obama added fuel to the debate when he denounced on March 9 a new law in Wisconsin that weakens the abilities of unions to build support in the workplace.

"It's no coincidence that the rise of the middle class in America coincided in large part with the rise of unions - workers who organised together for higher wages, better working conditions and the benefits and protections that most workers take for granted today," the president said in a statement.

The Wisconsin law was backed by anti-union Governor Scott Walker, a potential Republican presidential candidate in 2016, who says that union power has undermined American business and hurt workers themselves.

But Mr Obama called it "inexcusable" to undertake "a sustained, coordinated assault on unions" when middle-class families needed stronger incomes.

The United States is not the only place where union power has waned, but the decline has been stronger than elsewhere. Union participation has halved since 1983 to 11.1 percent of the workforce, compared with an average of about 17pc for the industrialised countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Private-sector unions have been the hardest hit, with only 6.6pc of the workers at US private companies joining unions, according to the Labour Department.

At the same time, the base salaries of US workers have stagnated, while more wealth has concentrated in the hands of the richest 0.1pc of Americans, who control now about one-quarter of the country's wealth.

The International Monetary Fund, not known for trade union sympathies, suggests there is a link between the loss of organised labour power and the growth in inequality.



Workers and supporters march to the Vegas Auto Spa, a car wash that has become a focal point for labour and union rights, during a rally last week in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. Photo: AFP

In a recent study, two IMF economists said that the fall in unionisation in advanced economies, and its impact on workers' negotiating power, is a "key contributor to the rise of top income shares".

"It's no coincidence that the biggest expansion of the middle class in history happened between

**'It's no coincidence that the rise of the middle class in America coincided in large part with the rise of Unions.'**

**Aaron David Miller**  
Former Middle East

the late 1940s and the late 1970s at the golden age of the labour movement," said US labour expert Philip Dine, author of the book *State of The Unions*.

Since then, the deindustrialisation of the US economy, with more workers moving into office and service jobs, has eroded the power of the unions. Many of the new jobs are not protected by limits on hours worked, for instance.

Ben Zipperer, of the Washington Center for Equitable Growth, which studies the inequality problem, notes that, in the private sector today, "you can be fired for whatever your employer wants you to be fired for".

"It's not really the best incentive to join a union," he said.

Weighing on the unions as well are "right to work" laws like Wisconsin's that allow someone to take a job in a unionised company without having to join the union. Half of the 50 states have such laws, which help employers erode the power of existing unions.

Companies are also supported by an industry of consultants who can advise them on how to ward off unions.

Even so, said Mr Dine, "when corporations are more powerful than ever, one can wonder if it's the best time for the average worker to negotiate on his own."

The strengthening of the jobs market and the fall in unemployment in the past year could shift the balance, helping to push up salaries as the labour supply tightens.

Some workers' group gains appear to confirm that. West Coast port workers felt strong enough to undertake a three-month work slowdown in order to leverage their power in contract talks concluded last month.

Activist pressure on fast-food and retail chains have also had some success: Wal-Mart Stores, the country's largest single private-sector employer, announced last month it would raise wages for a large part of its US staff.

"Workers may indeed have more powers when the labour market is tighter. It presents an opportunity but it won't be enough to reverse a structural trend," said Damon Silvers, director of policy at the AFL-CIO labour confederation.

To reverse this trend, he said, workers need to feel that they have power.

"There's an entire generation for whom the workplace has been the realm of powerlessness." - AFP

## IN BRIEF

### Twitter opens Hong Kong office

It may be banned in mainland China, but Twitter has launched an office in Hong Kong to help Chinese businesses reach international markets.

The San Francisco-based service, which has served as a platform for dissent and free speech, wants to tap into booming growth in Greater China by selling ads to businesses such as exporters.

Ahead of the launch, Twitter had said the office would focus on advertising sales, instead of the one-to-many messaging service which is barred in China.

### Euro resumes march to dollar parity as rates slump

The euro resumed its slump yesterday, sitting around 12-year lows against the dollar, as the European Central Bank's new stimulus and the likelihood of a US rate hike push the embattled unit closer to parity with the greenback.

In Tokyo afternoon trade, the common currency fell to US\$1.0515, down from \$1.0548 in New York where it hit \$1.0510 at one stage. The euro also weakened to 127.72 yen from 128.10 yen in US trade, while the dollar was slightly higher. With the ECB just starting on its quantitative easing drive, and the Fed due to lift rates analysts are tipping dollar-euro parity by next year, which last happened in 2002.

### Korean rate cut in economic kick

South Korea yesterday became the latest country to cut interest rates as the central bank announced a surprise 25 basis point reduction to a record-low 1.75 percent, as it tries to fend off deflation and kickstart the struggling economy.

It said in a statement that the economy is suffering from slow demand and lack of confidence among businesses and consumers. A painful economic slowdown in China - South Korea's largest trading partner - will also pose a growing risk.

### 'Better news' for advanced economies, says IMF chief Lagarde

IMF chief Christine Lagarde said that major advanced economies were seeing "better news" thanks to cheap oil, currency shifts and low interest rates that encourage investment.

"For once in a long time there are clearly some relatively better news on the horizon of the advanced economies. And this has not happened in awhile," she said late March 11.

"We clearly have a rebound of the US economy, an improvement and good growth showing in the UK, and the euro area is also now turning the corner," she said. - AFP

## Housing up to scratch

CONTINUED FROM BUSINESS 17

Some people have been able to upscale their homes, however.

U Than Htun, a retired resident of Thingangyun township, said his family moved into a new house four months ago.

He formerly owned a small one-storey wooden house, but he made a deal with a contractor to build an apartment on the site. The contractor received half of the eight units and U Than Htun's family received half. He now rents out three and lives in his fourth apartment.

"Compared to our former wooden cabin, our current house is really good," he said.

Since the structure is new, U Than Htun says he has few safety concerns from his home - besides, he has purchased a fire-extinguisher and has an emergency exit in good order.

"The rise of new buildings is really improving people's standard of living," he said.

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# World

WORLD EDITOR: Kayleigh Long

## BATTAMBANG PROVINCE

### Amid trials, Muth seeks redemption

ONCE a key figure in Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime, former navy chief Meas Muth, who was charged last week with war crimes and crimes against humanity, claims to have found forgiveness through religion.

Mr Muth, who faces charges of "murder, extermination, enslavement, persecution on political and ethnic grounds, and other inhumane acts", now enjoys a reputation in his home village as a kindly father who will do anything to help his fellow man.

Faced with increasing health problems, the 77-year-old spends much of his time on his sprawling estate in Battambang province's Ta Sanh village.

Currently in the process of building a pagoda on the grounds of his home, Mr Muth sees religion as a means of escaping his notorious past.

"In about 23 years' time, I will have lived for a century, so what I am worried about recently is finding the money to finish the pagoda construction, and at noon [every day] I am trying to read the Buddha's book and think about the Buddha's words," he said yesterday.

Now better associated among his neighbours with philanthropy than mass murder, Mr Muth says most recently he sold his own truck to purchase materials that are being used to build a hall for local monks. Sitting on a hammock in a small outhouse that rests in the shadow of his large

wooden home, Mr Muth explained that Buddha's teachings have taught him to "forgive everything".

"Before, I was angry with the Americans for throwing bombs on my head; I was so angry. But now I have found happiness, I forgive all," he said.

With charges laid against him last week by Khmer Rouge tribunal international co-investigating judge Mark Harmon, Mr Muth could soon be brought face-to-face with the past he is trying to evade.

While espousing his forgiveness of others, Mr Muth, who is accused of killing foreigners captured in Cambodian waters and purging his own soldiers, had little to say about his own crimes.

"I decided to stop talking about the ECCC or anything to do with the Khmer Rouge," he said bluntly.

"I used to record my voice on tape to describe everything about me but now ... I have decided to stop talking about this, because I understand about what the court is doing," he said. "If I speak out or don't speak out, it's meaningless; all the accusations are not true, so what they're doing is just revenge for what they lost during the Lon Nol regime."

Local villagers and monks, who have become close with the former Khmer Rouge leader, were also reluctant to speak about his past, and said Mr Muth's age was reason enough for

his crimes to be forgiven.

"If we're talking about the law, they have to sentence him, but if we think about morals, they shouldn't, because he is old," said a villager, who gave his name only as Rorn and who works with Mr Muth planting cassava.

People in the local community, he added, regard Mr Muth as a father because "he manages everything for people here. He has provided farmland, land for housing, [and] pagodas for the people. He is a very good person and people love him."

Another villager, who declined to give her name, said she feared the impact Mr Muth's arrest would have on the community.

"If he's gone, will villagers here have farmland? Will villagers here have a good standard of living? Will villagers have a pagoda?" she asked, adding that seeing Mr Muth at the pagoda every day showed he deserved redemption.

Samlot district's deputy chief monk, 83-year-old Prey Tann, echoed the villager's concerns.

According to Mr Tann, Mr Muth has constructed four pagodas in the district, and, without him, he fears construction on the latest one may remain incomplete.

For now, details of whether Mr Muth will be arrested remain unclear, particularly given the strident government opposition to the cases. On the day the tribunal announced the charges, court legal communications officer Lars Olsen said, "it has not been possible, within a reasonable time, to get any arrest warrants executed."

Heather Ryan, a court monitor for the Open Society Justice Initiative, said that if the investigating judge issues an arrest warrant, the judicial police have an obligation to carry it out.

But Mr Olsen would not confirm yesterday whether there were plans to arrest Muth, citing confidentiality.

Meanwhile, Mr Muth says he doesn't want to know about the charges. "Recently, I am pretending to be a deaf person; I don't want to hear about the ECCC."

- Phnom Penh Post



## BANGKOK

### Prayut to head Yi

THAILAND'S Finance Minister Sommai Phasee has asked Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha to chair an investigation committee on losses incurred by the Yingluck Shinawatra government's rice-pledging scheme.

The Finance Ministry agreed that Gen Prayut should take up the chair position as people involved in the losses included the former premier, Mr Sommai said.

Two panels will be established, he said. One is attached to the Finance Ministry, which will carry out the probe related to Ms Yingluck, and the other panel, overseen by the Commerce Ministry, will investigate the case linked to former commerce minister

Boonsong Teriyapirom.

The two panels will base their probes on the allegations filed by the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC), Mr Sommai said.

The two committees could be set up within 10 days and will conclude investigations by September 1.

The findings will be sent to another committee which will decide on compensation. That panel will consist of representatives of the Comptroller-General's Department, the Office of the Auditor-General, the Council of State and the Attorney-General.

This panel, which will be chaired by the Comptroller-General, should



Former Khmer Rouge navy chief Meas Muth reads the newspaper at home in Battambang province on March 11. Photo: Phnom Penh Post

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Israel prepares to go to the poll booth

WORLD 28



Two police officers shot in Ferguson flare-up

WORLD 26



IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP

Yoga teacher Sanjeev Bhanot teaches the supporting crew members of the Solar Impulse 2 plane, in the hangar at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport in Ahmedabad on March 11. The aircraft is scheduled to fly to Myanmar on March 16 after making a stop at the Hindu holy city of Varanasi.

UWAHATI, INDIA

Blast kills four in Imphal

A POWERFUL bomb blast struck a crowded marketplace in India's restive northeast on March 11 killing four people and injuring another 15, officials said.

The blast shook the heart of Imphal, state capital of Manipur, which borders Myanmar - an area that has been plagued by separatist violence for decades.

"Most of the victims were either shoppers or vendors," senior state police official A.K. Singh told AFP by phone from Imphal, adding that "a powerful IED (improvised explosive device) was planted".

"The injured have been shifted

to the local medical college hospital, with at least six of them having serious multiple injuries," Mr Singh said.

Hospital officials said four bodies had been recovered from the blast site.

No rebel group has claimed responsibility for the attack and it was not immediately clear what the motive was.

The remote state has long been affected by insurgent violence and is home to dozens of tribal groups and small guerrilla armies fighting New Delhi's rule.

They often compete against each other in turf wars for dominance in the state. - AFP

PHNOM PENH

Abortion up in Cambodia

THE number of abortions performed in Cambodia in 2014 increased nearly 51 percent from the year prior, according to the Ministry of Health.

A report released earlier this week showed that the total number of miscarriages and abortions for the year were up by more than 4000 cases from 2013, bringing the total number to over 18,000. But while the number of women who miscarried only increased slightly - from 8013 in 2013 to 8827 in 2014 - the number of abortions performed spiked significantly, to almost 10,000, compared with 6497 just one year prior.

The numbers were culled from government health care centres and hospitals as well as private clinics.

The reason behind the rise in abortions is unknown but being investigated, Tung Rathavy, director of the National Maternal Child Health Center (NMCHC), said on March 11.

But safety is the overriding concern for the centre.

"We want women to turn to safe services in legal places," she said, adding that she hoped more women would utilise preventative contraception. "We do not want the abortion rate to go up more."

Rathavy also noted that the

Ministry of Health and the NMCHC have been working to train officials about safe abortion procedures and educate women about their sexual health and legal rights.

While first trimester abortions were legalised in 1997, as recently as 2013, 80 per cent of women in the Kingdom believed abortions were illegal, according to a study by Marie Stopes International and US-based health and technology startup InSTEDD.

Lack of abortion education has led many women to remain in the dark about their rights, which has historically led them to DIY abortion techniques and midwives who lack proper training. In 2006, the *Phnom Penh Post* reported that nearly 32,000 women had required medical attention due to botched abortions.

"We noticed that there are many private clinics without legal permission, which are dangerous for abortions," said Chhorn Sokuntheary, head of the women and children rights unit at Adhoc. She believes female students and garment workers are the groups most at risk for unwanted pregnancy.

In Cambodia, an abortion that results in chronic disability or death is punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

- *Phnom Penh Post*

BRIEFS

Copenhagen

Ten men arrested in online SE Asian child abuse ring

Danish police have arrested 10 men and raided their homes on March 11, on suspicion that they paid to watch the live-streaming of children being sexually abused in the Philippines.

"They have been questioned and a number of computers, phones and tablets have been seized," Flemming Kjaerside of the Danish police's cyber-crime unit told AFP.

Danish police said in a statement that "a number of money transactions" had led to the arrests being made.

Paris

Scientists sound the alarm on swine and bird flu in Asia

Scientists have issued warnings over the threat posed by H7N9 bird flu in China and the H1N1 strain of swine flu in India that have jointly claimed more than 1700 lives.

H7N9 virus presents a high risk of becoming pandemic if China fails to close loopholes in its live poultry trade, researchers reported in the journal *Nature* on March 11.

A different team, writing in the US journal *Cell Host and Microbe*, said a strain of H1N1 "swine" flu in India may have acquired mutations enabling it to spread more readily.

The Hague

Hagur orders Dutch compensation for Indonesian war widows

"The Dutch state is liable to compensate Indonesian relatives of men who were illegally executed between 1946-49 in the former Dutch East Indies," the three-judge bench said in a March 11 ruling.

Twenty-three plaintiffs - 18 widows and five children - took the Dutch state to court in 2012, almost a year after judges ruled in favour of widows in a similar case involving executions at an Indonesian village in 1947.

At least 860 men died in front of firing squads, mostly between December 1946 and April 1947 on Indonesia's Sulawesi island, then called Celebes.

Previously the Dutch government was ordered to pay 20,000 euros (US\$21,000) in compensation to other Indonesian widows who brought similar cases to the Hague court. - AFP

Yingluck rice probe

wrap up its work within six months, Mr Sommai said.

The four projects of the Yingluck government's rice-pledging scheme caused an estimated 536 billion baht in losses, while the administration stacked up 17.5 million tonnes of pledged rice.

The Office of the Attorney-General last month indicted Ms Yingluck for alleged dereliction of duty related to the losses incurred and corruption in the scheme.

On January 20, NACC commissioner Vicha Mahakul, who heads a sub-panel investigating the rice scheme, indicted Mr Boonsong, his deputy Poom Sarapol, as well as 19 other high-level officials, private sector executives, and two compa-

nies involved in allegedly corrupt government-to-government rice deals.

Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam said on March 11 the NACC had forwarded its allegations against Ms Yingluck and Mr Boonsong for their roles in the rice-pledging program to the cabinet.

It is uncertain how much compensation the government will seek from the people involved in the civil lawsuit, he said, adding that those involved will have to share the losses in any judgment handed down by the court.

The Supreme Court will decide on March 19 whether to accept the criminal case against Ms Yingluck for further proceedings.

- *Bangkok Post*

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## NEW YORK



A man talks on his mobile phone in Havana. Photo: AFP

## Making connections: US-Cuba lines restored

THE United States and Cuba have re-established a direct telephone link, the Cuban state telecommunications company said on March 11, in the latest step toward normalising ties between the one-time Cold War foes.

For the first time since 1999, calls can now be made directly from the US to Cuba and vice versa, without passing through a third country, the company, Etecsa, said in a statement.

"The reestablishment of direct communications between the United States and Cuba contributes to providing better infrastructure and better communications quality between the people of both nations," Etecsa said.

The connection was set up through a February deal signed with New Jersey-based firm IDT Domestic Telecom.

It was the first agreement signed between Cuban and American companies since the announcement on December 17 that the two countries would renew diplomatic ties after more than 50 years of hostility.

The telephone link between the two countries has been interrupted and restored numerous times since Fidel Castro came to power in the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and began nationalising American-owned

companies in the 1960s.

But this is the first time the connection has been restored since February 25, 1999, according to Cuban authorities.

Previously phone calls between the United States and Cuba had to pass through a third country, making them expensive and poor in quality.

Etecsa has yet to announce new rates.

Around 2 million Cuban-Americans live in the United States, and many families rely on phone calls to stay in touch across the Florida Straits.

Postal service between the two countries was cut off in the 1960s and has still not been restored.

The new connection will "initially" be used only for international voice calls, but could eventually transmit other kinds of communications as well, Etecsa said.

The White House had announced in December that the rapprochement with Havana would include "new efforts to increase Cubans' access to communications and their ability to communicate freely".

That included easing restrictions on exports of telecommunications and internet equipment, services and infrastructure.

The historic announcement by

presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro raised Cubans' hopes that they could soon have regular internet access via the United States.

Cuba has one of the lowest rates of internet access in the world - just 3.4 percent of households are connected - and internet cafes charge around US\$4.50 an hour, in a country where the average monthly salary is around \$20.

US companies have been positioning themselves to enter the Cuban market since the rapprochement was announced.

Video streaming service Netflix launched in Cuba last month.

This month, MasterCard is due to allow clients with US-issued cards to use them on the island. And American Express has announced it is ready to do the same.

While Washington and Havana have held two rounds of talks on reopening embassies, among other subjects, thorny issues remain untouched, such as compensation for nationalised American property and Cuba's removal from the US blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism.

To lift the crippling trade and financial embargo the US slapped on Cuba in 1962, Mr Obama needs the approval of Congress - a difficult political battle with both houses currently under Republican control. - AFP

## NEW YORK

## Reunification becomes a Nobel cause

TWO Nobel Peace laureates and American feminist Gloria Steinem are among a group of 30 women planning to march across the demilitarised zone between North and South Korea to press demands for reunification.

Ms Steinem told a news conference at the United Nations on March 11 that the demonstration scheduled for May 24 would draw on women's successes in peacemaking to advance calls for Korean peace.

Taking part in the march will be Liberian activist Leymah Gbowee, who won the Nobel in 2011 for mobilising Liberian women against her country's brutal war and Mairead Corrigan Maguire, whose peace efforts in Northern Ireland were recognised with the prize in 1976.

"It's hard to imagine a more physical symbol of the insanity of dividing human beings than this zone," Ms Steinem said.

"To me, to walk across it, has huge, huge, huge importance."

The planned "walk for peace and reunification" is to start off in Pyongyang where the delegation is to meet with North Korean women before setting out for the DMZ.

Organisers said they had received

tentative approval from UN command in the DMZ to allow the women to cross from Panmunjom, if South Korea agrees, but there has been no formal word yet from Seoul.

North Korea has said it will support the march in principle, but stressed that a final okay would be given "if conditions are ripe", said Christine Ahn, from the Women Demilitarize the Zone group.

"Given the tense moment right now, they might not be," said Ms Ahn.

Women from over a dozen countries are set to take part in the march, held as the peninsula marks 70 years of division.

"What we learned from Northern Ireland and Liberia [is that] women from both sides said 'enough is enough.' We don't want any of our sons and daughters to become victims of this war," said Hyun-Kyung Chung, a professor of theology and one of the participants.

"What I would like to see happen is nothing less than a miracle," she said.

North and South Korea signed an armistice after the 1950-1953 war, but efforts at reunification and the signing of a formal peace treaty have been at a standstill. - AFP



This undated picture released by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on March 10 shows North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un inspecting unit 1016 of Korean People's Army (KPA) Air and Anti-Air Force at an undisclosed location in North Korea. Photo: AFP

## GENEVA

## UN calls for Gitmo access

THE United Nations' top investigator on the use of torture has accused Washington of dragging its feet on his requested visits to prisons and refusing to give him access to inmates at Guantanamo.

Juan Mendez said on March 11 that he had been waiting for more than two years for the US to provide him access to a range of state and federal prisons, where he wants to probe the use of solitary confinement.

He said the US State Department had been working to help him gain access to the state prisons, but after two years of discussions he had yet to receive a positive answer.

"I fully expect the United States to secure invitations from state prisons for me, but also to be able to visit federal prisons as well," he said.

According to Mr Mendez, "it is not rare" for prisoners in the United States to spend 25 to 30 years in solitary confinement, locked up in a cell with no human contact for between 22 and 23 hours a day.

"It's simply outrageous that it's

taking such a long time to provide access to American detention facilities," said Jamil Dakwar, head of human rights at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

According to the ACLU, more than 80,000 people are held in solitary confinement in the United States on any given day.

Mr Mendez said he was particularly concerned about the use of solitary confinement for underage offenders.

Solitary confinement for children "should never happen, even for a single day", he said.

Mr Mendez also harshly criticised Washington for not providing him with "acceptable" access to the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, and to the 122 detainees still being held there.

Washington, he said, had invited him to visit the prison camp in 2012, but under "unacceptable" conditions.

Mr Mendez said he had declined the invitation and asked the United States to replace it with one he can accept, to no avail. - AFP

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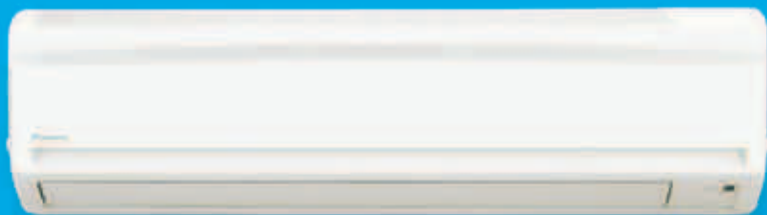
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## WASHINGTON



An elderly woman wipes her eye as she stands in front of a damaged house in Nikishyne on March 11. Photo: AFP

## West boosts Ukraine aid

THE IMF handed Ukraine a US\$17.5 billion lifeline on March 11 as the United States agreed to send military aid to bolster its forces against pro-Russian rebels – but stopped short of promising weapons.

The US also expanded the reach of its economic sanctions, targeting a Russian bank and separatist officials in eastern Ukraine – a move Moscow branded a “political provocation” that would only worsen the crisis.

The President of the Ukraine Petro Poroshenko welcomed the increased US support in the face of what he called the separatists’ “barbaric aggression”, despite Washington snubbing growing calls for arms and ammunition.

After a call with US Vice President Joe Biden and a meeting in Kiev with sympathetic members of Congress, Poroshenko thanked the US for the offer to send military equipment – but not weapons – worth \$75 million.

Ukraine has asked Western powers for weapons to help it fight the rebellion, but Washington remains cautious and key ally Germany remains flat-out opposed to supplying munitions.

White House spokesperson Josh Earnest said President Barack Obama was concerned that sending more

weapons to an already unstable region would lead to greater bloodshed.

“The president is mindful of the fact that there is not a military solution to this problem,” he said.

“It is unreasonable to suggest that the United States would be able to provide enough military support to the Ukrainian military that they could overwhelm the military operations that are currently being backed by Russia.”

US officials said the package would include 230 Humvee vehicles, unarmed Raven drones, counter-mortar radars, night vision devices and various medical and communications gear.

Meanwhile, new US sanctions targeted officials in the separatist self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic in Ukraine, as well as a Russian bank and a nationalist group.

The Russian National Commercial Bank has become the largest bank in Crimea since Russia seized the region from Ukraine last year.

Also listed was the Eurasian Youth Union, a nationalist Russian group said to recruit fighters to join the rebels.

Three officials of the pro-Moscow government of former Ukraine president Viktor Yanukovich, who was

overthrown in an uprising in February 2014, were also added to US sanctions lists.

The sanctions freeze any assets the individuals and institutions hold on US territory and ban Americans from doing business with them.

Russia’s deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov said Washington’s allegations that Moscow is backing separatist movements were “dreary and pointless”, as he slammed the new sanctions.

“It’s difficult to understand what is guiding the US Treasury Department and other authorities in introducing sanctions and expanding the sanctions lists,” he told the Interfax news agency.

“We see no logical link that would in some way explain such decisions, given Washington’s declaration that it is interested in the situation returning to normal.”

President Vladimir Putin’s Russia, meanwhile, denies allegations from Kiev and Western capitals that it has sent heavy weapons and thousands of troops to support the rebels.

The separatist conflict has killed more than 6000 people in 11 months – Ukrainian troops, separatist militiamen, Russian “volunteers” and civilians caught in the crossfire. – AFP

## STOCKHOLM

## Saudi pulls ambassador over stoush with Sweden

SAUDI Arabia has recalled its ambassador to Sweden, accusing it of flagrant interference in its internal affairs as the rift between the two countries deepens in the wake of Stockholm cutting military ties.

Riyadh said the March 11 move was in response to criticism of Saudi Arabia’s human rights record by Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom, which it said was “harmful to the kingdom”.

Her remarks, which Riyadh did not identify, were “flagrant interference in internal affairs, which is not accepted in international conventions”.

The foreign ministry added that because Ms Wallstrom’s comments do not “go well with amicable relations between countries, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia has recalled its ambassador from Sweden”.

Swedish foreign ministry spokesperson Erik Boman said on March 11 “diplomatic relations are not broken, but Saudi Arabia’s ambassador has been recalled”.

The move comes amid a deepening rift in which Sweden cancelled a controversial military cooperation deal after Saudi Arabia prevented Ms Wallstrom from making a speech on human rights at the Arab League earlier this week.

Ms Wallstrom had been invited to the Cairo meeting in praise of her government’s decision in October to recognise a Palestinian state.

Her speech, published by the Swedish foreign ministry, mentioned neither Saudi Arabia nor her feminist foreign policy agenda, but stressed women’s and human rights.

“Freedom of association, assembly, religion and expression are not only fundamental rights and important tools in the creation of vibrant societies,” it read, noting “Women’s rights do not only benefit women, but society as a whole.”

Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world where women are not allowed to drive.

The sexes are strictly segregated, women are required to dress

in black from head to toe when outside the home and also still need permission from a male guardian to work and to marry.

Ms Wallstrom said “The explanation we have been given is that Sweden has highlighted the situation for democracy and human rights and that is why they do not want me to speak”.

She has rarely commented on Saudi Arabia but, in January, criticised the kingdom’s treatment of blogger Raef Badawi, who had been sentenced to 1000 lashes and 10 years in prison for insulting Islam.

“One must protest against what are nearly medieval methods” of punishment, Ms Wallstrom said.

On March 10, a day after the Cairo incident, Sweden scrapped its 10-year-old military deal with the Saudis in retaliation.

Saudi Arabia is the third-largest non-Western buyer of Swedish arms. In 2014, Riyadh bought equipment worth 338 million kronor (US\$39 million).

Commenting on the military deal, Ms Wallstrom said “it’s a good and correct decision we have made”.

“And I feel that when I speak about democracy and human rights, I do it with the support of the Swedish people,” she added.

Swedish Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist said only cooperation in medicine and gender studies would remain on offer.

“In practical terms, there is no military cooperation,” he told public broadcaster SVT.

“What we have is an open invitation to partake in medical and gender training, but the Saudi side has not shown any interest,” he added.

But taking a stance against Saudi Arabia risks Sweden’s credibility as a business partner, according to some centre-right opposition politicians and the Swedish business community.

“Foreign policy is not only about other countries,” right-wing daily *Svenska Dagbladet* wrote in an editorial, noting that Swedish industry “must be allowed to trade ... even with dictatorships”.

–AFP

## WASHINGTON

## Assad keeps grip on power

DESPITE Western and Arab hopes he would be consigned to the dustbin of history, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad enters his fifth year of war with an increasingly tight hold on power.

Alarm over the sweeping expansion of the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group in Syria and Iraq means that international priorities have shifted.

In the four years since the conflict erupted in March 2011, leaving more than 210,000 people dead, Mr Assad’s forces have succeeded in halting gains by Western-backed rebels and jihadists seeking his overthrow.

While rights groups still regularly accuse Mr Assad of indiscriminately killing his own people, sending helicopters to drop crude barrel bombs, even the Syrian opposition no longer demands his resignation as a precondition for peace talks.

“Statements from the US and from EU capitals indicate a de facto direct or indirect acceptance of Assad’s holding on to the presidency, and a search for some form of national unity coalition that would include Assad as well as the non-jihadist opposition,” said Volker Perthes, director of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

US Secretary of State John Kerry recently laid bare the shifting Western stance towards the Syrian leader.

Mr Assad “has lost any semblance of legitimacy”, Mr Kerry said.

“But we have no higher priority than disrupting and defeating Daesh,” he added, using an Arabic acronym for IS.

Mr Assad, seen briefly as a reformer at the onset of his rule nearly 15 years ago, was ostracised for his bloody repression of anti-regime protests that began in 2011.

But in remarks that enraged the rebels, UN envoy Staffan de Mistura recently described Mr Assad as “part of the solution” in Syria.

After suffering initial losses to rebels, Mr Assad has managed to stabilise the military balance and even make gains in some areas, thanks to significant support from the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.

Air strikes by the US-led coalition have piled pressure on jihadists who have flocked to the war-wracked country.

Today, the regime controls 40 percent of Syrian territory home to 60 pc of the population.

Almost all of Syria’s major cities – except IS’s self-proclaimed capital Raqa and half of the second city of Aleppo – are under government control. – AFP

## The war in numbers

Syria’s war has killed more than 210,000 people, uprooted half the population and left the country in ruins since erupting four years ago.

Below are some key figures on the conflict that began with peaceful protests for reform but escalated into an all-out civil war, drawing foreign jihadists after a brutal crackdown on dissent.

### Casualties

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which relies on a large network of activists and medics across the country, says that 210,060 people were killed between March 2011 and February 2015.

They included 65,146 civilians, of whom 10,664 were children.

Among the anti-regime fighters, 38,325 were Syrian rebels while 24,989 were foreign jihadists.

On the regime side, the dead included 45,385 soldiers, 29,943 militia fighters, 640 members of Lebanon’s Hezbollah Shiite movement, and 2,502 Shiite militiamen from other countries.

The Observatory says the toll is probably “much higher” but it is impossible to gather information in certain areas under regime and jihadist control.

It says about 20,000 people have also gone missing in Syria’s infamous jails.

Thousands more – combatants and civilians – have been taken hostage by groups including the Islamic State jihadist organisation.

### Refugees and displaced

According to UN figures, 11.4 million people have fled their homes, of whom nearly 4 million have left the country.

Nearly 1.2 million have taken refuge in Lebanon – equivalent to more than a quarter of its population.

The actual figure is probably higher as many Syrians are unregistered.

Roughly 625,000 have taken refuge in Jordan, 245,000 in Iraq and 137,000 in Egypt.

Turkey says it has accepted about two million.

Refugees are mired in poverty, health problems and growing tensions with local communities where they live in makeshift camps and difficult conditions.

Inside Syria, 60 percent of the population of 23 million is poverty-stricken, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation estimated in September.

Up to 2.4 million children cannot go to school because of insecurity, the UN children’s agency says.

### Economic consequences

Experts say the conflict has set Syria’s economy back by three decades, with half of the population unemployed and most of the infrastructure destroyed. The International Monetary Fund says its gross domestic product has contracted by more than 40 percent. The war damage bill comes to some \$31 billion, according to official statistics. Oil production has dropped by 96 pc.



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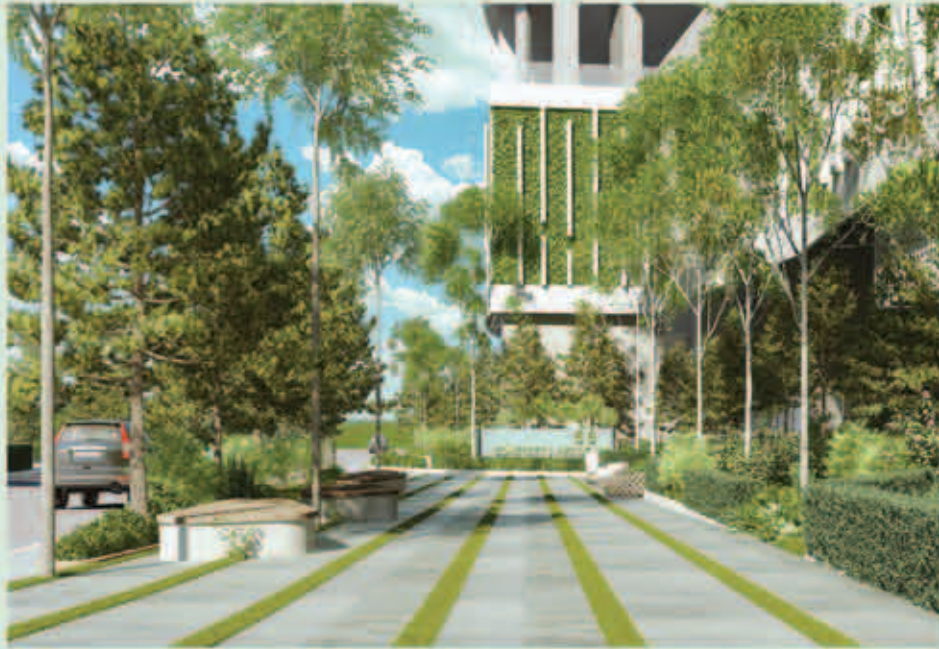
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WASHINGTON

# Two police shot in Ferguson unrest

TWO police officers in the flashpoint US town of Ferguson were shot early yesterday during a new protest over the treatment of the black population by the mainly white police force, officials have confirmed.

One officer was shot in the face and the other in the shoulder as a protest rally outside the police station in the Missouri town was dispersing, St Louis County police chief Jon Belmar told reporters.

"The police officers were standing there and they were shot. Just because they were police officers," Mr Belmar told reporters at the scene, adding that the officers were alive and conscious.

This comes in the wake of the March 11 resignation of Ferguson's embattled police chief Thomas Jackson, one week after a scathing US Justice Department report into the fatal shooting of the unarmed black teenager Michael Brown by one of his officers.

Mr Jackson is the latest prominent official in the St. Louis suburb to stand down, seven months after Mr Brown was shot and killed by white police officer Darren Wilson, igniting angry protests and a national debate about race and law enforcement.

"It is with profound sadness that I am announcing I am stepping down from my position of chief of police," wrote Mr Jackson, who has been police chief since 2010.

His resignation - which was reported by the *St Louis Post Dispatch* as being welcomed by

Mr Brown's family - will take effect on March 19, he said, to allow "an orderly transition of command".

In a brief statement, the City of Ferguson confirmed it had agreed "a mutual separation" with Mr Jackson that would see him get severance pay and health insurance for a year.

The Justice Department report said it lacked sufficient evidence to prosecute Mr Wilson on federal civil rights charges over the August 9 death of 18-year-old Mr Brown after an altercation on a quiet residential street.

But it condemned Ferguson's city hall, police department and municipal court for racial bias in targeting its African-American majority as a means to generate revenue.

Mr Brown's family has indicated it intends to file a civil lawsuit against Ferguson and Mr Wilson, accusing them of unlawful death.

"Michael Brown's mother and father are relieved that actions are being taken to address the very disturbing findings in the Department of Justice report," family lawyer Benjamin Crump told CNN.

Mr Jackson is the fifth Ferguson official to resign in the wake of the Justice Department's damning findings.

Others include Ferguson's municipal court judge, two long-time police commanders - including Mr Wilson's supervisor - and, on March 10, its city manager.

Ferguson's court clerk was fired over emails that smacked of racism.



A demonstrator is detained and arrested during a protest outside the Ferguson Police Department on March 11. Protests erupted after the announcement of the resignation of police chief Tom Jackson earlier in the day. Photo: AFP

Still in office is Ferguson Mayor James Knowles. He has promised root-and-branch reforms in the community of 21,000, in which two in three residents is African American.

At a late afternoon press conference, Mr Knowles called Mr Jackson "an honorable man" who recognized

that "the way to move forward was with someone else, and so he left."

Mr Wilson, no longer with the overwhelmingly white Ferguson police force, said he shot Mr Brown after the youth - a suspect in a corner-store shoplifting - tried to grab hold of his firearm.

Others insist that Mr Brown had put his hands up in a gesture of surrender when Mr Wilson opened fire.

A grand jury in November chose not to indict Wilson on murder or manslaughter charges, reigniting protests that sometimes turned violent. - AFP



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## RAMALLAH

# Pre-election jitters for Palestinians, as Israel prepares to head to the poll booth

PALESTINIANS throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip are hoping Israel's general election will bring about change, but even if it does, many still doubt their lot will improve.

After decades of conflict, it has made little difference to them who leads Israel. Neither leftist nor right-wing has achieved a comprehensive peace deal, with round after round of talks collapsing.

But people in the Palestinian territories are intrigued by the election in a country whose policies and occupation affect all aspects of their daily lives.

"It's natural we would follow these elections, since they are being held in the country that occupies us and which every day kills or oppresses Palestinians," said Palestine Liberation Organisation official Mohammed Madani.

Since 1967, Israel has occupied the West Bank and Arab east Jerusalem, and it also controls two of Gaza's three border crossings.

In the West Bank, Palestinians have to negotiate checkpoints manned by Israeli soldiers, and most people are not allowed to leave the coastal enclave of Gaza, which has been under Israeli blockade for eight years.

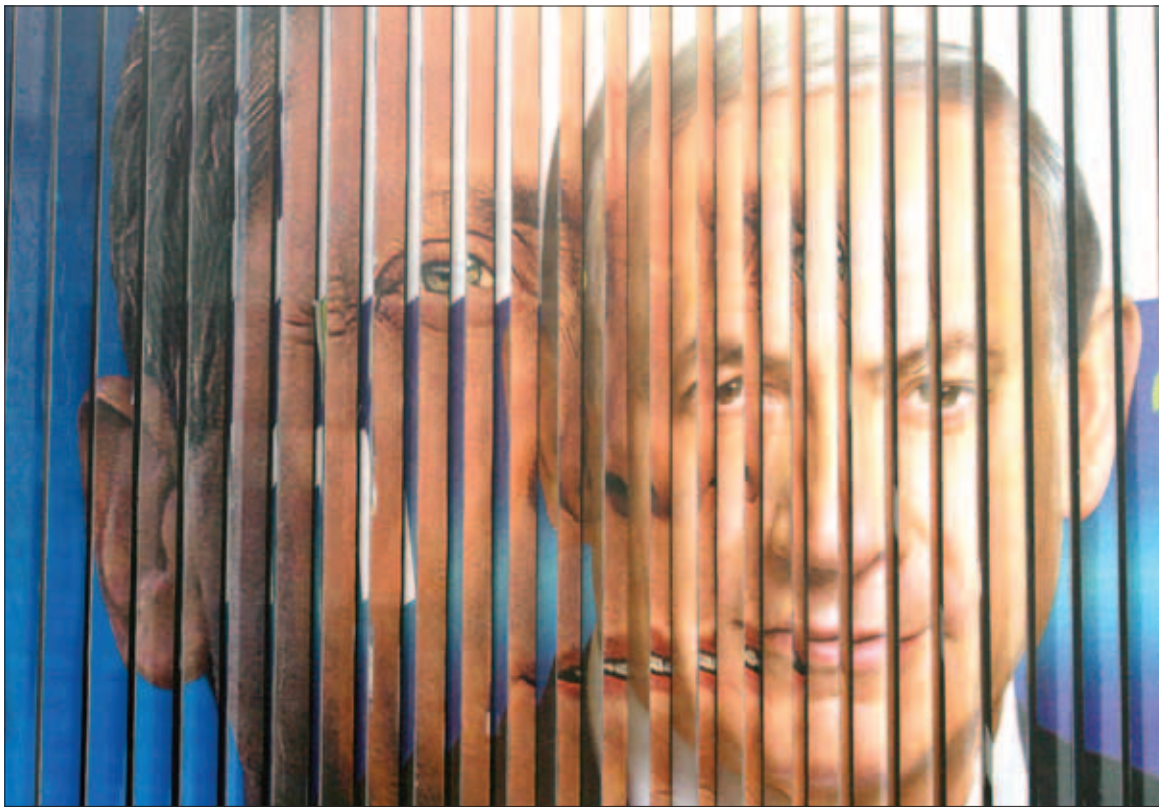
Under this pressure, President Mahmud Abbas declared last week he was willing to resume peace talks with "whoever" comes to power after the March 17 election.

Mr Madani echoed him, but also hinted that a change of leadership might be welcome, after talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government broke down nearly a year ago.

"Whether the right or the left wins, what matters to us is the question of who will build peace," he said.

"If that partner doesn't emerge, that will mean the Israeli people don't know that it's in their interest" to elect a leader who does not "prioritise war", Mr Madani said.

In a cafe in the West Bank city of Ramallah, waiter Bara, 23, felt things could be worse than under Netanyahu, who is seeking a fourth



A campaign billboard rotates showing Israeli Prime Minister and Likud party's candidate Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli MP Labour Party leader and co-leader of the Zionist Union party, Isaac Herzog on March 10 in Tel Aviv. Photo: AFP

term.

"I've been reading about the Israeli election on Facebook, and even talking about it with friends," he said.

"We know the future government might be even worse than the one now led by Netanyahu."

Alternatives to Mr Netanyahu's Likud include the ultra-rightwing Jewish Home, which opposes the creation of a Palestinian state.

But the latest opinion polls also show the centre-left Zionist Union gaining ground, sparking hopes of renewed peace talks.

Ramallah car salesman Adli al-Rami hoped a new government would mean real change.

"If they get rid of Israel's separation barrier [the concrete wall be-

tween the Jewish state and the West Bank], and slow just a little their settlement building, we would welcome a new government," he said.

However, Israel's main parties

have all focused their campaigns on internal socio-economic issues or perceived security threats posed by Iran and its allies.

Mr Madani was hopeful that the

joint Arab Israeli list - the one party for whom peace with the Palestinians is a priority - could win more than its current 11 seats.

"If that happens, it will be more possible that colonisation [settlement building] and the occupation" of the West Bank will be debated in parliament

Baker Mohammed Ibrahim hoped for a "moderate government which could be a partner for peace so the two peoples can live" side by side.

"We hope that this time the Palestinians will not pay in blood for the result of these elections," he said.

In Gaza, the prospect of "paying in blood" takes on literal significance, after last summer's 50-day war with Israel that killed about 2,200 Palestinians, mostly civilians, and displaced 100,000.

Gaza resident Rafiq Marshud winced at the prospect of another Netanyahu victory, saying: "Gaza will never benefit from Netanyahu or any far-right government."

The Islamist Hamas movement, which controls Gaza, said the result would make no difference.

"We are weighing nothing on the results and will continue to treat the occupation [Israel] as an enemy," spokesman Fawzi Barhum said.

"All the parties that have led Israel have wanted to annihilate the Palestinian cause, colonise, and strengthen the Jewish character of their state, and all have practised violence and terrorism," he said. - AFP

## The party line on Palestine

As Israel prepares for next week's election, the question of the intractable conflict with the Palestinians has been conspicuous by its absence from most party campaigning. But it is an issue no Israeli government can afford to ignore as the humanitarian crisis in Gaza worsens and the Palestinian leadership advances legal and diplomatic action against Israel on the international stage. Here is an outline of the main parties' positions on the issue:

### Likud

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government held nine months of indirect talks with the Palestinians until the negotiations collapsed in April 2014.

In 2009, Mr Netanyahu became the first Likud leader to agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state - albeit a demilitarised one - but a Likud statement this week suggested that stance had changed. Mr Netanyahu's spokesperson denied any U-turn.

Mr Netanyahu has repeatedly ruled out a Palestinian demand for a state within the lines that existed before the 1967 Six Day War.

He has also rejected any notion of a Palestinian capital in annexed east Jerusalem, vowing that the city will never be divided and that Israel will hold onto the major settlement blocs in any peace deal.

"To speak of [territorial] concessions at this time ... is simply irrelevant", a Likud spokeswoman told AFP.

### Zionist Union

Likud's main challenger, the centre-left Zionist Union, has pledged to pursue a political agreement outlining Israel's permanent borders with the support of moderate Arab states and the international community.

It would feature a demilitarised Palestinian state while Israel would retain sovereignty over the major Jewish settlement blocs as well as Jerusalem, with freedom of religion and access to all faiths guaranteed.

Palestinian refugees who fled or were forced out of their homes when the Jewish state was created in 1948 would not be allowed to return to Israel.

The Union says it will prevent any action that "harms the possibility of reaching a political agreement" pledging to stop settlement construction outside major blocs.

### Yesh Atid

Yesh Atid supports the creation of a Palestinian state, championing a "regional accord" with Arab states, but would make major West Bank settlements part of Israel.

It is willing to discuss "land swaps", and would freeze settlement building during negotiations, but would not relinquish control of Jerusalem.

It would also not grant right of return to Palestinian refugees - a key Palestinian and Arab demand.

### JewishHome

The far-right Jewish Home is completely opposed to "any kind of Palestinian state," according to its manifesto.

Nor does it support a de facto one-state solution whereby Israel would incorporate the West Bank and its Palestinian population.

Party leader Naftali Bennett advocates a plan which would see Israel unilaterally annex swathes of the occupied West Bank and offer full citizenship to the 100,000 Palestinians living there, who would be given full self-governance.

Mr Bennett opposed the most recent round of peace talks, and has described the Palestinian issue as "shrapnel in the buttocks".

### Joint (Arab) List

The Joint List, which unites the main Arab parties along with a Jewish-Arab faction, places more importance on the Palestinian question than any other party.

"For us it's a major issue," spokesperson Reut Mor told AFP.

Its platform calls for an end to Israel's decades-long occupation and the establishment an independent Palestinian state living beside Israel, with borders along the 1967 lines.

It also demands the right of return for Palestinian refugees, consistent with the position of the Palestinian leadership.

### Yisrael Beitenu

Yisrael Beitenu, a hardline nationalist faction, does not oppose the creation of a Palestinian state but has ruled out the possibility of a bilateral peace deal in favour of a regional agreement with other Arab countries.

"Any agreement with the Palestinians must be part of an overall agreement that would include peace agreements with Arab states," the party's website says.

The party also backs the controversial idea of "transfer" which would see members of Israel's Arab minority, "who identify with the Palestinians," become part of the future state of Palestine.

- AFP



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## BOXING

# Pacquiao and Mayweather face to face for first time

**M**ANNY Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather met eye to eye on March 11 for the first time since their May 2 mega-fight was announced, as Hollywood rolled out the red carpet for the richest bout in history.

"It's been a long road but we're here now," said the unbeaten Mayweather, as the countdown began to an eagerly awaited welterweight world title showdown in Las Vegas that has been a long - and at times fraught - five years in the making.

Filipino ring icon Pacquiao countered, "The fight is on and we're very excited. Both of us will undergo hard training, and we will do our best on May 2 to make you happy."

The celebrated duo seemed relaxed as they posed and chatted for a phalanx of about 600 media representatives who were recording their every move.

"On May 2 I have a tough test," Mayweather said. "Manny Pacquiao is a good fighter. I can't see how it will play out, I am not a psychic. But you best believe I will be in top shape and the best I can be."

The American, clad in a dove gray suit and pale striped shirt with diamond cufflinks winking, showed only rare glimpses of his "Money" Mayweather swagger - he did predict he would emerge with his unblemished record intact.

"I believe in my skill. I believe in myself," said Mayweather, who puts a record of 47-0 with 26 knockouts on the line.



Tickets for the long-awaited superfight will cost between US\$1,500 and \$7,500, say organisers but it is unclear how many will go on sale to the public. Photo: AFP

Pacquiao, 57-5 with two drawn and 38 knockouts, wore a darker suit and tie, and displayed his usual quiet confidence in a cavernous auditorium normally reserved for pop concerts and Hollywood A-listers.

"I believe I will win on May 2," said the down-to-earth 36-year-old south-paw, who has won world titles in an unprecedented eight weight divisions.

Pacquiao's Hall of Fame trainer Freddie Roach couldn't resist a few jabs at Mayweather, who turned 38 in February.

"His legs are little bit shot," Roach said. "He is going to have to exchange more. He has to exchange more because his legs won't take him out of the way. If he has to exchange with Manny Pacquiao he is in trouble."

Mayweather made little impact with his own somewhat half-hearted attempt to get into Pacquiao's head with a reference to the defeats on his resume.

"When you lose, it's in the mind," said Mayweather, widely considered boxing's pound-for-pound king. "From day one, I was taught to be a winner."

"I've never wanted to win a fight so bad in my life," said Mayweather,

projected to make an eye-watering \$120 million. Pacquiao will pocket \$80 million.

Previous bids to put together a fight between the two - most notably in late 2009 - had run aground over various issues, including division of the purse, drug testing protocol and animosity between Mayweather and Pacquiao promoter Bob Arum. - AFP

## FOOTBALL

## Gazza tells court hacking 'ruined my life'

PAUL Gascoigne on March 11 told the High Court in London that phone hacking by a newspaper group had driven the former England football star to alcoholism and destroyed his life.

Gascoigne, 47, said he was afraid to speak to his family, lost friends he thought were betraying him and spent £80,000 (US\$120,000) on counter-surveillance equipment.

"I would like to trade my mobile phone in for a coffin because these guys have ruined my life. I have no life," the ex-Tottenham and Lazio midfielder said.

A series of high-profile figures are giving evidence at the High Court as it determines what compensation should be paid by Mirror Group Newspapers to people whose voicemail was intercepted by its journalists.

MGN publishes the *Daily Mirror*, *Sunday Mirror* and *Sunday People* national tabloids, the chief competitors to media baron Rupert Murdoch's British tabloid stable.

"I knew I was getting hacked by the *Mirror*. This continued for ages," Gascoigne told the court.

"I changed my mobile. It happened again so I kept on changing mobiles, five or six times a month."

Gascoigne, who is complaining about 18 articles - all accepted to have been the product of illegal activity - said: "I was scared to speak to anybody ... my parents, my family and kids. It was just horrendous."

"And people can't understand why I became an alcoholic."

The 1990 World Cup star's evidence was not challenged by MGN's lawyer.

In a written statement to the court, Gascoigne said he did not speak to his family for almost two years and refused to spend Christmas with them because he thought they had betrayed him by leaking private information.

"It is very sad to me that a lot of damage has already been done to my family that cannot easily be fixed," he said.

Last month the *Daily Mirror* printed

**'I would like to trade my mobile phone in for a coffin because these guys have ruined my life.'**

**Paul Gascoigne**  
Ex-footballer

an apology, accepting voicemails had been "illegally accessed" in the past, with the information obtained used in stories.

Murdoch shut the *News of the World* in 2011 as public and political outrage exploded at revelations of phone-hacking at the Sunday tabloid.

The scandal sparked a press ethics inquiry and a mammoth police probe which has seen journalists jailed. - AFP

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HOCKEY

# Swapping bronze for silver



Myanmar's hockey team at Yangon International Airport, ready to depart for Malaysia. Photo: MHF/Facebook

**KYAW ZIN HLAING**  
kyawzinlaing.mcm@gmail.com

**M**YANMAR'S Hockey Federation has set their sights on a silver medal in the 28<sup>th</sup> edition of the Southeast Asian Games, to be held in Singapore this June, but will not compete in the women's competition.

"In the 27<sup>th</sup> Games we won Bronze in both the male and female events. This year we want to go one step better," U Lu Lu Htaw, vice president of the Myanmar Hockey Federation told *The Myanmar Times*.

"Budget constraints mean we will compete only in the men's competition," said U Lu Lu Htaw.

As part of their preparations, the

Ministry of Sport has supported costs for the men's hockey team to travel to Malaysia for a training camp and warm-up games against sides from the region's stronghold for the sport.

The Myanmar stickmen will compete in 17 friendly matches during their time in Malaysia, playing against high-level club sides, university and academy sides and the Malaysian national team.

"We went on a similar joint training mission before the 2013 SEA Games. We developed lots of vital experience and it was instrumental in achieving the bronze medal," said U Lu Lu Htaw.

"This year's Myanmar team consists 70percent of players who did not compete in the last SEA Games. This is a new generation, so we will train again with hopes of a silver."

## IN BRIEF

### Swimming Mexican spending cuts move Worlds to Budapest

Hungary will host the 2017 world swimming championships, the sports governing body, FINA, and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban announced in Budapest on March 11.

The event will be staged in Budapest after Cornel Marculescu, FINA executive director, signed an agreement with Orban in the Hungarian capital.

Mexico announced in February it was pulling out of hosting the event, originally scheduled for Guadalajara, as part of a massive drive to cut public spending.

The 2015 championships, which are held every two years, are to be staged in Kazan, Russia.

Budapest had been scheduled to host the 2021 championships, but a new bidding process will be open for that event, FINA said in a statement.

### Cycling Matthews wins stage, takes overall lead in Paris-Nice

Australia's Michael Matthews took the overall leader's yellow jersey in the Paris-Nice cycle race on March 11 with his Orica teammates helping him to victory in the third stage.

The 24-year-old Matthews, who has stage wins to his credit in both the Tour of Spain and the Tour of Italy, edged home first ahead of Italians Davide Cimolai and Giacomo Nizzolo with fourth place going to Norwegian Alexander Kristoff.

Polish world champion Michal Kwiatkowski had held the overall lead from his win in the prologue, but Matthews - who won the stage sprint finish - earned enough bonus points as the stage winner on March 11 to take over.

### Football Zimbabwe banned from FIFA World Cup

Zimbabwe have been thrown out of the African qualifying competition for the 2018 World Cup in Russia over an outstanding debt, football's governing body FIFA announced on March 12.

The Zimbabwe federation owe an "exceptional debt" to Brazilian former national coach Valinhos and were ordered by FIFA in 2012 to pay the money owed since 2008.

Disciplinary proceedings against ZIFA were opened and the deadline for paying the debt had now expired, FIFA explained.

### Skiing Matt calls it a day

Austrian slalom specialist Mario Matt, the Sochi Olympic champion, has announced his retirement, a month before his 36<sup>th</sup> birthday.

"I've decided to bring my career to an end," Matt told a press conference in the western Austrian resort of Sankt Anton, where he won the first of his two world titles in 2001 at the age of 20.

Matt has been plagued by recurrent injuries and has only managed to

finish three of the eight slaloms he has started this season, his best showing being a 12<sup>th</sup>-place finish in Kitzbuehel.

He won a second slalom world title in 2007 and took bronze in the 2013 worlds in Schladming before his surprise Olympic victory last year.

### Sailing Ocean Race crash report calls for standards overhaul

An independent report into the crash of Volvo Ocean Race boat, Vestas Wind, on an Indian Ocean reef has recommended an overhaul of navigational charting in offshore racing to prevent a similar incident in the future.

The Danish boat's crew miraculously avoided serious injury when they collided with the reef at St Brandon on November 29 last year at around 40kph and span 180 degrees before coming to a halt, grounded.

The vessel was badly damaged and the crew was forced to abandon it in the pitch darkness and wade to the safety of a nearby large rock in shark-infested waters before being rescued at first light by coastguards.

A retired Australian Navy rear admiral, Chris Oxenbould, headed the report's panel of three, which revealed its findings on March 11 in a global media call.

It found that a failure by the crew to spot the reef on onboard electronic navigational guides was to blame and has recommended that industry standards of charting, both electronic and paper, be improved.

## 2018 FIFA World Cup qualification

### Asian Football Confederation First Round

THE Road to Russia got under way on March 12 as the 12 lowest-ranked footballing nations in Asia competed for a chance to join the likes of Japan, Australia, Iran and Myanmar in the group stages of the Asian qualification route. The games are two-legged affairs, with the return fixtures scheduled for March 17.

Timor-Leste	4-1	Mongolia
National Stadium, Dili		
Cambodia	3-0	Macau
Army Stadium, Phnom Penh		
Chinese Taipei	0-1	Brunei
National Stadium, Kaohsiung		
Sri Lanka	0-1	Bhutan
Sugathadasa Stadium, Colombo		
India	0-0*	Nepal
Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium, Guwahati		
Yemen	0-0*	Pakistan
Grand Hamad Stadium, Doha (Qatar)		

\* Results correct as of going to print.

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Formula 1 Preview

# Sauber lose driver appeal

SAUBER faced contempt of court action on March 12 after failing to overturn an order that Giedo van der Garde must drive for them at the Australian Grand Prix.

In a fast-moving sequence of events, the Swiss outfit were told to hand over a list of their assets on the morning of March 13 to ensure they comply with the court ruling.

Sauber earlier lost their appeal against a Victoria Supreme Court order forcing them to honour a deal with former reserve driver van der Garde.

Van der Garde claims Sauber renege on an agreement that he would race for them this season when they opted for heavily sponsored drivers Felipe Nasr and Marcus Ericsson instead.

The legal row has badly disrupted Sauber's preparations for the new season, with their driver line-up still unknown. Jim Peters QC said Sauber had made no effort to reinstate van der Garde, and sought to seize the team's cars to ensure they complied with the court's ruling.

"We did not consider this course [the appeal] to be in the interest of justice," the judges said in a statement. Sauber argued that it would be un-

safe to let van der Garde drive in Sunday's race at such short notice, in unfamiliar cars which are specially tailored to their drivers.

There is no practical way we can allow [and] facilitate Mr. van der Garde in this new C34 Ferrari which he has not previously raced," the team's lawyer Rodney Garratt told the appeal judges.

It was not clear whether safety concerns will now weigh on whether van der Garde can drive ahead of today's official practice.

"These events are highly regulated. We proceed on the assumption that the regulators will ensure that all safety requirements are complied with," Justice Simon Whelan told the court.

Formula One's race director Charlie Whiting said that van der Garde did not hold the required super licence, but he did not rule out his ability to get one in time.

"All I'm saying is that there are procedures that are dealt with through the team, through the ASN [national sporting authority] of the driver concerned and the FIA in Geneva."

"The safety department in Geneva deal with that." - AFP

## IN BRIEF

### Ricciardo says he will contest Mercedes might

Daniel Ricciardo says Red Bull have confidence, reliability and "a plan" to beat the Mercedes pair Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg in the new Formula One season, starting with the March 15 Australian Grand Prix.

Ricciardo spectacularly launched his 2014 season by finishing second in Melbourne, only for officials to disqualify him over a technical infringement.

Twelve months on and Red Bull are in a better place after testing and ready to throw down the gauntlet to Mercedes, he said.

"If you look back on last year for sure we're in a better position this year," Ricciardo said.

"We're coming here this weekend with a lot more confidence and reliability and we've actually got a plan for Sunday where last year it was a case of putting the car on the track and hope to see the chequered flag."

### Hamilton hopes to match hero

World champion Lewis Hamilton on March 12 said he was already dreaming of emulating the late Formula One great

Ayrton Senna by winning his third drivers' title this season.

Hamilton, racing with dominant team Mercedes, is the pre-season favourite and he said it had been his ambition since childhood to match his "favourite driver".

"I would say that I always wanted to do what Ayrton did," the 30-year-old Briton told reporters in Melbourne ahead of the year's first race, the Australian Grand Prix.

### Vettel says he'll be fine with Finn

Four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel Thursday played down fears he could fall out with new teammate Kimi Raikkonen after his big switch to Ferrari this season.

Vettel moved from Red Bull, where he struggled behind Australian Daniel Ricciardo as Mercedes romped away with both the drivers and constructors world titles last year.

The German has had trouble in the past with teammates, notably Australian Mark Webber, but he does not believe there will be any issues with the sometimes surly Raikkonen.

"To be honest, no. I've known Kimi now

for a while. I think we respect each other. He's very straightforward, honest which I appreciate for a lot," Vettel said of the Finn.

### Button won't push for fourth Aussie victory

Jenson Button has won three Australian Formula One Grands Prix but said March 12 he will not be adding a fourth title with McLaren in this weekend's season-opening race.

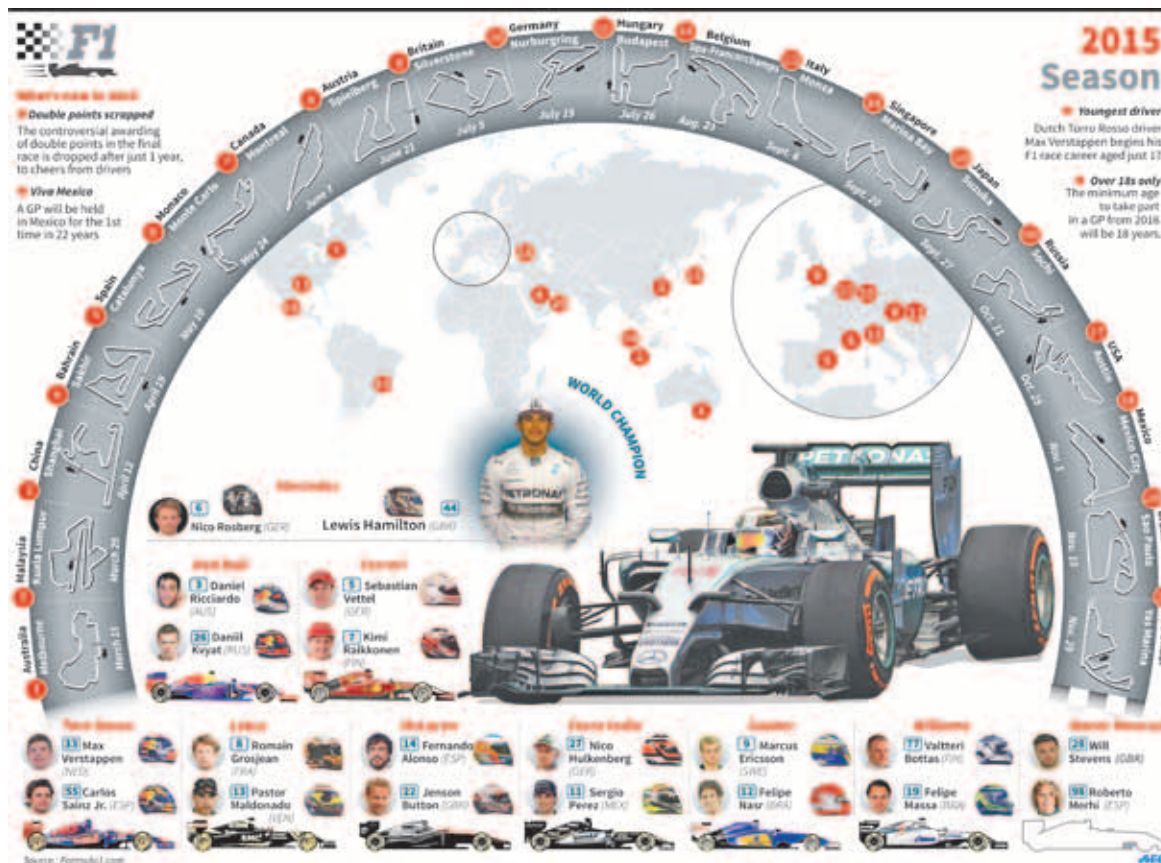
The British 2009 world champion admitted his McLaren-Honda had not done enough testing in pre-season to challenge for the podium.

"Will we be challenging for a win? No, we won't be," Button told reporters.

"It's just going to take time... This weekend for us is more about just getting the best out of everything that we have."

Button said they were a year behind in development compared to the Mercedes, Ferrari and Renault engines. But he felt it would not be long until the team was challenging.

"If you look at the layout of the power unit and how tight everything is in the car, you would say it's very aggressive and you can see that Honda is here to win." - AFP



# New kids on the F1 grid

### MAX VERSTAPPEN (NED/Tororo Rosso)

Will become on March 15 at 17 years and 166 days the youngest-ever F1 driver, smashing Jaime Alguersuari's six-year-old record by almost two years. Born the same year Jacques Villeneuve clinched the world title, Verstappen comes from good F1 stock as his dad is former pilot Jos and mum Sophie a successful kart driver. Ten victories and 16 podiums in F3 last season was enough for Tororo Rosso to pick up the phone.

### WILL STEVENS (GBR/Manor)

The Englishman acted as this team's test driver when it competed as Marussia last term, and made his F1 debut in the 2014 season-closing race in Abu Dhabi, replacing Marcus Ericsson for Caterham, steering his car into 17th and last. Earned his shot in the fast lane after advancing his claims in Formula Renault and before that karting.

### CARLOS SAINZ JUNIOR (ESP/TORORO ROSSO)

The son of ex-world rally champ Carlos has inherited his father's love of horse-

power. Youngest Formula Renault 3.5 champion in 2014 with seven wins. Red Bull were already tracking his potential giving him a series of tests in 2013.

### ROBERTO MERHI (ESP/Manor)

Unveiled only on March 10 as Stevens' partner to the team that has risen from the financial ashes of Marussia. Joins Fernando Alonso and Carlos Sainz junior as the third Spaniard on the 2015 grid. "I am happy because they have bet on me purely for my talent," said the 23-year-old who won the 2011 European F3 title.

### FELIPE NASR (BRA/Sauber)

The 22-year-old who impressed in pre-season testing joins another Brazilian, former Sauber driver Felipe Massa, on the grid. He takes inspiration from another of his countrymen, the late F1 great Ayrton Senna. "Being Brazilian I learned so many things about him as a driver as a person on and off the track, so many videos, documentaries, I enjoyed watching him. I would put him as my idol," says the Banco do Brazil-backed Nasr who worked as test and reserve driver for Williams in 2014. - AFP

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# Sport

## Formula One season under starter's orders

SPORT 34



### FOOTBALL

# Yadanarbon continue Cup woes

MATT ROEBUCK

**Y**ADANARBON FC fell to a second AFC Cup defeat on March 11 as they were beat 3-1 by Hong Kong's South China at the Mong Kong Stadium.

The Mandalay side's only consolation was a late goal from Zaw Lynn Tun but a home win next week against the Philippine's Global FC will now be vital if Yadanarbon, who sit bottom of Group G, are to have any hope of progressing.

South China on the other hand are in a strong position to advance after starting the competition with a 6-1 rout of Global FC in the Philippines before adding this win.

"South China is the best team in our group and this was the correct result.

The difference between the two teams was the performance of the players and we struggled in the match," said Yadanarbon coach Kyi Lin.

Bizarrely it seemed that the Yadanarbon team had arrived in Hong Kong ill-prepared for what would await them.

"Our team has a big problem with the wet weather and pitch, as our players had boots that were not appropriate for the conditions."

South China dominated the game and had effectively killed off the game by half time as they went into the changing rooms three goals to the good courtesy of a 13<sup>th</sup>-minute strike from Lo Kong Wai, a Mahama Awal finish in the 19<sup>th</sup> and Australian Daniel McBreen, the top scorer in Australia's A-League, heading home on 38 minutes.

Yadanarbon FC came out for the sec-

ond half showing fight and a powerful header in the 47<sup>th</sup> minute from Nigerian centre-half Happiness Okpechi almost brought his side back into the game.

But it took until two minutes from time until Zaw Lynn Tun's head made a nominal impact on the scoresheet for the visitors.

"We conceded a late goal but that's only because our players still want to score, so it's not a problem about the players' concentration," said South China coach Mario Gomez.

Yadanarbon managed to salvage some pride two minutes before the end of normal time, Zaw Lynn Tun nodding past Mora's despairing dive after confusion in the South China box.

In Group G's other game Global FC recovered from their heavy home defeat at the hands of South China to pick up

Pos	AFC Cup Group G	Pld	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
1	South China	2	2	0	0	9	2	+7	6
2	Pahang	2	1	1	0	3	2	+1	4
3	Global	2	0	1	1	1	6	-5	1
4	Yadanarbon	2	0	0	2	3	6	-3	0

an away point in a goalless draw with Malaysia's Pahang FA.

Global defended heartily against an onslaught of attacks from their hosts and even created chances to take the lead. "We're very happy and we showed that we can play at this level," said Global coach Dan Padernal in the press

conference after.

In Group H, where Myanmar's other representatives to the AFC Cup, MFF Cup winners Ayeyawady FC picked up a 1-1 draw with Indonesian champions Persib Bandung and the Maldives New Radiant SC beat Lao Toyota FC 2-1.

A late penalty from Radiant skipper captain Ashad Ali saw the Maldivian champions bounce back from their opening game 4-1 defeat suffered away from home to Persib Bandung.

"Our main target was to win the game and we are happy to achieve that. It was an important win for us," said Radiant's caretaker coach Ahmed Hameed after the game.

His opposite number, former Myanmar coach David Booth, focused on his side's lack of concentration as the game progressed.

"In the first half we played very well but things were different in the second half as we made some silly mistakes after taking the lead," he said in the post-match press conference.

Ayeyawady coach Marjun Sekulovski will take note as his side prepares to travel to Male for a March 18 match-up.

"The Maldives is even hotter and more humid than Myanmar," said Sekulovski as he looked forward to the game in his own post-match conference.

"When I last took an Ayeyawady team to the Maldives we attacked too much in the first half. We played very well but at half-time the players were lying on the dressing room floor begging to be substituted," he added.

"We lost power and we lost the match. I will use that experience and arrive with good tactics and preparation and hopefully leave with a good result."

## U22s go down by nine

MATT ROEBUCK  
matt.d.roebuck@gmail.com

THE road to an Olympic return for the Myanmar men's football team seemed a long way off when the U22 national team were soundly thrashed 9-0 following first-half hat tricks from Musashi Suzuki and Shoya Nakajima at the Fukuda Denshi Arena on March 11.

The game was part of the Young White Angels preparations for the upcoming 2016 Olympic qualifiers in Taiwan, where they will face Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong and Australia on March 27, 29 and 31 respectively.

The Taiwan tournament acts as qualification for the AFC U23 Championship to be held next January in Qatar, from which the top three sides will qualify for the Rio Games.

Myanmar last graced the Olympic stage when - as Burma - they took home the FIFA Fairplay Award from the 1972 Munich Games.



Yadanarbon's Shine Thuya representing Myanmar challenge's in their 9-0 defeat to Japan. Photo: MFF/Facebook

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# WEEKEND

THE MYANMAR TIMES MAGAZINE MARCH 13 - 19, 2015, ISSUE 01



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Meet the ghosts who guard buried treasure

## A happy medium

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A woman's face is smeared with coloured powder during the Holi Festival in Assam state, India, on March 6. Holi is a riotous celebration of the coming of spring and falls on the day after the full moon in March each year. Revellers spray coloured powder and water on each other with great gusto, while adults extend the hand of peace.  
Photo: AFP

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TIMEPIECES





# Pumpkin plus pigeon equals death?

BY ZON PANN PWINT

**D**EATH comes in many guises and has many causes, but few paths to eternity are more unlikely than eating pea roots with a side of chocolate. Or egg with watermelon. These are some of the bizarre food combinations that, at least in local superstition, should be avoided on pain of death.

Dr Htein Lin, deputy director of the Nutrition Department under the Health Department, says these fears are groundless. When he was studying at Institute of Medicine, he made a bet with his friend that he could drink yogurt and lemon, another supposedly deadly combination, and survive. His friend lost the bet.

Despite the scientific proof that Dr Htein Lin supplied, many people still believe that sprinkling sugar on mangosteen, or mixing pumpkin with pigeon, is dicing with death. At food markets the careful consumer can consult charts that purport to warn against these fatal mixtures, complete with illustrations. But the charts bear the imprint of no public health organisation, just the name of the printing house.



**"If we want to eat pigeon we have to catch it ourselves."**

Dr Htein Lin

"Throughout my career as a doctor, I have never treated a patient who has been struck down by eating a forbidden combination of foods, and nor has any other doctor I know," said Dr Htein Lin.

One chart that is sold in the market warns against the following combinations: sea shells and beef; parrot and gourd; mushroom and frog; crab and mushroom; and pork with any other meat.

"There is no sense in the food combinations. For example, take pumpkin and pigeon. Pigeon is not part of our normal diet and it is not

available in the market. If we want to eat pigeon, we have to catch it ourselves," he said.

He confirmed that the charts are not produced by the Health Department.

"They aren't based on the evidence. Many of these combinations are just not part of normal diet," he said.

Some charts, perhaps striving for a more scientific approach, no longer threaten consumers with actual death. "They said these combinations could cause indigestion, asthma or dizziness," he said. "From an ethical point of view you can hardly test people to determine whether this is true or not."

Not everyone needs science. Yangon resident Khine Thizar, 26, has shunned suspicious food combinations since two girls of his acquaintance died after eating tapioca and preserved plums together in their native Kyaiklat, Ayeayawady Region.

"Even in kindergarten we were taught that eating watermelon and egg can cause death. My mother warned me against it. You won't catch me trying some of these combinations," he said.

Dr Christoph Gelsdorf, MD, a member of the General Practitioner Society of the Myanmar Medical Association, said Western medical training is silent on the subject.

"Perhaps these food combinations come from Ayurvedic medicine traditions introduced in Myanmar from centuries of cross-migration with the Indian sub-continent," he said, adding that he has no objection to his patients observing these traditions as long as it does not affect their health.

"I don't have the medical evidence or the right to recommend for or against. But when traditional beliefs conflict with Western medicine, I have to have a much more serious discussion with patients about my own beliefs and theirs so we can make a healthy choice together," he said.

Dr Gelsdorf said he is not aware of anyone dying because of any of these combinations. ■



# Shabushi Buffet



BY CHARLOTTE ROSE

**A**S wise men from Hippocrates to Stevie Wonder have said, "Life is short." And just as there are too many books to be read to spend time reading anything about Kim Kardashian or her posterior, there is too much good food to be eaten to waste precious stomach acid on ubiquitous chain restaurant food.

Or so I thought. Shabushi is not only a chain, it's the worst kind of chain: the kind that is located in a shopping mall food court. But this is Yangon and, as Yangon food courts go, Junction Square's new "Secret Garden" is something of a novelty. Without the customary offerings of fried chicken and blue iced-donuts, it

feels like taking an escalator into the First World. There are several international restaurants to choose from in the glitzy new building, but Shabushi stands out - in part due to the impressive sushi buffet in the window, but mostly because of the hungry-looking queue of people outside.

The chain is already popular in Thailand, with 95 outlets across the country. Serving both Japanese hotpot and sushi, the all-you-can-eat self-service buffet costs K15,000 per person, including unlimited soft drinks. Diners are seated at tables surrounding the conveyor-belt system and choose from the many delicacies that revolve before them to fill their hot-pots. Tables are fitted with hot plates and pots for the sukiyaki, and there are different broths to choose from.



It's difficult to contain your excitement at the sight of so much food whizzing past you - the raw foods on offer include a range of fresh seafood, vegetables and beef steak. But with stays limited to 75 minutes, my guest and I got down to tactics. The plan? Load up on sushi from the buffet while the hot-pots heat up, and then forgo all carbs or rabbit food in favour of eating as much steak as we could physically manage (I chowed my way through what has to be a medal-worthy 12 plates) before hitting the all-you-can-eat ice cream.

Admittedly, the time limit on seating is a bit of a conversation killer (only a fool would waste time talking when there's so much meat to be eaten) and a visit to Shabushi may feel like an exercise in competitive eating. But the

food is fresh and delicious and, as long as you're prepared to queue, you certainly won't find a more fun chain restaurant than this in Yangon. I'm even willing to admit that I might have been wrong about chains altogether. But don't tell anyone I said that.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to check out the latest on Kim Kardashian's new hair-do. ■

<b>Shabushi Buffet</b>	
Secret Garden food court, Junction Square, Kamaryut township, Yangon	
Restaurant Rating:	
Food	6
Beverage	7
Value	6
X-Factor	9



COOKING WITH PHYO

## Two ways with potatoes

1/8 cup olive oil  
1 teaspoon dried thyme

Cover the potatoes with water in a stock pot, cover with a lid. Boil the potatoes over a high heat until they are cooked. To check if they are cooked, insert the tip of a knife into one of the potatoes - if it slices through easily they are ready. Turn off the heat and leave to cool.

When the potatoes have cooled enough to be handled, peel them and cut into cubes about 2 centimetres in size. Chop each onion into roughly 8 pieces and set aside.

Add the olive oil to a frying pan with the potatoes. Cover the pan with a lid and fry for 2-3 minutes before tossing the potatoes to ensure they are covered with oil. Fry for a further 3 minutes. Next, add the chopped onions to the frying pan along with thyme. Cover with the lid and turn the heat down to medium. Fry the ingredients for 2-3 minutes, tossing them occasionally.

Remove the lid and fry for 3-4 more minutes or until the potatoes are crisp and golden.

Season with salt and ground black pepper to taste.

Season with salt and ground black pepper to taste.

**Potato, leek and bacon frittata**  
6 servings  
180g bacon strips (alternatively, you can use sliced pork belly)

300g potatoes (10 medium potatoes)  
2 medium leeks  
4 eggs

Beat the eggs with a couple of pinches of salt and some black pepper until they become frothy. Cut the white parts of the leeks into 4 pieces each.

Wash the potatoes and prick them all over with a fork. Lay a sheet of kitchen paper on the plate inside the microwave and place the potatoes on top, covering them with another sheet of kitchen paper. Set the cooking time on the microwave for 10 minutes, but return to check on the potatoes after 5 minutes as cooking time can vary according to the size and variety of the potatoes and the power of the microwave. To check if they are cooked, insert the tip of a knife into one of the potatoes - if it slices through easily they are ready. Cook for a further 2-3 minutes if necessary before checking again. When the potatoes are cooked, leave them to cool before cutting them into small cubes.

Alternatively, you could boil the potatoes as above.

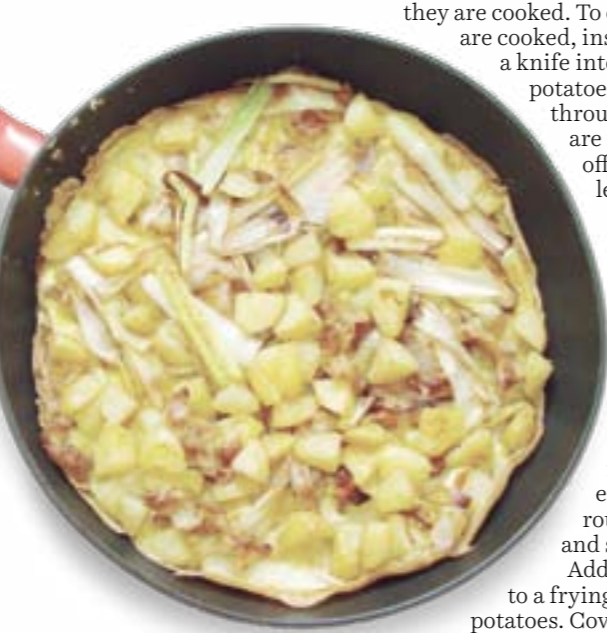
Add the bacon strips to a frying pan and fry until they become crisp. Transfer the bacon on to a plate covered with kitchen paper to absorb the excess fat, and pour the rest of the bacon fat left in the pan into a bowl.

Fry the potatoes in a frying pan with 1 1/4 tablespoons of the bacon fat for 3-4 minutes. Transfer them on to a plate. Next, fry the leeks with 1 tablespoon of bacon fat. Cover the frying pan with a lid and fry for 3 more minutes, turning the leeks occasionally.

When the leeks are soft and cooked through, transfer them onto a plate. Add the potatoes and bacon back into the frying pan, arranging them to cover the base of the pan. Pour the beaten eggs over the top and ensure they spread to cover the whole of the pan.

Sprinkle the fried leeks over the egg and cover the pan with a lid. Cook over a low to medium heat for 3-4 minutes or until the eggs are cooked through.

Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Serve warm. ■



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# Thirteen dreams interpreted

BY ZON PANN PWINT

ACCORDING to dream expert Daw Khin Yadanar Sint, most dreams merely signal your obsession with something, and present no difficulties of interpretation. But, she says, some dreams are clearly prophetic. She lists here some of the more commonplace dreams, with her explanation.



If you are climbing a mountain, you will become the centre of attention.



If you see a pagoda and a Buddhist stupa, the spirits will take care of you and bless you.



If you suffer torture, you will enjoy good luck wherever you go.



If you eat a human head, you will rise to fame and fortune.



If you are bitten by a snake, someone will cheat you.



Any friend or relative appearing in your dream beautifully dressed is likely to fall ill.



If your tooth is broken, you will be transferred from one place to another.



If you see a tiger, someone is hatching a plot to trap you.



If you are sitting on a broken chair, you will marry a divorcee.



If the violin you are playing is broken, some misunderstanding will occur between you and your spouse. (Note: You do not have to be the one playing the violin. It could be someone else. The result is the same.)



If you eat ginger and chilli, you will be promoted and will soon become rich.



If you are bitten by a bat, your property will suffer damage or loss. (Warning: At worst, this could mean the loss of a friend or relative.)



## Beauty tips to believe in

BY NYEIN EI EI HTWE

YOU can't be too careful. For those who take their folk wisdom seriously, there is a thicket of rules that must be followed in order to avoid being dogged by bad luck, or worse. Today, Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, anxious triskaidekaphobes would do well, or at least avoid doing ill, to bear the following 13 simple rules in mind. As many local people will tell you, it's just common sense.

- Don't get your hair cut on your birthday, or on Friday or Monday.
- Don't wash your hair on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays or Fridays.
- Don't clip your nails at night - it allows ghosts to enter the house.
- Never whistle after dark.
- Don't sweep out the trash in front of house during the day - save it until the night time.
- Ghosts will haunt anyone who goes out at night with unkempt hair.
- Being asleep when the sun sets will make you sick.
- Stay away from trees at night, as demons lurk there.
- Wash dishes immediately after eating; leaving dirty dishes in the sink could have serious consequences.
- Refrain from clashing earthenware cooking-pot lids together as if they were cymbals, unless you want to get bitten by a tiger.
- Passing under a rope where longis are set out to dry will, obviously, sap your powers.
- Above all, do not play hide and seek at night. You may never be found.

In fact, we have only set out 12 of the 13 rules. As I said, you can't be too careful.



## Statement earrings

Ok, so unless you plan on joining a travelling sideshow you probably won't want to steal the complete look, but when it comes to accessorising, trust us: fortune-teller chic is the way to go. Statement earrings are always in style so we've looked into our crystal ball to bring you our pick of the best.

Model: Poe Ei Ei Set, Photographer: Phone Myint (NTT). With thanks to NOW! magazine.



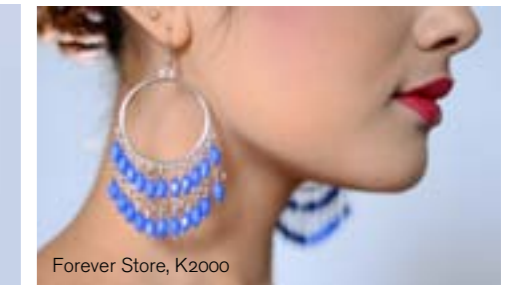
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Pomelo, K12,000



## Myanmar's beauty secret

While the rest of the world goes crazy for the latest SPF wonder creams in an effort to keep themselves looking youthful, the people of Myanmar continue to look no further than thanaka for their skincare needs. But does it really work? *Weekend's* skincare and beauty expert **Soe San Da Yi Myint** gives us the lowdown on Myanmar's oldest beauty secret.

AN old Asian proverb says, "The world's most beautiful women have a Thai smile, Indian eyes and Myanmar skin." For more than 2000 years, Myanmar women have relied on a preparation made from natural tree-bark, thanaka, to protect their skin.

But as the country opens up to foreign imports, including pharmaceuticals, it's becoming clearer that thanaka's age-old reputation will make you sick.

Stay away from trees at night, as demons lurk there. Wash dishes immediately after eating; leaving dirty dishes in the sink could have serious consequences.

Refrain from clashing earthenware cooking-pot lids together as if they were cymbals, unless you want to get bitten by a tiger. Passing under a rope where longis are set out to dry will, obviously, sap your powers. Above all, do not play hide and seek at night. You may never be found.

Multinational cosmetics corporations that mount seductive advertising campaigns may soon start to challenge ancient regimens like thanaka. Despite the intense competition, at the end of the day people of any gender, age, or appearance should wear what makes them feel their best, whether it is thanaka or modern cosmetics. After all, self-confidence is a great boost for the complexion.

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# Spreading the word about dolphins in danger

International school students in Mandalay work to protect Irrawaddy dolphins

BY STUART ALAN BECKER

**S**TUDENTS at Ayeayawady International School in Mandalay have taken up the cause of saving the Irrawaddy dolphin, studying the threats the endangered species faces and working to raise public awareness.

The project came about when 5<sup>th</sup>-grade teacher Steve Wagonseller's class received Thant Zin, the ecotourism manager of the Myanmar's Wildlife Conservation Society, a few weeks ago.

As a result of Thant Zin's presentation, the students prepared artwork to illustrate the problems of electric-shock fishing, agricultural pollution, mining and other threats to the unique species.

While there is a storied tradition of good relationships between Ayeayawady River fishermen and the dolphins - including many accounts of the river mammals cooperating with fishermen to herd the fish toward the nets - the dolphins also get killed when fishermen use electricity to shock



Mie Mie Ko, 12, displays her drawing depicting the dangers facing Irrawaddy dolphins. Photo: Stuart Alan Becker

**“We also want to say the dolphin is the symbol and the mascot of our school. The fishermen are killing them because they can get their work done more easily, so we want to put a stop to that.”**

Aye Aye Chan Thar, Ayeayawady International School student

and stun the fish.

The students see this practice as a primary threat.

Student Aye Phye Chan Thar, 12, said the dolphin was a proud symbol of the river.

“We also want to say the dolphin is the symbol and the mascot of our school. The fishermen are killing them because they can get their work done more easily, so we want to put a stop to that, not just electrical fishing but gill nets too,” she said.

“We were thinking of going and talking to the fishermen to reason with them not to kill the dolphins. They accidentally kill them because they use electrical fishing, and the dolphins mistake the electrical fishing for normal fishing.”

The 20 students in the class made artwork presentations to illustrate the importance of protecting the dolphins.

“It is hard for the dolphins to reproduce. They have no safe place,” said student La Yaung Lin. Thant Zin from the Wildlife Conservation Society said that with the help of Myanmar's Department of Fisheries, an estimated 65 dolphins were identified as living in the stretch of river between Bhamo and Mandalay.

Thant Zin and others involved in protecting the dolphins have a project area from Kyau Myaung to Mingun, which is a popular area for fishermen and where the estimated number of dolphins is 23.

He said the dolphins have a habit of heading for the fishermen's boats, swimming around but not coming too close.

“Mostly they live in the sand banks,” he said.

Dolphin pairs have a single baby, and both parents stay with the young dolphin for about two years. They grow to between 2 and 2.5 metres (6.5-8.2 feet) in length.

Last month, money was provided to fishermen as a way of promoting ecotourism and protecting the dolphins.

“Electric fishing is against the law,” Thant Zin said. “Last year two small baby dolphins died, one by electric fishing and another one by chemical poisoning. Near the

riverbanks, farmers are planting peanuts or corn, and they apply chemical insecticides which get into the water. We examined a baby dolphin's liver and it was chequered, indicating chemical poisoning.”

He added that gold mining also created pressure for the dolphins. Teacher Steve Wagonseller said the students did not have to wait until they were older to do something important.

“We are in school to learn about life,” he said. “Myanmar is your heritage and your land. You have to do it yourself. We want students who are responsible and community-oriented so they learn not only what lessons are about, but how lessons can be used.”

# Why are buildings still made without a 13<sup>th</sup> floor?

BY PATRICK CLARK

**I**F on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, you get on a plane, or trade a stock, or drive your car through an intersection, congratulations. You're too logical for medieval superstitions.

If you're not, you're in the good company of New York's boldest real estate developers. Twelve centuries after the Omens of Charlemagne's

Death, they are still labelling the floor that comes after 12 as 14.

Less than 10 percent of Manhattan condominiums with 13 or more stories actually label a floor with the dreaded number, said Gabby Warshawer, director of research at data and listings company CityRealty. That's an estimate based on 650 mid- and high-rise buildings that have filed condo declarations with New York City since 2003, including luxury



towers going up right now, such as 53 W 53<sup>rd</sup> and 225 W 57<sup>th</sup> streets.

A spokesperson for elevator maker Otis International estimated that 85pc of US buildings with more than 13 floors skipped the unlucky number. Otis's current press office couldn't confirm that stat.

And builders seem to be getting more superstitious, not less. Newer buildings seem even likelier to skip 13 than older ones, Warshawer said.

Bad luck seems like a bigger deal at the higher end of the Manhattan market, confounding expectations that a person who spends US\$10 million for a couple of thousand square feet of midair real estate should be a data-driven rationalist.

Warshawer cautioned that her data set of 650 condos may be too varied for firm conclusions. “You can't make too much sense out of an irrational superstition,” she said.

Why are the titans who borrow scary sums to erect towers that defy gravity and wind currents afraid to number the 13<sup>th</sup> floor? “Marketing people want to appeal to the largest audience,” said Jacqueline Urgo, president of the Marketing



Directors, a New York real estate consultancy that helps developers make these kinds of decisions. Most people don't mind living on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor, just like most people don't mind sitting in the 13<sup>th</sup> row of an airplane. But there's nothing gained by shrinking the potential market, Urgo said.

Here's another theory: Pulling a number out of the floor plan serves to make a building seem taller. Prices for 13<sup>th</sup>-floor apartments, the handful of them that exist, don't sell at a discount, according to Jonathan Miller, chief executive of appraisal firm Miller Samuel and a contributor to Bloomberg View. But apartments on higher floor numbers command higher prices.

“From a marketing standpoint, it's pretty powerful,” he said. “The taller you get, the thinner the competition is. If you're on the 90<sup>th</sup> floor, there are only a handful of units.”

Patrick Kwan, 33, a Chinese American who lives in a new apartment complex in Midtown, thought it was funny that his modern digs, where tenants can request concierge services by iPhone app, doesn't have a 13<sup>th</sup> floor. Then again, he wasn't willing to live on the fourth or 14<sup>th</sup> floor, because those numbers are bad luck in Chinese culture.

“Even if I were OK with being on the fourth or 14<sup>th</sup> floor, I'm sure I would have a lot to deal with from my mom,” he said. —Bloomberg News

# House haunted?

The Ghost Radar Classic app might help identify your invisible guests

**I**F we've learned anything from the proliferation of reality TV shows since the 1990s, it's that we're constantly surrounded by ghosts.

Series like *Ghost Hunters* and *Paranormal State* have pioneered the use of foolproof research methods to demonstrate that our world is crowded with disembodied spirits. But you don't need your own TV show to make contact with these wretched wraiths: Mobile technology now allows everyone to enjoy DIY ghost hunting.

Last month I tried my own hand at haunt-hounding, and after some online research I settled on the Ghost Radar Classic app - mostly because it was free and easy to download (spudpickles.com/app/ghost-radar-classic/).

According to the website, Ghost Radar Classic uses “various sensors” to detect paranormal activity, which it displays as blips on a radar readout. The colours of the blips indicate signal strength: Red is the strongest, followed by yellow, green and blue in descending order of poltergeistical potency.

Further, “The entities you are trying to interact with can manipulate the sensors and have Ghost Radar speak their words”, and the app helpfully displays a readout of these spectral communiqués.

I conducted the first experiment at my apartment. I turned on Ghost Radar and, sure enough, a red blip soon appeared, indicating that someone was behind the sofa where I was sitting.

The first word spoken through the app was “colony”. This was followed by the name “John” and the word “potatoes” - an unmistakable reference to the spud-laden curry I had just eaten for dinner. “John” then uttered “molecules” before going silent.

It can be concluded that my intangible roommate is a food-mooching, colonial-era spirit named John who, in life, was engaged in chemical or biological research.

Easy enough.

The second test occurred during a weekend trip to secluded Lethkhookon Beach south of Yangon. After sunset, I sat on the balcony of my bungalow and flipped on my trusty apparition-appraising app.

Spirits aplenty wandered the grassy lawn in front of the hotel, but for a long time none of them said anything, making me feel like a wallflower at a supernatural garden party.

The chatter eventually started, but nothing caught my attention until I heard “we're” plus “officers”, and after a short pause the words “Indian”, “trial” and “crops”. The plot thickened when my vaporous interlocutor pronounced the names “Lee” and “Bill” - evidently the real culprits in the farmland felony for which the Indian officers were framed and brought to trial.

I felt like that kid in *The Sixth Sense* who was tasked by a ghost with dropping by a funeral and revealing that the dead girl had been poisoned by her mother: In uncovering the horrible truth about Lee and Bill's nefarious deception, perhaps I - with more investigation and technical support from Ghost Radar Classic - might be able to free the Indian officers from their ectoplasmic existence.

Ghost Radar is an excellent way to expand your circle of supernatural acquaintances. It can also give your life new purpose by calling your attention to long-forgotten mysteries, which you can solve on your own or as part of a group of meddling kids.

On a more technical level, Ghost Radar was well-attuned to English-speaking ghosts but seemed incapable of picking up chatter in other languages. Alternate conclusions would be that the app is equipped with a built-in translator, or that English is the official language of the undead. ■

—Douglas Long



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# Seers of fortune

Yangon's street-side astrologers, palmists and tarot card readers are still in demand by customers eager to know what surprises the fates hold in store for them

BY NYEIN EI EI HTWE

**U**NDER the hot sun, on the fringes of downtown Yangon's Mahabandoola Park, a man is sitting reading the paper while he waits to open his stall. His workplace is decorated with larger-than-life images of palms, showing the networks of lines and cross-hatchings that palmists decipher so they can predict a customer's fate.

U Min Khant Kyaw, a street palmist in Yangon for 10 years, has also taken his profession on the road. For years he went from village to village setting up his stall in various parts of the country.

"You can gain greatly in experience by observing different customs in different places. Besides, villagers are more honest - though, unfortunately, not so wealthy," he said.

He would ask from K3000 to K5000 for each reading, but most villagers could not afford the cost of enlightenment. Astrologers and palmists used to do good business at rural pagoda festivals, but storefront rentals are high.

"When rents went up, we had to raise our fees too, but you can't charge more than the market will bear. So in the end I decided to stay in Yangon," he said.

An artist should be above such financial considerations. But a man has to live.

U Min Khant Kyaw, now 51 years old, learned his present trade from the master U Myat Moe Aung. "I'd turned my hand to many things. When I got laid off from my last job, I ran into a palmist who became my teacher," he said.

At first a sceptic, U Min Khant Kyaw was surprised to find that his new teacher could tell him a great deal about his own life and history just by examining his palm. He began to practise the art himself, studying the theory in books, until the day that U Myat Moe Aung told him he was ready to hit the street.

"I was very nervous, but I also wanted to show off my learning. I took a seat near Sule Pagoda. A man came up to me and asked me to tell his fortune. I read the answers in his palm," he recalled.

Since that first success, he has never looked back. Losing interest in more mundane jobs, he decided to become a fulltime palmist. He learned a great deal from his clients, both good and bad.

"Some customers told me my reading was not 100 percent correct, but I reckon 70pc accuracy rate is a reasonable target," said U Min Khant Kyaw.

He is aware that some might look down on a man who earns his living by working on the street, and that some practitioners boast considerable shop-fronts. "When you read in the paper about some wonderful fortune teller, it's usually

someone sitting at a desk," he says. "We street practitioners don't resent them, but most of us are just seers of fortune for the working day, living on the strength of our predictions. We don't lie. But nobody is permitted to see the whole picture."

Fortune teller U Aung Myin Kyaw, whose own personal window on the future is Myanmar traditional astrology, disparages many palmists as con-artists chasing a quick kyat, who deserve their questionable reputation. "Some palmists are really great, but public opinion is against them because so many customers have been cheated," he said, adding that U Min Khant Kyaw's 70pc rule-of-thumb is about right.

U Aung Myin Kyaw studied astrology while he was at university, majoring in Myanmar literature, from a teacher who was a well-known monk at Shwedagon Pagoda. For many years he pounded the beat as a policeman, working his way up to chief of police at a township by the time he retired.

"I used to practise on the prisoners, and on my fellow officers," he said.

After leaving the police, he worked as a tourist guide in Yangon, supplementing his income by predicting his visitors' futures after inquiring their date birth and time.

He considers his greatest feat of astrology was to predict, even before US President Obama's first inaugural in January 2009, that he would be re-elected to a second term.

"I wanted to cast horoscopes for people all over the world.



"Some customers told me my reading was not 100 percent correct, but I reckon 70pc accuracy rate is a reasonable target."

U Min Khant Kyaw

When Obama was elected I found his stars confirmed that he would win re-election. I sent my predictions to *The Myanmar Times* as evidence, and it came true," said U Aung Myin Kyaw happily.

His sense of professionalism is offended by swindlers who masquerade as palmists or astrologers, preying on the gullibility of the client. He blames them for bringing the art into disrepute by their failures.

"I hate those liars who pretend to tell fortunes. False predictions cause bad omens," he said, adding that the government should promote the art of traditional astrology.

"As a culture, we don't always pass on our traditions, and important knowledge can get lost," he warned.

Tarot card reader U Hein Latt - who has published five books on the subject, including *Beyond the Cards*, *Behind the Cards* - said that just knowing the "meaning" of the cards was not enough to give accurate readings.

"We cannot know the deeper connotations of a reading if we only know the general meaning of the cards," he said.

"Tarot card readers need to develop their intuition and their sixth sense, which will help them to really understand to significance of the cards. This means opening the third invisible eye between the two visible eyes."

He added that to tell the future, card readers should be vegetarians who are educated, have a good mind and hold strong religious beliefs.

However, he admitted that no one had the power to know everything about the future.

"Fortune tellers, including tarot card readers, can't know the future for certain, but people always want to know what is coming next for them," U Hein Latt said. "They ask many questions, but we can only give them a few answers." ■



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# Nat dead yet



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Photos:  
 1. Douglas Long  
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BY NANDAR AUNG

**E**VERYBODY knows the thin, pale man who visits the market early every morning. They know he knots his longyi like a woman, and they know how he chatters so vociferously. They know why.

This morning he carries a big green basket and buys chicken and vermicelli so he can make a curry and soup. The meal is not for himself alone. He offers it to his guardian spirit. U Aung Myat Khaing, who lives in North Okkalapa township, is now 50 years old. "I faced a lot of discrimination and difficulties for two decades," he admits. He is a spirit medium, who has bowed to his spirit since he was 17 years old.

Much of his life is spent on the earthly plane. He eats breakfast in a teashop while reading the paper. He watches Korean soap operas on TV while waiting for clients. But the shrine in his home bears the carvings of 37 spirits, and is heaped with offerings of bananas, coconuts and flowers in profusion. His home is also adorned with pictures of his younger self, in nat costume, with face makeup, and with a sash, headband and anklets in gold.

People come to him because they need the assistance of A May Yin (A May Gyi), a powerful spirit from Monywa in Sagaing Region.

"I believe we are a source to connect the spirits with people who have problems," said U Aung Myat Khaing. He makes offerings on their behalf to the 37 spirits recognised in the Myanmar cultural tradition, hoping they will intercede to bring improvements in clients' health, fortune, love life and

more.

Working through U Aung Myat Khaing, the spirit will prophesy. It can also help him interpret the pattern of cowrie shells thrown on the table.

This skill does not come easily. It may require a form of marriage to the spirit, some exposure to spiritual risk and the need to travel around the country attending nat festivals to make offerings.

U Aung Myat Khaing adopted a vegetarian diet, avoids the number 13 and favours Wednesdays as a day for making arrangements. Nevertheless, affording a brief temporal home for a spirit is not an easy thing, he says. His moral character must be impeccable, and his life must be suffused with respect for the spirit and confidence in its powers.

Medium U Tin Win, 48, is also married to his spirit. He has undergone possession and acquired the temporary power to prophesy.

When he was 27, a client sought his help in finding a lost gold necklace. Aware that he could not do this alone, he invited the spirit into his body. "I felt weird and dizzy. My fingers and toes grew cold and my memory went blank," said U Tin Win, describing his first experience of possession. "When I got back my mind, the client told me that I had revealed the location of the necklace" – albeit in riddle form.

"Not on the ground or in the water, nor in the hands of a thief, but placed within something," he was made to say. The client, after a search, found the chain in a cavity below the floor of his house.

As for U Aung Myat Khaing, he was 27 years old before he felt able to choose his personal guardian spirit, drawing on the



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help of his teacher and three experienced mediums.

"I still remember that time. It was the most exciting moment of my life. I had no idea what kind of spirit would come to me," he said.

He prepared for the ceremony by adopting a strict vegetarian diet for a month. Seated amid the traditional offerings of bananas and coconuts linked with a sewing thread, he was attended by four elder spirit mediums who cooled him with red cotton fans. His teacher bore four cups, each inscribed with the name of a famous spirit: Ko Gyi Kyaw, A May Yin, the Taungbyone nats and A May Gyan. Blindfolded, U Aung Myat Khaing chose a cup: A May Yin.

Such rituals are becoming rarer, says medium U Ko Lay, 48, of Kyaiklat township, Pyapon District, Ayeyarwady Region. "Meditation centres are proliferating and some people don't believe in spirits anymore," he said.

But Aung Myat Khaing, U Tin Win and their colleagues do not believe their way of life is passing from the scene, nor do they fear for the place that reverence for the spirits holds in the life of the people.

Spirit worship is not as common in mainstream society as it once was, although among Buddhists it remains one of the most highly developed forms of ceremony and ritual. But young Buddhists often don't believe in the spirit tradition. On the other hand, visiting foreigners sometimes adopt it.

Australian Bob Percival said, "I'm not superstitious, but when I arrived here I could see that many people were. I bought some beautiful carved wooden nats from Mandalay, and I was told that you have to give them water and flowers every day to avoid bad luck. So I do." ■



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# You can't take it with you

## Seeking treasure and its undead guardians on Daysompar Pagoda Hill

BY DOUGLAS LONG

**P**ICK any pagoda in Myanmar and it's almost certain to have extraordinary legends attached to it.

One site in particular kept popping up in conversations with Myanmar friends: a hilltop shrine 30 kilometres (20 miles) north of Bago known as Daysompar.

The forested hill on which the pagoda was located, I was told, was home to an array of nats (spirits), as well as to ghost-like entities who guard buried treasure. According to one second-hand rumour, there was also a subterranean passageway where mummified corpses could be seen.

Being suckers for high weirdness of the supernatural sort, my wife and I planned a day-trip to the pagoda. A couple of local friends declined to accompany us on the basis that it was ground zero for excessive paranormality, so we were on our own.

The drive from downtown Yangon took less than three hours, and when we got close we had to ask for directions because construction work along the old Yangon-Mandalay highway had obscured the sign at the turnoff to the dirt lane leading to the pagoda.

We parked under a shady tree at the foot of the hill and approached the pagoda from the main south-facing entrance. The stairway was lined with Buddhist nuns begging for alms. Most of them were widows, we were told, and they came to the pagoda from a nearby nunnery on Saturdays and Sundays.

Partway up the stairs was a shrine to the regional nat Bago Medaw, recognisable by her horned water buffalo headress and the golden fish she holds in each upturned hand. Also known as Nankarine Medaw, in her past life she was a water buffalo who raised an orphan boy whom she loved as her own son.

The boy grew up to be extraordinarily strong, and he travelled to the palace at Hanthawaddy (now Bago) with the intention of serving the king. The boy was accepted into service, and one day the king ordered him to

kill the water buffalo who had raised him and cut off her horns, which were known to be filled with fine gold.

When the boy's mother learned of the king's order, she made a solemn wish for her own death, as she did not want her son to suffer in hell for committing murder. Her heart broken, she died as the result of her own wish and became a nat. To this day, her followers make offerings for good luck and other favours.

Across the stairway from the Bago Medaw shrine was a small room holding a statue of Thaik Chote, chief of the treasure-guarding spirits at Daysompar.

The hill is famous as a haunt for *thaik*, or spirits who are so attached to their material possessions that they stick around to guard their belongings rather than pass on to their next incarnations. Many of them are thought to be misers who hid money under the earth from robbers or dacoits, then died before they had the chance to reclaim it.

Such spirits are more properly called *osa zaunt*, while *thaik* refers to the treasure to which they are bound. This attachment is not always a symptom of greed: Some *osa zaunt* are believed to be awaiting the arrival of the next incarnation of the Buddha so they can donate their belongings, pay homage and achieve enlightenment.

In the meantime, *osa zaunt* who wish to can become human beings for a specific amount of time, but they must promise their *thaik* family – those from their previous life who are also attached to the buried treasure – that they will return after an agreed-upon period has elapsed.

That means former *osa zaunt* are walking among us. But – as if all of this were not eerie enough – while they are human they forget their *osa zaunt* existence. Their *thaik* family sends reminders in the form of dreams, and most of them also suffer from frequent illness: It is believed that the *thaik* family makes them sick so they will not enjoy their human life and will not want to dwell long in the human world.

The result of this belief is that normal people who suffer from bad dreams or recurring illness sometimes start to wonder whether they might actually be *osa zaunt* who will soon die and be called back to their *thaik*.

Anyone who suspects they might be an *osa zaunt* can consult a *bodaw*, or one who has gained great supernatural power through meditation, vegetarianism and moral purity. *Bodaw* can determine whether a disease originates from natural causes, was sent by a witch or is the result of being an *osa zaunt*. *Bodaw* can also determine the precise time when the *osa zaunt* is meant to die and return to the *thaik*.

The *bodaw* can attempt to cut the person's connection with the *thaik*, a process known as *thaik kyoe pyat*. This usually involves

from the land of the living.

Perhaps the fear of seeing – or being – an *osa zaunt* lies at the root of some people's reluctance to visit Daysompar Pagoda. One acquaintance who explained *thaik* beliefs to me said he knew of a family who, several years ago, drove to the pagoda from Yangon to pay homage to the Buddha. On the way, they got into a car accident that resulted in the death of their housemaid. The family subsequently assumed that she was an *osa zaunt* connected to treasure near the pagoda, and that she had suddenly been called back from the human world due to their proximity to her *thaik*.

Some also believe that the *osa zaunt* at Daysompar do not like people singing or cursing on the hill, and that they can make offenders lose their way. There are stories



There are stories about pilgrims who sing on their way to the top of mountain and end up wandering around in circles in the forest. When others ask what they are doing, they say they are trying to find a way to the top of mountain even though the path is right before their eyes.

brokering a bargain where the *osa zaunt* can sever his or her link to the *thaik* and remain human, but must fulfill a particular promise, such as sharing their Buddhist merit with their *thaik* family so they too can return to the cycle of reincarnation.

On the other hand, the *thaik* family might not agree to set the person free, and if angered they can launch supernatural attacks on the human-form *osa zaunt*, or on their human spouse and children, to hasten their return

about pilgrims who sing on their way to the top of mountain and end up wandering around in circles in the forest. When others ask what they are doing, they say they are trying to find a way to the top of mountain even though the path is right before their eyes.

After visiting the strange nat and *thaik* shrines, we found the pagoda itself to be an unremarkable example of Mon stupa design. There was a large weekend crowd on the

platform, demonstrating that plenty of people had no fear of *osa zaunt*. In fact, many believe that those who were relatives of Daysompar *osa zaunt* in past lives can be granted material wealth by visiting the pagoda.

But my wife and I were more interested in finding the cave with the mummies, so we left the hilltop platform by the back entrance and found ourselves on a network of trails lacing through a peaceful bamboo forest.

Despite asking several people for directions to the cave, we had a tough time finding it. I don't remember singing or dropping the F-bomb, but we spent quite a long time walking back and forth on the same trails before we finally spotted a concrete stairway tucked behind an old monastery that took us in the right direction.

The walkway ended at a small building and a collection of shrines shaded by a huge bodhi tree. We were met by a man with long hair and a wispy beard who was dressed all in white and who introduced himself as U Phone Shwe. He told us he was from Ayeyarwady Region but had been living alone on Daysompar Hill for 20 years.

"Most people can't stay here very long, but for me it's a really tranquil place," he said, adding that he was the caretaker of a shrine dedicated to Sayadaw Bar Mei, who lived during the Inwa period, more than 500 years ago.

"He was highly respected by many generations of kings, including Bayinnaung and Dhammazedi. He meditated here, and he predicted that someday this place would be swarming with pilgrims and that Buddhism would flourish here," he said. U Phone Shwe said Bar Mei found this place with the help of Sakka (Thagyamin), the king of the celestials.

"While living here, sayadaw limited his diet to vegetables and fruits, and people who visit still need to be vegetarians," he said. "This was one of the things that helped him through a series of spiritual advancements. He had supernatural skills that lie beyond a layman's conception. He could bring down Sakka from heaven and he could make things emerge out of nowhere."

He told us that Bar Mei was a *bodaw* whose pupils included Inwa Min Gaung and Dhammazedi Min Gaung. Among their spiritual kin is Bo Min Gaung, a layman who passed away about 50 years ago but who, through his powers, became *ashinhtwet*, or reincarnated into another life without experiencing physical death.

These beings, also known as *weizza*, continue to wander the earth using their power to help people in trouble and perform good deeds as they wait for the arrival of the next incarnation of the Buddha. Among their powers are the ability to see

previous lives; to hear distant sounds and see objects that are far away; to know the minds of others; and to fly in the air, dive into the earth, walk on water, create multiple bodies and be many places at once.

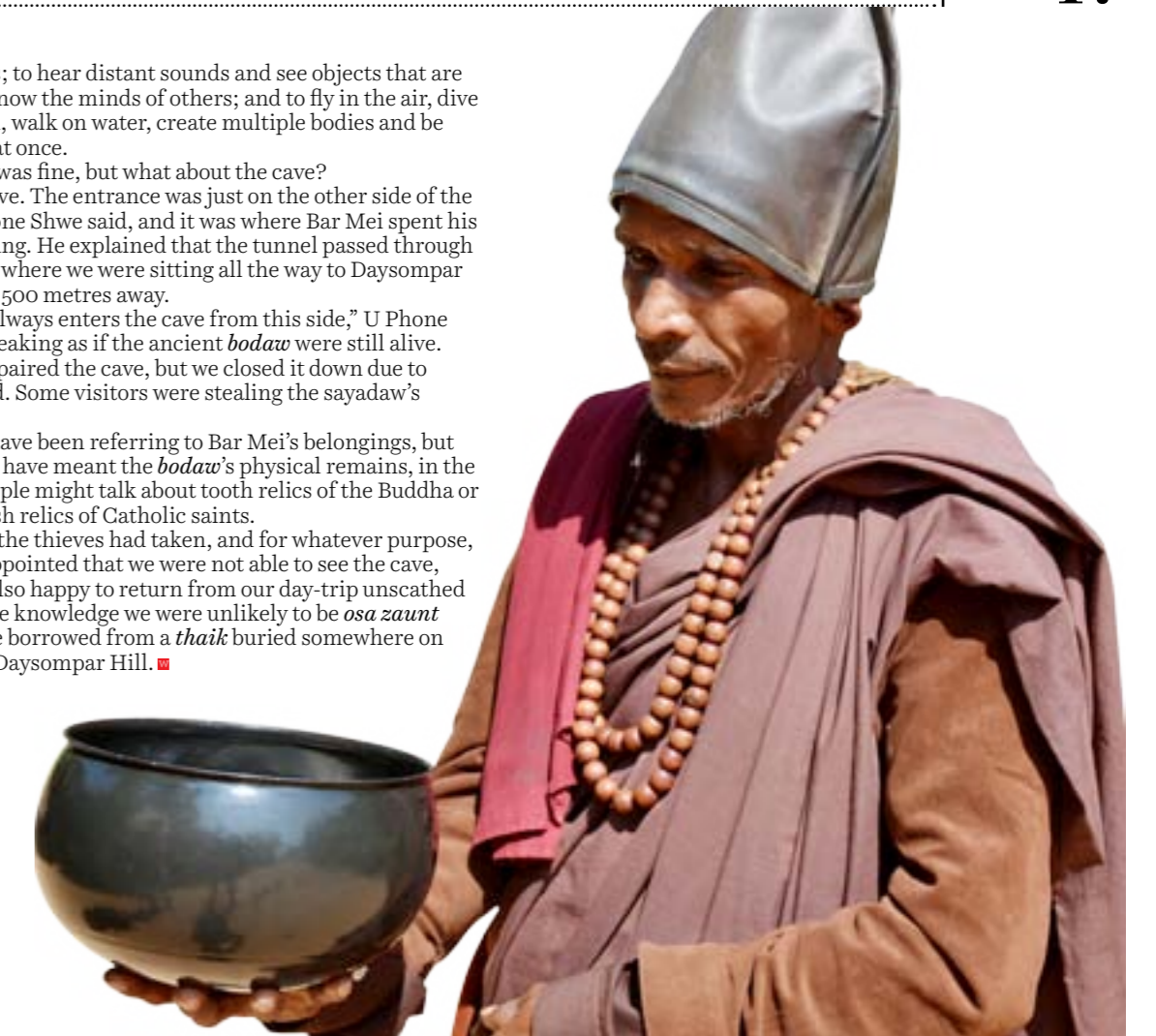
All of this was fine, but what about the cave?

Yes, the cave. The entrance was just on the other side of the shrine, U Phone Shwe said, and it was where Bar Mei spent his time meditating. He explained that the tunnel passed through the hill, from where we were sitting all the way to Daysompar Pagoda about 500 metres away.

"Bar Mei always enters the cave from this side," U Phone Shwe said, speaking as if the ancient *bodaw* were still alive. "I recently repaired the cave, but we closed it down due to people's greed. Some visitors were stealing the sayadaw's relics."

He could have been referring to Bar Mei's belongings, but he might also have meant the *bodaw*'s physical remains, in the same way people might talk about tooth relics of the Buddha or bone-and-flesh relics of Catholic saints.

Whatever the thieves had taken, and for whatever purpose, we were disappointed that we were not able to see the cave, but we were also happy to return from our day-trip unscathed – secure in the knowledge we were unlikely to be *osa zaunt* living on time borrowed from a *thaik* buried somewhere on the slopes of Daysompar Hill. ■



A yathay – a hermit studying to become a *bodaw* – collects alms at the entrance to Daysompar Pagoda. Photo: Douglas Long



Actors Shwe Ba (left) and Kyi Kyi Htay play the roles of *osa zaunt* in the 1950s film *Myaw Taw Yang* (Expectation). Photo: Myanmar Motion Picture Museum



U Phone Shwe displays a magical staff at Daysompar Hill. Photo: Douglas Long

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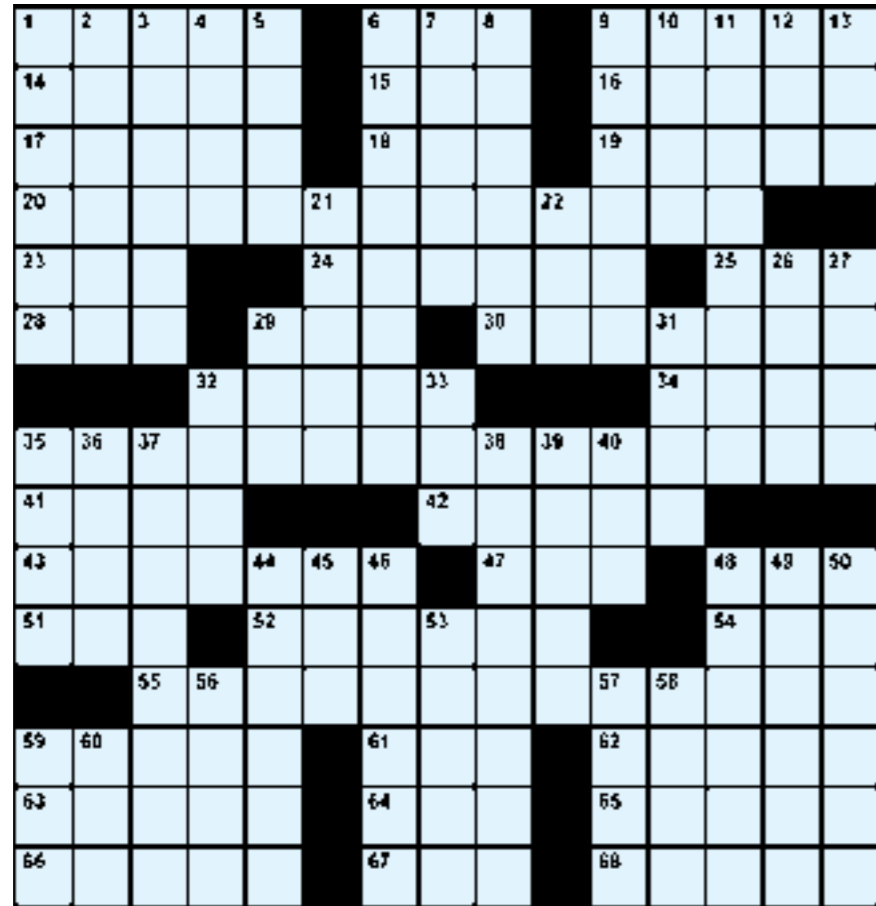
SHIFTING PRIORITIES By Kimberly Grant

- ACROSS
1 Bar mitzvah officiator
6 Maple dripping
9 Flagstone material
14 Blew it
15 Post-USSR alliance
16 Dairy Queen supply
17 Like some talk out a living
18 Hardly a man of few words
20 Poland's locale
23 Infomercials, e.g.
24 Red- (way to be caught)
25 Ceiling
28 Not in the clergy
29 Boot-camp sentence ender
30 More than indecent
32 Column type
34 A bit more than never
35 Moderate, in politics
41 City on its own Great Lake
42 Chiseler
43 Designs of colored glass
47 Possess
48 Dreamy sleep phase
51 Lennon's bride
52 Yet to hit the shelves
54 Australian runner
55 Egg order
59 Artist Matisse
61 Photo, briefly
62 Watchful
63 Pizzeria needs
64 "The Tell-Tale Heart" writer
65 Cowboys' home
66 Academy student
67 Bread heel
68 "Come in!"

- 3 Bold and outspoken
4 Boxing prize
5 Doing nothing
6 Play synopsis
7 Singer Clay
8 False start?
9 Young codfishes
10 What an air ball misses
11 Holly wood resident
12 Actor Van Cleef
13 Hrs. in New York
21 German wine valley
22 Vicksburg soldier, briefly

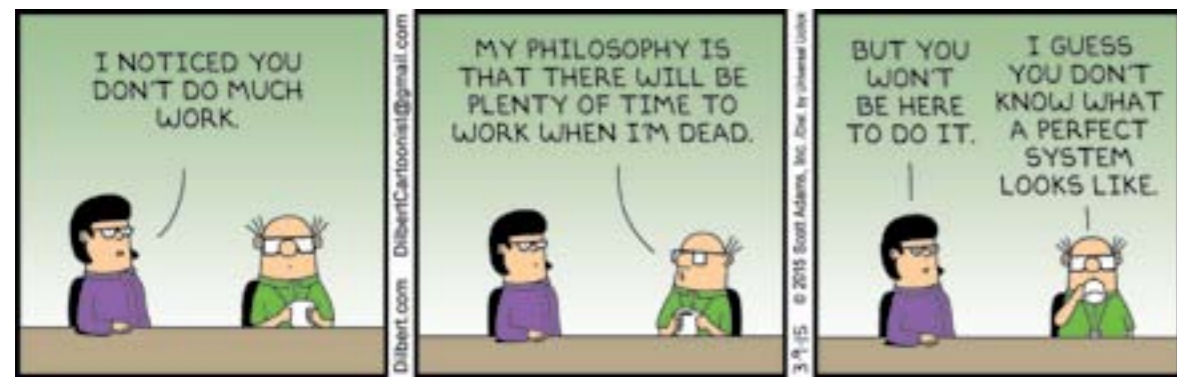
- 26 Andean civilization
27 Scout's good work
29 Costa del \_\_\_
31 New Year's popper
32 "I had no \_\_\_!"
33 Environmental hazard, for short
35 Excel's note
36 Frequently pumped item
37 Repudiated
38 Thrashed
39 Bookstore section
40 Long, long time

- 44 More than request
45 Simple bed
46 Treeless plain
48 Bend a little
49 Exit one's cocoon
50 Murmur indistinctly
53 Betelgeuse's constellation
56 Atlantic bird
57 Filly's mother
58 Verve
59 Ad-\_\_\_ committee
60 One of the Gabor



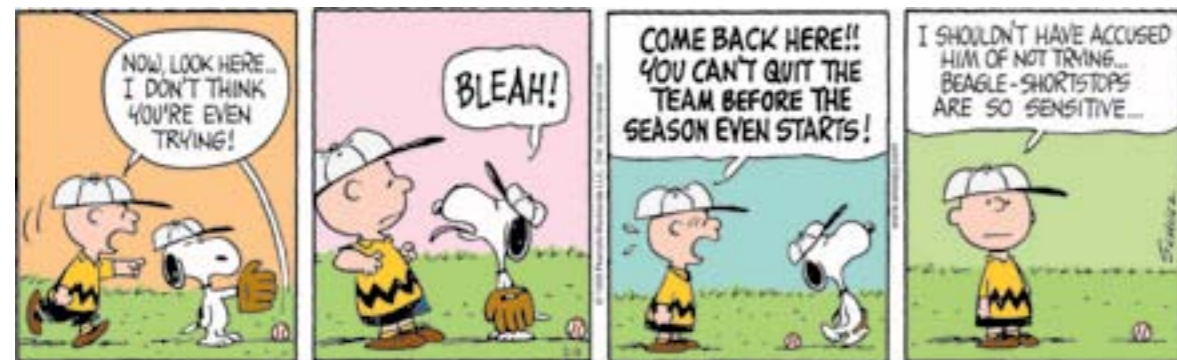
DILBERT

BY SCOTT ADAMS



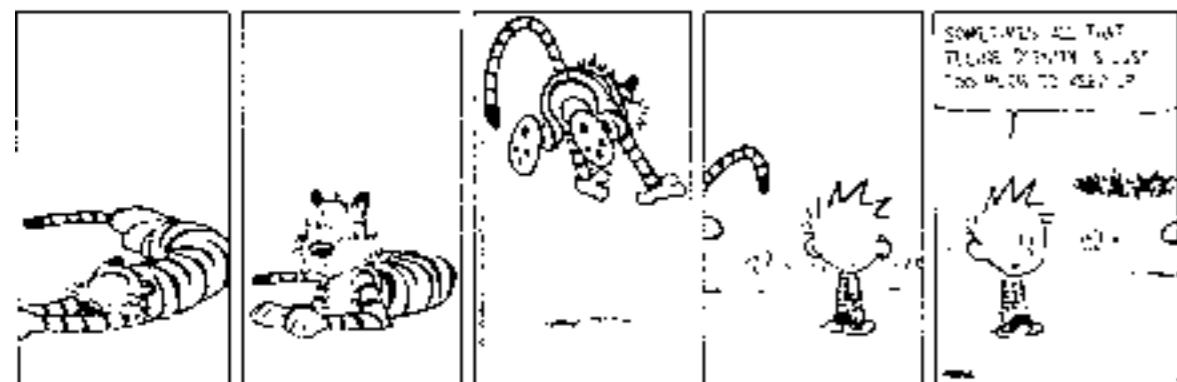
PEANUTS

BY CHARLES SCHULZ



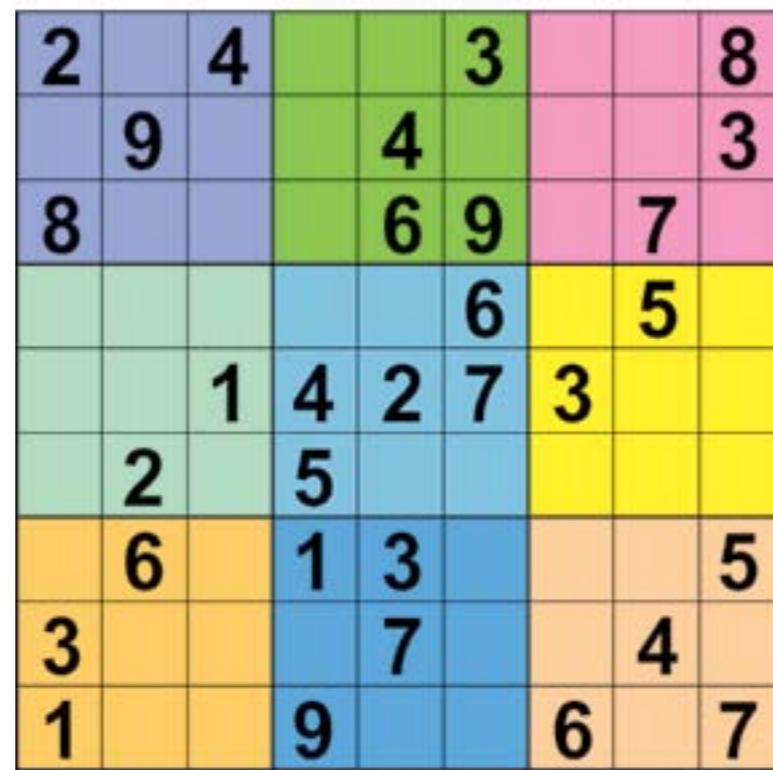
CALVIN AND HOBBS

BY BILL WATTERSON



SUDOKU PACIFIC

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.



3/12 DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

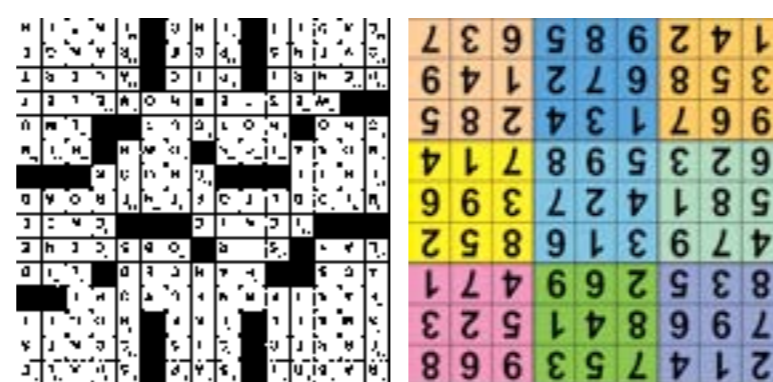
WONDERWORD By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle's horizontal, vertically, diagonally, even backward. Find them and CIRCLE THEIR LETTERS ONLY. DO NOT CIRCLE THE WORD. The following letters spell the Wonderword.

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C M R O R C U R I T I B A L A
I O P N S A I B E A N S A L N
R B D A I S N F B U C T O A T
E S R A N V O H E G A T E F O
V A A A R A A R A N S B S U S
I L B M S R D L G I Y G U Z A
R V M P U I E A R O P E A A O
N A A C L P L C S L T R N U P
O D S A I A A I O I R A A G A
Z O E H R N I R A N T I M I U
A R C B U G H N A D U S E S L
M R A R A E C T S A I O G E O
A C O F F E E F E I J O A D A

Amazon River, Archipelagos, Beans, Brasilia, Cabral, Carriwa, Ceara, Cerrado, Coffee, Cristo, Cross, Curitiba, Empanadas, Ethnic, Fejoada, Gerais, Goias, Iguazu Falls, Manaus, Mato Grosso, Minas, Mines, Nata, Oinda, Para, Piranha, Plains, Pumas, Real, Recife, R ce, Rio De Janeiro, Sa vago, Samba, Santos, Sao Paulo, Soybean, Tour

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AQUARIUS | Jan 20 - Feb 18

Do not fear chaos, which threatens and unsettles with fears of unknown dangers. Music can create order from chaos. True, forces of nature are unpredictable. Acknowledge the ever-present imminence of chaos and affirm that you can function within it and even sometimes tame it.

GEMINI | May 21 - June 20

Art is an effort to create, beside the real world, a more humane world. Believe in the human heart and in the value of concepts such as freedom and justice. Know that the human image has never been forgotten in the arts. You would like to bring yourself nearer to human actuality.

LIBRA | Sept 23 - Oct 22

You are responsible for constructing and maintaining your personal philosophy. You must have mental power enough to change and improve your personality. Use your keen senses to navigate through life and locate worthy projects, and to gain a new perspective of the beauty of everything.

PISCES | Feb 19 - March 20

Draw on your courage to do the just and fearless thing every single time. Strive to overcome that lack of self-confidence which saps your will to battle through blockages and social interference as you pursue your dreams. Positive creativity is a basic component of right living and you should have a loving attitude.

CANCER | June 21 - July 22

To risk making a mess while embracing improvisation must be the expression of wisdom and soul. You can be both talented and inadequate, magnificent and puny, because of your tarnished human nature. You may be an imperfect but still splendid creature thanks to your varied experiences and creative quality.

SCORPIO | Oct 23 - Nov 21

Character is destiny, and character must be simple and honest at the level of intelligence. Believe that at the core of every human being lie pride, dignity and self-respect. Understand the problems of low self-esteem. Do so by loving yourself and loving the work to raise yourself up and move toward its better shape.

ARIES | Mar 21 - Apr 19

A classic is like a hidden treasure. Its core is buried under so many layers of varnish that it can be attained only by patience and infiltration. You must have the score in your head, not your head in the score. Know that everyone prefers belief to the exercise of judgment, and dogma does not mean the absence of thought.

LEO | July 23 - Aug 22

Emotional stability is a source of fairness and dependability. Your analysis of problems are essential management functions that must be exercised with logic and reason under known conditions to illuminate opportunities. All meaningful statements about the relationship between goodness and fairness relate to the long run.

SAGITTARIUS | Nov 22 - Dec 21

Putting off an easy thing makes it hard and putting off a hard one makes it impossible. Rid your mind of thoughts that are non-paying guests, and instead fill it with purposeful sparks of your wisdom. Truth and equity are not easily interrelated within an egocentric policy and its negative drives.

TAURUS | Apr 20 - May 20

One is jealous because one cannot live without love. Acknowledge your own envious nature and take pride in your ability to loosen envy's grip. Frame a simple rule about everybody. You must support your own best nature and live more wisely to feel better about yourself. Know that self-esteem is yours for the asking.

VIRGO | Aug 23 - Sept 22

An intelligent hell would be better than a stupid paradise. A relationship of love is to love and to be loved. Know that the man who has no inner life is a slave to his surroundings. The introverted carries the seeds of danger, and you could miss something important every day. Extroverted nature is meaningful.

CAPRICORN | Dec 22 - Jan 19

Never give up questing after knowledge in your own quiet way, and always continue to develop and research your practice of concentration according to your own rules and discipline. A good chance will arise for taking on more responsibility and power and you must understand to boost your self-esteem.

Editor's Note

Astonishing methods used to solve heinous crimes: Records of Yangon's most famous consulting detective found

THE Myanmar Times is pleased to take the opportunity afforded by the launch of our new weekly magazine, Weekend, to recall some of the most heinous crimes ever perpetrated in and around our great metropolis of Yangon. Many of these outrages, which occurred toward the closing years of the last century, may be unknown to our readers, as is the astonishing skill displayed in solving them by the Yangon consulting detective, U Sha Lok, who from time to time assisted the official police in solving mysteries beyond their comprehension. U Sha Lok, who was world-famous throughout Yangon in the eighties and nineties, brought to his singular profession astonishing powers of observation and deduction, which he deployed to bring many an incorrigible reprobate to book. Though he himself cared nothing for public acclaim, shunned the limelight and was content to dwell modestly in the humble obscurity of his lodgings in Bei Ka Street, history is indebted to U Sha Lok's friend and companion, Dr U Wa Zone, for recording, embellishing and sometimes outright inventing the exploits of the great detective. Some of the most gripping of these narratives, written in Dr Wa Zone's crabbled hand in his private journal, recently came to light after decades in obscurity. They have now been recovered, translated and edited with devoted care by the leading criminologist Ko Nan Doi. Thanks to his exertions, readers will be able to relive the excitement that convulsed our readers 20 and more years ago as they witnessed U Sha Lok grapple with the forces of lawlessness and darkness. Readers can learn of the shocking events presented in A Study in Saffron, in which Dr Wa Zone first made the acquaintance of U Sha Lok; of the international cause célèbre known as A Scandal in Sukhumvit; and of the dastardly affair of The Pickled Blend. Above all, we will revisit the great detective's titanic clash with his mortal enemy, Dr Mo Yat Ti, known as the Napoleon of Crime who, in his luxurious den deep in the warren of the meanest streets of Yangon (now the site of a gourmet supermarket), held in his hand the threads of a hundred criminal enterprises. Dr Mo Yat Ti disappeared, at the same time as U Sha Lok, under the bizarre circumstances later related by Dr U Wa Zone in the account he entitled The Drowned Bell, in which he relates how U Sha Lok thwarted an attempt by his foe to purloin with the famed Hammazzed Bell. We therefore invite our readers to peruse next week's edition, where the first chapter of the narrative entitled A Study in Saffron will be presented for their delectation.

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