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Currents hamper search for ferry victims

STRONG currents yesterday hampered efforts to retrieve the bodies of victims of a ferry accident which killed at least 34 people off Rakhine State, as hopes dimmed for the missing.

The *Aung Takon 3* sank late on March 13 after leaving the town of Kyaukpyu on its way to the state capital Sittwe.

Updating the toll, police said 34 people died in the sinking with a dozen more listed as missing.

The ship was officially carrying 214 passengers and crew.

But locals have said they fear many more unregistered ticket holders may have been on board, a common practice on the often overcrowded ferry network.

"We have hundreds of people helping with the rescue, but there's a strong current. It's hard to carry out rescue work," said U Thein Naing, a senior police official in Kyaukpyu.

"We have 34 dead people so far ... We will continue the search until we have found everyone."

But expectations of finding survivors have diminished nearly two days after the boat went down.

Many citizens living along Myanmar's lengthy coastline and flood-prone river systems rely on poorly maintained ferries for transportation.

The area where the *Aung Takon 3* capsized is notorious for its treacherous waters. - AFP



A survivor from the *Aung Takon 3* ferry, which sank late on March 13, killing at least 34 people, is carried by soldiers from a vessel at Kyaukpyu on March 14. Photo: AFP

Activists threaten hunger strike

Four labour activists being held in Insein Prison following protests in Shwe Pyi Thar have threatened to launch a hunger strike if a government request to transfer their case to courts in Yankin or South Okkalapa is approved. **NEWS 3**

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THE INSIDER: The local lowdown & best of the web

'Police beat the students hard. Some suffered burst eye vessels. The police were abusive and ridiculed us. Many people suffered head injuries.'

One of the last students to be released after being detained at Letpadan tells Eleven about the crackdown

Did you know

In the 1965 James Bond film *Thunderball*, Ernst Stavro Blofeld in a disguised voice sends an ultimatum to NATO demanding that they pay SPECTRE a ransom of white flawless diamonds worth £100 million to be deposited in the Mergui (now Myeik) Archipelago off the coast of Burma.

In brief:

Tourists look on in astonishment as barefoot demolition worker swings mallet to destroy the very wall he's standing on

Stunned silence as employee at bus company proposes having door moved so passengers won't be getting out directly into oncoming traffic, management marks him as a potential troublemaker

Expat uprising narrowly averted as St Patrick's Day event bar runs dry prematurely

Man surreptitiously asking people if they want to "Change money, change money?" and offering "good price for you" out the front of Bogyoke found to be Lord Green with a hat on

Next week:

Expat fondly recalls that glorious two-week period where he "didn't sweat all the time"

North Korea and Eritrea said to be 'deeply concerned' at Myanmar's recent efforts to make a comeback in next year's press freedom rankings

It's going to be "pretty hard" to meet the end-of-2013 deadline on freeing all political prisoners, President U Thein Sein concedes, but insists the time travel program is coming along "very nicely"



Announcing the winner of Page 2's 'Caption This' contest:

"Director's cut of *St Elsewhere* contains major plot twist" Congratulations, Catherine, you've won yourself three cheroots and a pack of potato sticks. This can be collected at *The Myanmar Times* office during business hours.

If you have any story ideas for Page 2, please do get in touch. Likewise, please feel free to send through photos, drawings, confessions, etc. Or if you'd just like to become penpals - drop us a line. Email address is at the top of the page, or you can get me on Twitter @ayleighk.

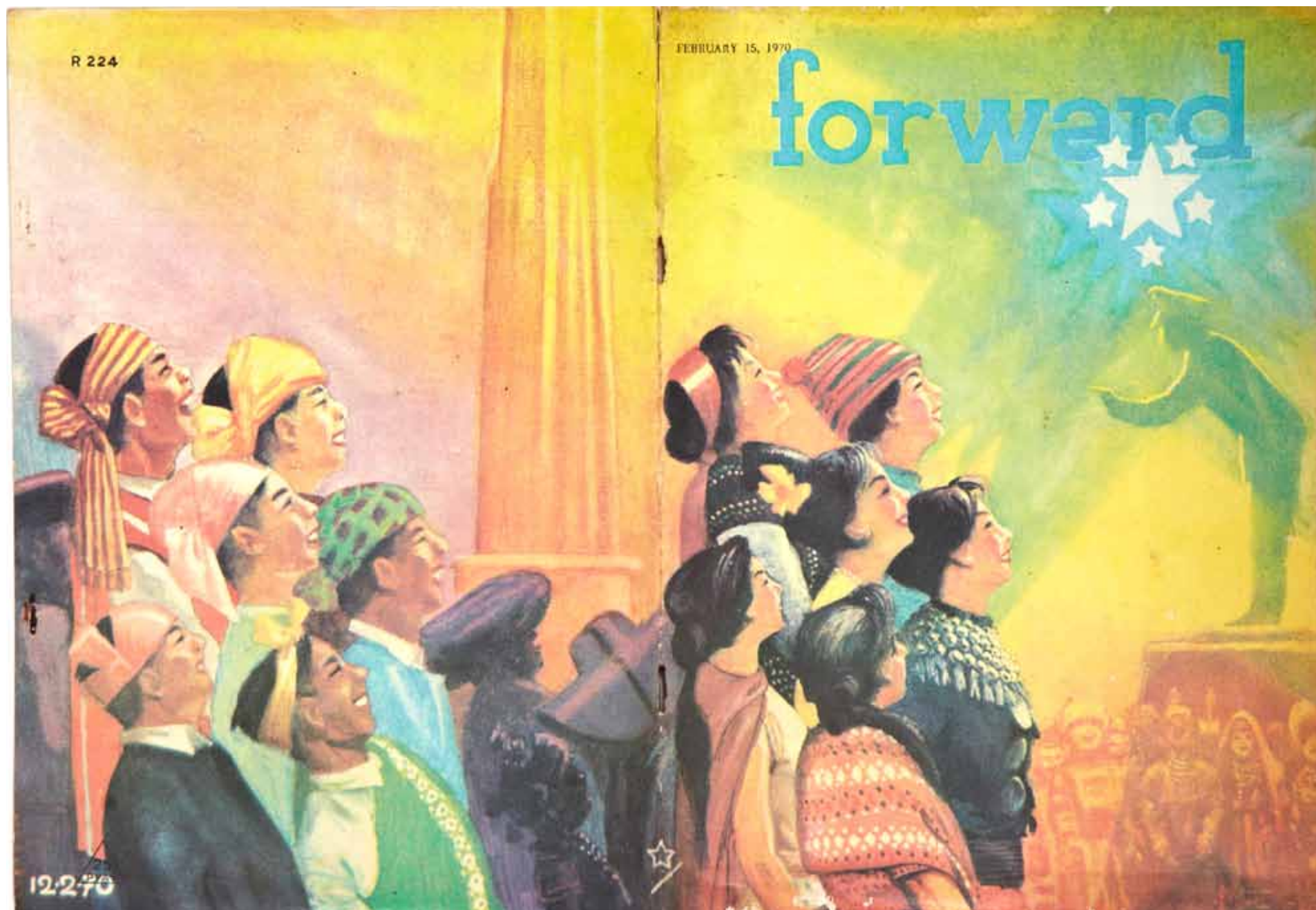


Gold Face whitening cream: Keep your skin looking youthful and dewy.
Photo: Page 2

Once was Burma...

Archival material courtesy of Pansodan Gallery

First floor, 286 Pansodan, upper block, Kyauktada township



Cover of socialist-era propaganda magazine *Forward*, from February 1970

KIO meet 'good omen' for Yangon talks: govt

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IN a surprise step forward toward a national ceasefire agreement, the government and the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) yesterday agreed to conclude a draft accord at talks starting tomorrow. The Union Peace Working Committee (UPWC), led by vice president Sai Mauk Kham, and the KIO delegation, led by the organisation's secretary, La-Jar, discussed the draft at Nay Pyi Taw's Myanmar International Convention Centre.

The KIO will meet the Tatmadaw today, one day before the UPWC and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), which is negotiating on behalf of 16 armed groups, including the KIO, resume talks in Yangon in the hope of finalising the nationwide ceasefire agreement.

"We agreed to discuss reaching a ceasefire agreement at the peace talks," KIA deputy commander-in-chief General Gun Maw told reporters after the Nay Pyi Taw meeting.

General Gun Maw said the KIA believed this week's talks could lead to the building of a genuine a federal union, a major goal of his organisation. "We want to see progress before the elections," he said.

Until now, the KIO has - unlike most ethnic armed groups - shunned invitations to Nay Pyi Taw. The news last week that a ground-breaking meeting with the government could take place was treated at first with great caution because the KIO had made no secret of its distrust for the government and the army.

Speaking on March 14, General Gun Maw said, "We just dropped by in advance of the Yangon talks and the vice president agreed to meet with us."

Asked if the meeting signalled a thaw in relations, he said, "It's difficult to measure trust."

Relations between the Kachin and the government have been particularly rocky since November, when a Tatmadaw artillery shell hit a KIA academy, killing 23 people. The Tatmadaw has since accused



Chief government peace negotiator U Aung Min (left) and General Gun Maw of the KIA walk out of a meeting together yesterday. Photo: Supplied

the Kachin of involvement in illegal logging and supporting ethnic Kokang rebels launch a surprise attack against its forces in the Kokang area on February 9. The KIA has denied both accusations.

Government reaction to yesterday's meeting has been positive. Vice President Sai Mauk Kham urged both sides to negotiate patiently and with a view to the long term, adding that a nationwide ceasefire agreement was "near at hand".

"If we could move one or two steps more, we would get a concrete agreement that could lead to eternal peace. So let's grab this opportunity to create peace," he said.

U Aung Min, head of the government peace negotiation team, told reporters that it was "a good omen" for the Yangon talks.

Originally planned to resume today, the Yangon meeting was postponed one day to allow a meeting between KIO and the Tatmadaw, apparently so that the KIO could warn against a repeat of last November's Tatmadaw artillery attack.

"That meeting will take place in Nay Pyi Taw on Monday, which is why the Yangon talks were delayed," said U Hla Maung Shwe, a senior official from the Myanmar Peace Center.

The MPC announced yesterday that the Yangon talks, the seventh formal meeting to be held since talks were launched to sign a nationwide ceasefire, would take place from March 17 to 22.

The negotiators will focus on the few points not yet finalised in the draft ceasefire agreement. However, the recent fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) in Kokang will not be officially on the table, even though the Kokang rebels are members of the NCCT.

Nevertheless, the matter could come up in bilateral talks between the Tatmadaw and the KIA, said General Gun Maw.

"We are worried that the conflict in Laukkai could affect the peace process, and we want to solve the problem by political means," General Gun Maw said.

Detained labour activists threaten hunger strike

Activists and their family members upset at a request from the government to shift trial to a different court

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TWO labour union leaders and two activists under arrest for demonstrating for higher wages have threatened to go on hunger strike in Yangon's Insein prison if their case is moved to another court.

Ko Nay Lin Aung, lawyer for the four unionists, told *The Myanmar Times* yesterday that the two union leaders, Ko Naing Htay Lwin and Ko Myo Min Min, and the two activists, Ko Thu Zaw Kyi Win and Ko Naing Zaw Kyi Win, had told him of their decision on March 12.

The legal officer of Shwe Pyi Thar Township Court requested on March 9 that the case be shifted to Yankin or South Okkalapa township courts for security reasons. Both courts are about 90 minutes' drive from Shwe Pyi Thar. The next hearing is due to be held on March 18.

"If the court is changed, then their families will face difficulty meeting them. They and their lawyers will be too exhausted because of the distance. So they told me they did not agree" with the request to change court, the lawyer said.

"My view is that the authorities should not change the court. They [authorities] talked about security, but I don't see any violence or unusual situation at the court. So I do not agree with the authorities' [request]," he added.

Rights groups have regularly accused the authorities of transferring cases involving activists to more distant courts to create hardship for the accused and their families.

Ma Ni Lar, wife of Ko Thu Zaw Kyi Win, said that her husband suffered from liver disease and she was worried about how a hunger strike would affect his health. She said prison authorities had not given the family permission to send medicines to him and that he rejected medical treatment from the prison hospital.

Ma Thandar Aye, wife of Ko Myo Min Min, labour union chair of South Korean-owned garment factory E-Land Myanmar, said she could not afford the costs of

travelling to a distant court to see her husband. Since his arrest she has been the family's sole breadwinner and cannot afford to take time off work, she said.

Ma Thandar Aye works in the same garment factory, earning about K100,000 (US\$95) a month to support their two young children.

"We will face a lot of difficulties. So I do not accept the order to move the court. If they do that I will hardly have a chance to meet my husband," she said.

The government charged the labour activists under section 505(b) of the penal code, accusing them of advocating violence. Three were arrested a month ago, while Ko Thu Zaw Kyi Win was arrested on March

'I do not accept the order to move the court. If they do that I will hardly have a chance to meet my husband.'

Ma Thandar Aye

Wife of Ko Myo Min Min

4 during a demonstration in Yangon that was broken up by a vigilante group aiding the police. Another 13 workers from South Korean and Chinese-owned garment factories - including one aged just 15 - have been charged under section 147, for participating in violence, and section 18 of the peaceful protest law for staging an illegal demonstration. They have been released on bail.

Workers have demanded a wage increase of K1000 a day and the introduction of a fair minimum wage, as well as the release of striking workers who have been arrested since their campaign began on January 28, after which more than 3000 workers went on strike.

Ethnic parties ready for six-way talks

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THE Rakhine politician appointed to take part in long-awaited six-way talks on constitutional reform said yesterday he had informed parliamentary authorities of the issues he wants discussed.

Rakhine National Party leader U Aye Maung said there were four items on his agenda: power-sharing between the central and regional governments, the role of ethnic armed groups under a federal union army, human rights in ethnic areas and general affairs.

No date has yet been set for the talks, which the Pyithu Hluttaw began calling for last November, but they could happen as early as this week. The other participants will be President U Thein Sein, Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker U Khin Aung Myint, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann and opposition leader

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

The projected talks took on a new urgency last week when Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann summoned representatives of 19 parties to put them on notice that the talks would soon begin.

On March 13, representatives of the ethnic parties met to decide what line U Aye Maung, as their representative, should take in the talks.

"The main thing is to amend the power sharing system between the regional and central government," he said.

The talks are expected to be followed by debate in parliament on a constitutional amendment bill.

The government has previously described the six-way talks as "impractical" and instead pushed for larger, "all-inclusive" meetings. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, meanwhile, has been pushing for a four-way meeting between herself, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, U Thein Sein and Thura U Shwe Mann since 2013.

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Campaign members distribute armbands in downtown Yangon on March 13. Photo: Naing Wynn Htoon

White armbands hit streets of Yangon

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OPPOSITION to the violent police crackdown on students at Letpadan on March 10 continues to grow, as supporters of the student movement circulate white armbands as a sign of solidarity.

Yangon students and activists launched the campaign to focus public disapproval of the police action against the protestors by handing out the armbands, which bear the words "We are students. Respect our rights" on March 13, with more armbands distributed on March 15.

The movement began at Mahabandoola Park and spread across the city. The armbands have been spotted in parks, markets, tea shops and on public transport.

On March 10, baton-wielding police

attacked students and monks at Letpadan, arresting 127 people in a violent end to an eight-day standoff over the national education law. The police have since released without charge several dozen of those arrested, but those still in custody could face several years in prison.

Maung Saung Kha, the leader of the Poetry Lovers' Association, who has been active in the white armband campaign, told *The Myanmar Times* yesterday the authorities were already asking questions about the campaign.

Administrators of two Yangon townships where armbands were distributed on March 13 asked organisers who arranged the campaign, what its aims were and how many people were taking part.

Maung Saung Kha said the officials allowed the campaign to go

ahead after organisers answered their questions.

"We've handed out 5000 armbands in the past two days. We will hand out more. It's all been done peacefully," he said, urging people to show their support for the students' cause by wearing an armband.

"I think this is a better way [to protest] because of the current situation.

'I think this is a better way [to protest] ... It is a peaceful response.'

Maung Saung Kha
Campaign organiser

It is a peaceful response. A lot of people are wearing the armbands, so we are very satisfied," he said.

Others have declined to wear the armbands, fearing discrimination in the workplace.

"I want to wear an armband, but I can't. Our company says they don't want staff getting involved in anything political, and I think this campaign was political," said Ko Win Aung, who works for a private company in Pansodan Street.

"I wore the armband because I read about the government's harsh crackdown on the students. It was a good and peaceful campaign," said a young man at Sule bus stop.

Organisers are asking supporters to wear the armbands for one week, while they also plan to extend the campaign to other states and regions.

Student leaders, NNER to resume talks with parliament

With many of the hardline student leaders now in jail, University Students' Union heads back to negotiating table



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PARLIAMENTARIANS and some student leaders will resume talks today on proposed amendments to the National Education Law, amid suggestions of a split in student ranks.

The meeting comes after police violently suppressed a student demonstration at Letpadan on March 10, arresting 127 people, including a number of student leaders who have been the strongest critics of the law.

The Amyotha Hluttaw will meet the University Students' Union, better known by its Myanmar-language acronym of Ta Ka Tha, and the National Network for Education Reform

(NNER) separately, students told *The Myanmar Times* yesterday. The NNER meeting is scheduled to take place tomorrow.

Previously, the USU and other student groups, such as the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (Ba Ka Tha), had united behind the Action Committee for Democratic Education banner.

But while the USU - comprising mostly current university students - had favoured negotiation, the more confrontational ABFSU, which is made up of older students who fled overseas or went underground following government crackdowns in 1988 and 1995, insisted on protests.

The students boycotted a March 5 to March 15 window set by the Amyotha Hluttaw to conduct consultations on draft changes to the law, as they instead demanded that parliament introduce changes agreed upon at

four-party talks in February by March 1.

The consultations, led by the Amyotha Hluttaw Bill Committee, went ahead without the students. The government has since said the Letpadan conflict invalidated any previous agreement.

With many ABFSU leaders in jail, the USU has now agreed to return to the negotiating table, although members interviewed by *The Myanmar Times* yesterday insisted there was no formal split.

USU leader Ko Nann Aung said his group would push for the introduction of the 11 points agreed on at the February talks, which were attended by representatives of the government, parliament, the NNER and student bodies.

"We will also request the parliament to help as much as they can to secure the release of all detained students," he said.


The February agreement included nine "pre-conditions" - ranging from respect for student and teacher unions to a pledge not to arrest protesting students - and 11 "facts" to be included in the amendment bill.

These include the right to establish teacher and student unions, to reduce central control over educational institutions, to reform the university entrance system, to spend 20 percent of the national budget on education and to enable minorities to use their languages in classrooms.

The budget requirement was among the last of the demands to be agreed upon.

U Arkar Moe Thu from the NNER said he was hopeful the government would stick to the original agreement. "These are the terms that the parliament and representatives from the government agreed on during the talks," he said.

Border tensions run high as China warns over bombing



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A LOCAL conflict with ethnic Kokang rebels in northern Shan State escalated into a tense stand-off with China at the weekend after Beijing sent warplanes to patrol the region and threatened to take "decisive measures" if Myanmar failed to prevent the fighting from spilling over the border.

Beijing's blunt warning followed the killing on March 13 of four Chinese sugarcane workers near the border town of Lincang by what China said was a bomb dropped by a Myanmar military aircraft. U Zaw Htay, a director in the president's office, denied the Tatmadaw was responsible.

"The Myanmar side must recognise the seriousness of the issue, seriously deal with this incident, punish those who caused the trouble, apologise and pay compensation to family members, and explain themselves to China," Fan Changlong, deputy head of the Central Military Commission, said in a statement.

Mr Fan spoke by telephone to Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on March 14, urging the commander-in-chief of the Tatmadaw to take firm action to rein in the armed forces and ensure no such incident occurred again, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

"Otherwise, China's military will take resolute and decisive measures to protect the lives, property and security of China's people," Mr Fan said.



A tuk tuk drives toward a gate marking the entrance to China at Chinshwehew, just south of Laukkai in northeastern Shan State. Photo: Zarni Phyo

The escalation of the conflict came as the Tatmadaw told international humanitarian agencies that it could not provide them with safe access to the Kokang area, which has been under martial law for the past month. Aid workers involved in formal contacts said the President's Office had earlier asked the UN to assist about 3000 civilians displaced in the fighting.

The alleged border bombing, in which nine Chinese were also wounded, illustrates the difficulties facing the Tatmadaw in pursuing ethnic Chinese Kokang rebels right up to the rugged mountain frontier with Yunnan province. More than 70 Tatmadaw troops are reported to

have been killed since fighting erupted five weeks ago, on February 9.

Beijing has denied accusations by the Tatmadaw that the rebel Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) receives support from inside China and says it has stepped up controls of border crossing points, following the arrival of tens of thousands of refugees from Kokang.

One Western diplomat said China's tough warning to Myanmar should be seen in the context of a groundswell of popular sympathy for the ethnic Chinese rebels and civilians of Kokang who have been adept at championing their cause over social media. China needed to be seen

to be acting tough even while not allowing the border conflict to damage its growing economic interests in Myanmar as its gateway to the Indian Ocean, the diplomat said.

According to Xinhua, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said Myanmar "understood China's feelings" and would send personnel to conduct a joint investigation with the Chinese side. "[Senior General] Ming Aung Hlaing also promised to properly handle relevant issues and hold relevant people accountable," Xinhua reported.

Mr Fan said Myanmar military aircraft had crossed the border several times. But U Zaw Htay, director of the President's Office, told several reporters that the Tatmadaw had analysed its flight data and concluded that its warplanes had not carried out the March 13 bombing. Reuters quoted him as saying that it was possible the MNDAA rebels had purposely carried out the attack "with the intent of causing misunderstanding between China and us". The MNDAA is not known to have aircraft.

The MNDAA evolved out of the formerly Chinese-backed Burmese Communist Party in the late 1980s. Peng Jiasheng, the 85-year-old rebel leader who is known by the Myanmar name of Pheung Kya-shin, is accused by the US of being a major narcotics trafficker during years of administering the region of some 150,000 people. His forces were driven out of Kokang by the Tatmadaw following a power struggle in 2009 and have spent the last years regrouping and re-arming in preparation for their comeback offensive last month, possibly betting on support from China or at least local Chinese interests.

Govt seeks approval for \$400m WB loan

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THE government will seek a US\$400 million loan from the World Bank for a project to bring electricity to 98 percent of the country by 2030, parliament heard on March 12. Deputy Minister for Electric Power U Maw Thar Htwe said the plan entailed first bringing power to villages within reach of the national grid.

The deputy minister told the Pyithu Hluttaw that the ministry would soon be submitting proposals for the low-interest loan to parliament.

The ministry's three-stage project also envisages electrifying more remote villages by solar energy, windmills or small-scale hydropower plants, he said.

Further, the ministry was also negotiating with the Rural Development Bank of the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development to offer low-interest loans to villages setting up their own lighting plans, said U Maw Thar Htwe.

"With funding from the government and help from the World Bank and international donors, those villages will be lit up in the next four or five years," he said.

About 67pc of the population is still beyond the reach of the electricity supply, and annual individual electricity consumption is just 190 kilowatt-hours, the second-lowest in the Southeast Asian region.

The country's electricity demand is expected to increase to 23,850 megawatts by 2030. U Maw Thar Htwe said hydropower plants planned for the Thanlwin River would produce more than 13,000MW.

- Translation by Zar Zar Soe

UN chief urges world leaders to up disaster reduction investment

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THE United Nations secretary general has urged countries to invest more in disaster risk reduction. Speaking at the World Disaster Risk Reduction Conference in Sendai, Japan, on March 14, Ban Ki-moon said climate change had caused more extreme weather events. Investing in disaster risk precautions was "smart investing".

"Over the past few decades, more than four out of every five disasters were related to climate change, at a cost of US\$300 billion every year. Disaster risk reduction saves lives and protects the most vulnerable. It helps sustain political stability. That is the smart investment for our future," Mr Ban told reporters.

In a reference to Cyclone Nargis, which killed hundreds of thousands of people in Myanmar in 2008, the secretary general said the lessons learned had helped save thousands of lives.

He said the UN aimed to set a new sustainable development agenda in 2015, and called for a universal mandate for a climate change agreement, backed by financing to turn promises into action.

"Disaster risk reduction is the beginning of our journey," he said.

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction said in a statement on March 14 that Japan's prime minister, Shinzo Abe, had pledged



UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon speaks at the disaster risk reduction conference on March 14. Photo: AFP

US\$4 billion to support the implementation of the Sendai Cooperation Initiative for Disaster Risk Reduction over the next four years.

The package will focus on the development of disaster-proof infrastructure, the promotion of global and regional cooperation, and the training of 40,000 government officials and local leaders to play a leading role in national efforts for disaster risk reduction. Japan will make its expertise and knowledge available, it said.

The conference, which was attended by 186 governments, will adopt a new framework for disaster risk reduction on March 18 in place of the current Hyogo Framework for Action adopted 10 years ago at the last World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, held in Kobe, Japan.



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ABSDF report confronts bloody past

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THE All Burma Students Democratic Front has released the results of an investigation into one of its darkest chapters - the killing of dozens of members accused of being government spies.

The report, compiled by the ABSDF's Truth and Justice Committee and released at a ceremony in Yangon yesterday, found that the student army's northern branch had tortured detainees and committed extrajudicial killings.

In a foreword to the report, Swiss

ambassador to Myanmar Christoph Burgener praised the work of the committee and said the "telling can become an act of letting go and of restoring the dignity that has been shattered by the former experiences".

"I commend you for taking this difficult step in your already long journey for peace," he said.

Formed by students who fled the military crackdown in 1988, the ABSDF had its headquarters in Karen National Union-held territory.

The killings occurred in the jungles of Kachin State, which were held by its northern branch. Altogether 106 people were accused of spying, with 36 killed during 1991 and 1992.

Of these, 15 people were executed on February 12, 1992, at a spot known as Assam Hill, while another two were

executed in the Hpakan area the same year. Eleven were killed during interrogation and another eight died in detention.

Accounts of the killings - as well as the use of beatings, electric shocks, burning with tar or hot nails, and the chopping of wrists to extract confessions - began to emerge in 2012, both online and in print. However, nobody has been held accountable for the crimes perpetrated.

While the report did not clear the victims of spying, it said their human rights had been violated and urged the ABSDF to provide health assistance and other support to survivors and the families of those killed. The group should also reinstate them as members, issue an official apology and take action against those involved in

the atrocities.

The report said the northern branch was fully responsible for the rights violations and headquarters had "little to no effective control" over its activities. However, it found that ABSDF leaders had failed to act on warnings of what was happening and issued statements declaring those executed as spies.

Truth and Justice Committee member U Kyaw Lin said they found torture had been used extensively against detainees in order to get them to confess to being spies, and provide information about alleged contacts and activities.

"We listed the names of who were responsible for this tragic process and we urge them to apologise," he said.

Many of those accused of

responsibility later died in battle, were arrested or simply disappeared.

Others, however, remain prominent in the exile community - in the case of one, working until recently for the British Broadcasting Corporation. Few were willing to be interviewed for the report; one committed suicide while negotiating a time to speak to the Truth and Justice Committee, the report said.

Ko Phoe Kyaw, who escaped from the camp, said the accusations levelled by ABSDF members against him linger, more than two decades on.

"I approached the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society to work with them but they refused. I am from the 88 generation of students but they don't trust me," he said. "I want to get back my dignity."

AG's office holds up consumer protection by-laws

SHWE YEE SAW MYINT

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THE country's first consumer protection legislation is being held up by the Attorney General's office, consumer advocates said yesterday.

Although parliament passed the law in March last year, it has taken the past 12 months to draft the by-laws needed to govern implementation. The final step in the process was approval by the Attorney General's office.

A Myanmar Consumers' Union spokesperson revealed details of the holdup at an event yesterday at Yangon's City Hall to mark World Consumer Rights Day.

"We know the consumer protection department of the Ministry of Commerce has sent the consumer bylaws to the Attorney General's Office, but the office has asked for amendments," said Daw Nu Nu Yi, a member of the consumers' union and herself a retired official in the Attorney General's Office.

"Consumer protection needs the support of the law, but we cannot protect consumers until the bylaws have been approved," she said.

The Consumers' Union was established three years ago. Many of its experts are retired government officials. Most of its activity is devoted to training and the promotion of consumers' rights under the law.

The March 2014 law adopted by Pyidaungsu Hluttaw was meant to address widespread concerns about unsafe ingredients in food and beverages. A charter of consumer rights in the law states that the Committee for Consumer Protection will include the Minister of Commerce, senior representatives of other relevant ministries, representatives of civil society and experts.

The law covers the rights and responsibilities of both consumers and manufacturers, and lists prohibitions for manufacturers. It sets out how a Committee for Consumer Protection will function, and describes a dispute resolution and sanctions regime.



UNDP administrator Helen Clark (centre) and WFP executive director Ertharin Cousin (left) visit the Thet Kae Pyin IDP camp in Sittwe on March 11. Photo: Supplied

'All communities need access to development'

United Nations Development Programme administrator Helen Clark visited Myanmar from March 10 to 12, together with World Food Programme executive director Ertharin Cousin, travelling to Sittwe, Nay Pyi Taw and Yangon. She speaks exclusively to *The Myanmar Times*' **Sandar Lwin** about Myanmar's balancing of human rights and economic development, meeting the country's budgetary needs, and the challenges in Rakhine State.

Why are you and Ms Cousin visiting Myanmar at this time?

The reason for the head of the WFP and I coming together was because we want to send a united message that the humanitarian and development wings of the UN are here for all people, working for all the people, food security, rural development ... poverty eradication, basic social services. We know that Myanmar has experienced quite good economic growth and the challenge now is to turn it into a better life for all the people.

Where do you see the major development problems in Myanmar?

When we look at the Millennium Development Goals, Myanmar is doing quite well on a number of the education goals and on some of the malaria and TB targets. It won't meet the poverty goal, and it won't meet a lot of the other goals. So, that tells that there are still a lot of very basic development challenges for many, many, many people.

How can Myanmar do a better job of meeting those challenges?

Have the government in its development strategy very much focusing on the human development of the people.

The government has a goal to graduate from least-developed country status and to be a middle-income country, so to achieve these things, investment in people is going to be ever-more important.

The UNDP is assisting bureaucratic reform but some civil servants say they can't properly understand the materials distributed by the UNDP at its workshops. What is your comment on that?

I haven't heard that complaint. What I know is that public service reform, fighting corruption and having quality in [terms of] services and planning and policy advice is very, very important. And we have efforts going on with the public administration, with the Attorney General's Office, with the parliament to work for improved governance in all these areas. But this is early days of Myanmar's reform journey. And you don't change low capacity to a high capacity in one year, two or three. It is a longer-term process.

The UNDP's current three-year program is nearly finished. What's next?

Yes, we have a country program and

it comes under the UN development assistance framework which is negotiated by the UN country team with the government. There will be a new UN development assistance framework drawn up from 2018 to 2022. There will be the opportunity to have that program lined up not only with the reform program that Myanmar is progressing but also with the global sustainable development goals which Myanmar will be part of. So, I'm confident we will continue to have a big and strong program here. [The budget will be] as much as we can mobilise because Myanmar is ... is still a least-developed country. A lot of people are still living in poverty so there is a lot to do.

You travelled to Sittwe on this trip. How do you navigate the conflict between promoting human rights in Rakhine State and respecting the sovereignty of the country?

What we have urged is firstly that all the communities have access to development and basic rights to development. Secondly we've urged that all necessary steps be taken to ensure people who are entitled to citizenship get it verified and are able to vote. This

is a very important year in Myanmar with the elections late this year. Everyone who is entitled to vote should be able to ... so we very much urge that. And urge for protection of people across all the ethnicities and religious and beliefs.

UNDP focuses on many development issues here. Is there any conflict between the government's economic agenda and the promotion of human rights?

Myanmar has been moving toward a market economy. Both of us come from countries with strong market economies. That doesn't mean you can't look after your people. We also come from countries with very high human development levels.

So I think what Myanmar is endeavouring to achieve is having a strong economy which will generate the money for the budget to pay for every child can realise their potential, no person to go hungry, everyone to have the healthcare they need. This can be done by having a strong economy that generates resources.

Editor's note: This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

Views



Garment workers stage a sit-down protest on a road in Insein township on March 4 after police blocked their planned march to downtown Yangon. Photo: Naing Wynn Htoon

Garment workers deserve support too

Vicious crackdowns on student demonstrators have garnered significant international attention but workers have faced similar bully tactics

AMID all the furore and outrage over the excessive force used by police against student protesters this month, another violent clampdown has dropped from public attention.

On March 4 - one day before civilian thugs were employed to violently quash student activists gathered at City Hall - a similar scene took place at Yangon's Shwe Pyi Thar Industrial Zone.

The protesters in that incident were striking garment-factory workers. As would be repeated at the student protest the following day, hired civilian men, decked in red armbands bearing the word "duty", broke up the protest, apparently at the instigation of the authorities.

According to a spokesperson for the garment workers, those who were arrested were "violently beaten" in the process. Those beaten and arrested at Shwe Pyi Thar were calling for a minimum working wage of K60,000 a month (US\$60).

Those arrested remain in detention more than a week later - along with three activists arrested during an earlier wage protest.

Given the high-profile role that students have played in Myanmar's pro-democracy movements, it is natural that their recent campaign - and the authorities' brutal response - should

capture the public's imagination at home and abroad.

Articulate youthfulness and passion for democracy and human rights makes for a narrative that is easy for an international audience to relate to.

But while the aggressive crackdown on the protesting students raises important questions about the government's commitment to democratic reform, the treatment of factory workers should also be seen as a key test.

If it provokes outrage - as it should do - that hired thugs are drafted in to violently oppress students, it should surely provoke equal outrage when impoverished, mainly female protesters calling for a basic wage are similarly assaulted.

We should recognise that gender issues are relevant here.

Both men and women took part in the student protests, were subjected to police brutality and were arrested.

It is testament to the role of women in democracy activism in Myanmar that those female student protesters photographed being manhandled by hired civilians and police have been seen principally as symbols of democracy being abused, and not cast as victims mainly because of their gender. A bully wielding a baton is a bully whether he is beating up unarmed



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men or unarmed women.

But when an industry is predominantly staffed by women - as the garment industry is - then certain specific rights protections are required.

Last week Human Rights Watch released a detailed report on the dreadful working conditions and abuses suffered by women working in the garment sector in Cambodia, where around 90 per cent of the workforce is female.

The report highlighted unlawful

Their rights should be safeguarded and supported, not violated in order to protect the financial interests of foreign investors.

discrimination against pregnant women as well as physical and verbal sexual harassment by male managers and colleagues.

Conditions are unlikely to be much different for women working in the garment sector here.

Many of these workers are still in their teens, and have been forced to leave school and seek employment to support their parents and siblings.

Teenage girls in Myanmar are among the most marginalised in society, where both gender and age discrimination means they are rarely given an opportunity to speak out for themselves. Their position leaves them extremely vulnerable to exploitation.

Without careful monitoring and government support for workers rights, the exploitation that currently takes place will become an even greater issue as Myanmar's garment sector grows.

The country's low wages make it an appealing location for garment producers to establish factories. The sector has expanded significantly since reforms were initiated in 2011, with export income increasing by 33 per cent between 2012 and 2013. Big-name Western brands are among those who have set up shop here.

This means more workers - mainly female - are going to end up working in clothes factories in Myanmar. If the ambitions of government and industry

leaders are realised, these women will play a key role in the country's economy, as their counterparts in Cambodia do for theirs.

Their rights should be safeguarded and supported, not violated in order to protect the financial interests of foreign investors.

That the garment workers faced authority-sanctioned brutality in standing up for their rights should be just as much a cause for international condemnation and national scrutiny as the violence suffered by the students.

President U Thein Sein has ordered a commission of inquiry into the violent dispersal of student protesters on March 5. Surely the government should treat the garment workers with the same respect, and investigate the allegations that civilian militia members and police abused them too.

This column will cover news and current issues being reported from Myanmar and elsewhere in the region and approach them in an alternative way. It seeks to give a voice to those who are not always properly heard in mainstream media and challenge some of the dominant approaches to key issues. The author welcomes suggestions on worthy topics related to gender and associated issues.



'You mean democracy?'

Ask the people of Myanmar what democracy means to them and few mention a system of elected government. Instead, it's all about justice, freedom, equality

CHERRY THEIN

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HA – you mean democracy? Go and see the Sule area where nearly a hundred people are anxiously watching the students protesting the Education Law.”

When Yangon resident U Ngwe Moe was asked what democracy meant to him, the first thing on his mind was the protests in front of City Hall. Later, the peaceful gathering would be broken up by armed thugs raised as a militia, sporting red arm bands with the word “defy” on it. But the crackdown, carried out to public outrage, was then still yet to come, and U Ngwe Myo, like most in Yangon, was caught up in following what seemed to be multiple protests breaking out all over the city and the country, in solidarity with students as well as striking garment workers.

“There are many breaking events – you journalists can't even keep pace with what's going on,” he said.

Asked about the protests, U Ngwe Myo said students are agitating for a “democratic educational system”.

But then he added that, while the government and international organisations, call this a “transition process”, there's one thing he wants to know.

“How long will it take? How many people need to agitate? You know, we have protested enough. I understand nothing is easy in a change, but here democratisation is a bit complicated,” U Ngwe Moe said.

Does he not feel optimism? He said he is not a pessimist by nature, but the transition is “a sad-news scenario” and that things that have happened have made him speak this way. He won't, he said, trust democratisation anymore.

Whether at teashops, in newspapers or in political protests, people are itching to present their views on democracy. But what does democracy mean to them? They aren't political scientists; they aren't worried about how democracy is defined in the dictionary or on

Wikipedia. Most aren't protesting matters of voting or enfranchisement – though these are concerns for some as well.

No, most use democracy as a catch-all term for whatever they lacked under decades of military government. And there has been a lot missing. They look to their daily lives – their hardscrabble jobs and unreliable electricity and shambolic healthcare and authorities still demanding bribes for what should be regular service – and whatever is unsatisfactory becomes gathered under the umbrella of a single idea: democracy.

One change, of course, is that they are now feeling more free to express their views on this topic openly, without regard for who might be listening. Those like U Ngwe Moe – and those at Sule and Letpadan and all other venues of protest bubbling up across the land – are speaking their mind. Social media helps spread opinions; sometimes, its old ways, cartoons and caricatures, which are still the most effective.

As the jailing of journalists and state control over broadcast media show, freedom of expression is still not fully granted in the transition society. But there have been improvements over what it was under the junta. And one popular topic of discussion is, of course, the democratic process itself: How close it is, how far it is, what needs to be done to achieve it.

A popular depiction making the rounds says that democracy is like a bra, and the rule of law is like a strap. A strapless bra looks exciting, attractive and bouncing, but it's a bit loose and uncomfortable also.

Nowadays, people say, democracy in Myanmar is like a bra without a strap.

“Democracy in Myanmar is a fake,” one Yangon taxi driver said when asked about what democracy means. “The government is using the word but they do not practise it. It is not democracy but it is cronyism, which only favours the welfare of a group of people. The so-called democracy is



In the shadow of media attention, protesters oppose the National Education Law near Yangon's Sule Pagoda. Photo: Thiri Lu

only beneficial for those cronies and dictators.”

He said the only difference is that the rich are getting richer in new ways under a more open economy. Referring to the March 10 break-up of student demonstrators and other protesters at Letpadan, he said, “Our county has business-democracy. But ordinary people have beating-democracy.”

Roadside seller Ah Nyar Thu, who sells pancakes from a trolley and takes her name from her origins in the dry zone of upper Myanmar,

'Our country has business-democracy. But ordinary people have beating-democracy.'

Yangon taxi driver

said she does not believe that the transition to democracy is happening to the benefit of everyone yet.

She said her understanding of democracy is that it's a system in which everyone can earn their living legally, according to rules they can trust. But in her experience, she said, the red-tape channel is still influencing how things operate, especially for the average person on the street.

Last week she heard of a YCDC project to arrest trolley roadside sellers. She said she did not understand why the arrests would be made, but she closed her trolley-shop for a while anyway to be safe. She made no living during that period.

She does feel grateful to one recent development, she said: mobile phone access, which is now common and affordable for most. It allows her to get updates from other vendors and avoid arrest.

But she's careful not to suggest that cheap SIMs are a political fix-all.

“Mobile access is not a democracy; we should have had that long ago. The system of past years is still being practised today, no matter how the government calls democracy,” she said.

She said authorities still practise “hunter games”, something people in the streets know all too well. It is like playing hide-and-seek for a while, and then later, when things have calmed down, everyone returns to their old ways. Responsibility and accountability, she said, are far from being common practice.

“What on earth are we going to do? They arrest people doing good business as well as bad ones like prostitution. Is that called change? This doesn't include the people at the grassroots level,” she said.

U Than Htike Aung, a member of a civil society group in Ayeyarwady Region's Maubin township, said democracy is freedom from political control. He said it requires individual responsibility, to make sure one person's way of living does not disturb the living of others.

“If I dig a pit for a toilet, I should be careful of the environmental impact. I am responsible and accountable for my toilet. Similarly, everyone including government is responsible for their action, law, practice,” he said.

One company employee who wished to remain anonymous defined democracy in labour terms, saying every employee should have the right to ask for a raise, and an employee should have a right to accept or deny it according to a fair metric such as performance. The worker said, “The thinking must respect each person's rights. That, and the state of constitutional acceptance, is how I understand democracy.”

Salai Isaac Khen, executive director of the Gender and Development Initiative, said democracy means a country that reflects the wishes of the majority. But sometimes this method can be dangerous, as it can shut down those in the minority.

A popular saying says that when the elephant passes you get the path: The big animal clears the way for others to follow, but also

crushes small animals, trees, bushes and berries. Likewise, he said, making changes that reflect only the majority's decision could bring discrimination against minorities, and create social problems as a result.

“Actually the majority must be morally and ethically sound enough to consider the minority, and have love and respect for fairness and justice. If they don't, it is a democracy by majority,” he said.

Hledan resident Daw Yamin Maung, a teacher, said it is exhausting to wait for democratic rule to come to the country. She said recent events, including the student protests, have prompted past memories to resurface.

She said she doesn't know much about democracy and can't analyse the political situation. But she feels it is unfair. She expressed her political views using the metaphor of a family.

“I wish for a government which is like a father who gives a sense of security to his children. Likewise he can raise his children, the citizens, to be confident and help them to escape from fear,” Daw Yamin Maung said.

Freelance writer Wai Yan Phone said democracy means no discrimination by gender, colour, education, race or religion. He said it also means the people participate in the country's political reform.

He said he appreciated the views of Indian peace activist Gandhi. “From what I understand, democracy is when the minority gets equal right with the majority.”

“If we want to build up a democratic country, we need to respect and promote the minorities' rights. Freedom, equality and rule of law are the pillars of democratic rule, in which equality means respecting minorities,” he said.

Not all, however, are so caught up in political change. Some are taking care of their own business, no matter how often the topic lands on the front page.

Third-year university student Mg Myat Thu Han said he had no idea about democracy or demonstration, and that his companions felt the same.

“Democracy? It is not more than a word for me and my friends. I have no idea why they are demonstrating,” he said.

Matriculation student Ma Phyu Pwint, busy prepping for her exam period, said she felt conflicted about the student uprising. If she doesn't support or take part in it, she said, she might be treated like a traitor by others. At the same time, she worried about her own future.

“I do not know much about the demonstration for democracy. My parents want me to finish my exams successfully. My duty is to pass the matriculation that I have studied for the whole year,” she said.



A woman passes a recently added graffiti message on Bogyoke Aung San Road east of Bo Aung Kyaw Street. Methods used to break up protests have been the cause of much public consternation in recent weeks. Photo: Zarni Phyu



The Myanmar Times is proud to present a special four-page section focusing on reform and reconciliation. The extra weekly feature will appear each Monday in March.

ON March 30, 2011, the first elected civilian representatives to take office in Myanmar in half a century swore an oath to, among other duties, “strive for further flourishing [of] the eternal principles of justice, liberty and equality”. Their words signalled that, from then on, discussion and debate would pave the way for change and growth.

Since then, an unprecedented era of development has arrived

in the country, of the kind few in 2011 – or 2007, or 1988, or 1962 – could have imagined. It would not be an understatement to call the transition period a second Independence for Myanmar.

Over the past four years, the joy of freedom has brought impatience for more; at the same time, new challenges have arisen over where to go from here. Some hurdles have been handled well; others not so well. Held back

by endemic poverty, ongoing conflicts and numerous other limitations, Myanmar democracy remains, at best, a work in progress.

But it is progressing. That’s why, coinciding with the daily launch of the only privately run English-language newspaper, *The Myanmar Times* would like to state for the record its view that the transition process – now begun – must remain irrevocable

and irreversible. Whether in peace talks, government, business, NGOs, or the arts – and even in the religious, civic or domestic spheres – we all, as a parliament of peers, must hold ourselves to the same oath, working for “justice, liberty and equality” for all.

Anything less is simply unacceptable in the new Myanmar.

– Staff



Columnist Sithu Aung Myint takes stock of where we’ve come since 2011

I think Myanmar’s reform over the past four years has been dramatic compared to what came before. Before this, Myanmar was under a military government for nearly five decades. We can call it dictatorship. The situation was much worse than what we are encountering today. All opposition figures were detained, or had to leave Myanmar, or were oppressed and unable to engage in any political activities.

But, when the U Thein Sein government took office in 2011, the situation changed. Before, only Senior General Than Shwe held all the power. Now the power is shared: Senior General Min Aung Hlaing is the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, former general U Thein Sein is the President, former general Thura U Shwe Mann is the hluttaw (parliament) speaker and former Lt-Gen U Tin Aye is the chair of the Union Elections Commission.

Political parties can be established so there are now more than 70 registered political parties here. As a result of the meeting between President U Thein Sein and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD was allowed to contest the 2012 by-elections and more than 40 NLD party members are now elected members of the parliament.

Thousands of political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, were released and many are engaged in political activities.

We have found that Myanmar has been seeking to become a real open-market economy.

One significant reform has been easing restrictions on car import permits. Not just top seniors [privileged business people] but individuals are now allowed to import cars, which enables the middle class to possess vehicles. About 400,000 motor vehicles, including those under the old car substitution plan, were imported during the new government’s reign.

The most significant reform is allowing foreign mobile telecom operators to provide mobile communication service in Myanmar. As a result, most people can use mobile phone. According to government data, mobile phone density has reached 40 percent.

Another important reform is media freedom. The Press Scrutiny Board was abolished in August 2012. The government started allowing the private sector to publish private dailies from April 1, 2013. The new government remains completely in control of radio and TV, as during the military rule. But it has relaxed control over print media and the internet. If there is no progress in the press freedom in Myanmar, it would be difficult to prove that reforms are genuine.

Looking at Myanmar, we can see positive, significant reforms, I believe. Myanmar has now a military-controlled democracy, after being under the authoritarian military rule for decades. For the past 50 years, we didn’t see anything like today’s reforms. But the democratic federal union that ethnic nationalities are seeking still seems to be a far-fetched dream.

The constitution was drawn up to maintain the military rulers’ predominance. Under the current constitution, national reconciliation is a serious need for the country, and for building peace with ethnic armed groups. Otherwise, the country can’t be built up into a developed country. Amending the constitution is the main duty of the current government, the military leaders and former generals who are in charge of the State institutions. I think they should give top priority to this task. The constitution which favors the dominant role of the military must be amended to establish genuine democracy in this country where all ethnic nationalities may be able to enjoy equal rights and self determination.

– Myo Lwin, translation by Thiri Min Htun



Daw Thandar
Mother of two, South Okkalapa township

Changes were fast and big during the past four years. The release of political prisoners was a great relief for my friend whose son had been arrested for a misunderstanding. When the son was discharged from prison, my friend said it was her happiest day.

Phones used to be very expensive back in the day, but now you can get a SIM card for K1500. I would say that is the biggest change I have experienced. It

is really helpful for our family. It makes me less anxious when my son is late coming back from work and I can call him to know the reason he is late.

I am no expert in politics and have no interest in it either, but I seriously believe and hope our country is heading toward the good. I am not sure that everyone would feel the same way as I do.

Honestly, I don’t know what

democracy is, but I know that the whole country is yearning for it.

Every change has been surprising for us old citizens who know more about the country’s gloomy past than younger people do.

See, you could not talk bad about the government in the old days, but now you can see cartoon jokes in newspapers about politics.

– Nay Zaw Aung Win



Lu Maw
Moustache Brothers comedian, Mandalay

National reconciliation means not fighting. If you said, “Don’t fight,” and you are encouraging fights, that is not a good thing. You say, “Don’t shoot,” and then you start a fight out of the blue – I don’t know how to understand that.

Answers for peace and national reconciliation are simple but difficult to figure out. They depend on the wishes of the higher authority. As you see, when they really want to meet, the president and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi meet. The people are pleased with that, thinking, “They are meeting now, so this will be solved.” Similarly, people are pleased when the authorities and students meet too. Even if they meet and nothing happens, we are pleased.

Like writer Maung Thara said, each

side has to slacken, and it would be okay if all sides slacken a little each. Wars are not good, indeed. Currently I am a caretaker at my home. If there is a war, it doesn’t kill caretakers. It kills youths. It shouldn’t be that a war ends only when no one is left. All are brothers. I say stop before no one is left.

National Reconciliation is important for the coming election as well as for national ethnic groups. We wish they would be able to negotiate for the peace soon.

About the election, it isn’t necessary to mention who the world-famous and competent one is. Although we say Daw Suu or Senior General Min Aung Hlaing or whoever may win, if Daw Suu doesn’t win anything at all, the world wouldn’t believe it. If it turns out like

that, the election wouldn’t even have been necessary. If she doesn’t win, it wouldn’t be believed, even if it is a fair election. Even if the Union Solidarity and Development Party wins with fair conditions, people won’t believe it.

A solution comes out if two sides talk often. Students go out to the streets because they are not getting the changes they want. The reason why two sides are not friendly is for not seeing each other. If they see each other, they would be friends. Even if they meet under pretenses, they would be friends if they see each other many times. Then the truth will arrive at the table, like that saying goes.

– Phyo Wai Kyaw,
translation by Kyawt Daryl Lin



Lu Maw makes his views known. Photo: Phyo Wai Kyaw



Ma Thida (Sanchaung)
Writer, journal editor, doctor, former political prisoner

During this transition period, I am able to speak out on my beliefs and make my voice heard. Literary talks are being hosted. Writers no longer need to go through rejection by censorship. The news media has boomed.

People’s interest in politics has increased. Everyone has come to know they can’t neglect political affairs. They have come to have the knowledge that

politics is a matter that concerns them. Their growing involvement with politics benefits the country’s development. It is a good point.

The bad point is the outbreaks of affairs. Many issues arise at the same time. I face a group of people who react negatively to issues raised. Their reaction is not based on rational thought.

My concern is qualified human

resources. I feel people’s skills, values and abilities have been lowered as they have received poor educations. It is difficult to let my feelings out. But I hope for a better future. They are at disadvantage because of poor education but they have desires to learn and to help. That’s why I hope for better education that develops people’s skills and values.

– Zon Pann Pwint



Mahabandoola Park visitors got a thrill on January 8 when a film crew and actors in costume – representing Bogyoke Aung San and the eight major ethnic groups of Myanmar – posed for photographs around Independence Monument, to be used as publicity for the 100th anniversary of Bogyoke Aung San's birth. Photo: Wade Guyitt



No reconciliation without retrospection

In this exclusively translated extract from his book *Pyan-Le-Yin-Gyar-Sait-Ye Hnit Myanma Naing Ngan Ye Atway Amyin* (Reconciliation and political views), Min Ba Htoo – a former Union minister writing under a pen name – mulls why we must look back as well as forward

DISCOVERING the truth about past incidents is one part of reconciliation. Sufferers should have the right to disclose their experiences as well as their feelings about what was done to them. But what we all need to understand is that truth alone can't bring reconciliation. Justice is also necessary, to heal hurts which have been suffered in the past, to hold accountable those who committed unfair deeds, and to bring equal rights and mutual respect.

At the beginning of the reconciliation process, most people – including, most likely, those who have suffered the biggest injustices – may have doubts. They may deem the reconciliation process only a way to legally mandate the reduction of a situation, and by extension a way to lessen or ignore their own feelings of hurt.

But reconciliation is a process aimed at the long term. We need to be able to explain to those with doubts that it is not a short-distance goal. It is important that the whole country reaches a situation in which truth, justice, healing, collaboration, and development of socio-economic and collective energy emerge. Such a situation is only possible when all who should participate take part and the process becomes all-inclusive.

That's why reconciliation is not an easy task. If seemingly more important tasks appear, along with many conflicts that require political solutions, reconciliation may appear to be an obstacle, especially at a time when a ceasefire agreement has just been inked. In implementing a new democratic structure, some may not consider adding national reconciliation to their schedule, due to limits in resources, time and institutions. There may be serious political pressures on one side or the other, or enticements to give more priority to party processes and interests instead.

Such a scenario may delay the reconciliation process. Otherwise, stakeholders may think moving forward quickly, forming an investigation commission and recognising bitter past experiences may dredge up memories that harm current political and socio-economic stability.

If we look only the past rather than giving priority to the future, there will be a loss not only of the sensitive political and economic present situation but also of tasks necessary for the future. Some people might suggest focusing on collaborating in some scenarios, but in other scenarios in which groups hold more disparate

views, waiting to implement reconciliation until later when tensions have cooled.

We can understand this reasoning, even though we can't accept it. For we must try to bring about reconciliation between two sides precisely in order to decrease tension between them. If we postpone it until later, there is a risk the situation will change into something altogether different from what we wish to see.

People have bitter feelings. Is it fair to tell them to forget their hurt for the moment and collaborate on more important matters, and that their hurt will be cured later? Well, think of what those suffering from a serious illness would think if they were treated with a quick-

Reconciliation without retrospection may seem easier: There will be no arguments, because we won't hold any talks. But it is certain that society will face a deeper loss in the future.

fix remedy. Reflecting on the past inevitably brings up painful experiences for some, but it is a necessity in a society which has suffered discrimination.

The future we want is a shared society, with no bitterness, and with a collective energy leading to prosperity and unity. If that future is to be built out of a past which saw discrimination, we cannot simply forget the past and begin as if nothing has happened. Only when all can have a clear mind on their bitter feelings suffered in the past can we all be free from concern over the risk of backsliding.

Of course, from the short-term, political point of view, reconciliation without retrospection may seem easier: There will be no arguments, because we won't hold any talks. But it is certain that society will face a deeper loss in the future. In seeking to change the situation from conflict to peace, we need to negotiate with one another politically. And we need to try to achieve agreements to

collaborate in areas which are of benefit to both sides. Politicians who can create such situations can get good marks from public. And international aid will roll in. But if relationships can't be rehabilitated, all their efforts will soon come to ruin. That's why it is not easy to be a sustainable democratic country.

Some members of the current government have said that people never praise them, no matter how much good they do, but always exaggerate if they show a little weakness. How, they ask, can the country develop if people hold a pessimistic view like that?

Well, it is true from their side. But they need to know why. If we know the disease, we can cure it; if we try curing it without knowing the disease, we will only make it worse. The disease of conflict comes when a "proper collaborative relationship has not yet been reached in society". That's why I have repeatedly mentioned that, in a post-conflict society, it is necessary to make reconciliation in every step of the democracy implementation process.

What does this mean in Myanmar? I must say first that there is no perfect model for reconciliation. We will have to build it with our own model, appropriate to the situation of our country, our people and our conflict. Reconciliation can't be imported from abroad. International communities do need to stay as helpers, though, and those who have experience with the challenges of peace talks here and elsewhere should play a leading role in the reconciliation process. They can use others' suggestions, but they need to act according to their own views, and be confident in their own ability. Moreover, they must have creativity and originality, and able to integrate new opinions where suitable.

I want to suggest four facts be kept in mind for a sustainable reconciliation process.

First, the reconciliation process should be started at the earliest convenience, because people are most understanding and accepting of reforms and challenges at a time when democratic reforms are getting under way.

Difficult problems should be tackled first, because they are more difficult and will take longer to solve.

Reconciliation takes time and implementation shouldn't be hurried.

Lastly, the goals, challenges and time-frames should be openly publicised.

– Translation by Thiri Min Htun



Min Ba Htoo looks at what forgiveness means – and what it will cost if we don't achieve it

At least four things must be achieved for a reconciliation process to be called successful.

First, both sides have to have accepted that fierce incidents have really happened, and happened because of people. It is necessary to record this for the historical record.

Second, each side needs to have accepted the other side's feelings. Those who suffer also need to have accepted that those who carried out acts against them will suffer bitterness as well.

Third, both sides need to believe justice has been made in a case that has had no justice in the past.

Finally, hopes must have been raised for the security of both sides, as well as the mental and physical well-being of all concerned.

The last item is the peak of reconciliation. When that period is reached, both sides will start to have mutual trust, respect and compatibility.

Of course, it is difficult to bring about perfect reconciliation between past enemies. What we need to bear in mind is the fact that relationships made stable may still be destroyed at any time if reconciliation is not implemented. If you want to end a conflict forever and to get eternal peace, reconciliation needs mental remedies, including forgiveness.

Forgiveness shows sympathy and love; it is much better than justice. All religions across the world teach people to forgive. Mahavira Jina, Jesus Christ, Prophet Muhammad, Siddhartha Gautama Buddha and Confucius all taught patience, love, sympathy, insight truth and good morals.

I would like to quote from a speech given by Sitagu Sayadaw. It was delivered as part of the Inter-Faith Dialogue held at Tehran, Iran, in January.

"Every religion has its own outer shell and inner core. The outer shell consists of rites, rituals, ceremonies, beliefs, myths and doctrines. These outer shells differentiate one religion from another. However, there is an inner core which is common to all religions. This is the universal teaching of morality, charity, mental discipline, pure mind, pure love, compassion, goodwill, tolerance and insight truth. This is a common denominator that all religious leaders ought to emphatically teach their followers to practice. If proper importance is attached to the essence of all religions, the pure love, tolerance, forgiveness and compassion are shown for their surface level, then conflicts and violence could be minimised.

"We must try to seek forbearance, forgiveness, selflessness and confession for the establishment of peace, harmony, stability, security and coexistence in the world," Sitagu Sayadaw said.

I'd like to mention that patience and forgiveness feature in the teaching of all religions. If you forgive someone, your power, properties and mental image won't be lessened. Similarly, someone who has been forgiven shouldn't feel that being forgiven has made him or her degraded.

Forgiveness is a task of people who are mature, generous and moral. It is a tradition that one person has to forgive when another person confesses his or her fault and says they are sorry.

Let's consider what the initial intention of forgiveness is. It is a kind of recognition of the sufferer, who seeks out the offender to repair the bad relationships between them. It also means that the side of the offender realises their fault and regrets it, and wants to bring reconciliation.



The party line

The Myanmar Times speaks to political parties about the issues they face

Rakhine National Party

Established: **2014 (merger)**
Hluttaw seats: **6 (Amyotha), 8 (Pyithu)**

U Maung Nyo, member

THE Pyithu Hluttaw's oldest member, Sittwe MP U Khin Maung Nyo, says it was a wave of popularity that propelled him into his seat, despite his initial reluctance to run.

A member of the Rakhine National Party, U Khin Maung Nyo says he has always been involved with local causes, earning himself a large reputation in the process. First elected at the age of 78, he is now 83 years old.

"As an elder of the town, I did many things for Sittwe. They used to charge an entrance fee for Point Beach, the most popular beach in Sittwe. In colonial times, people with TB or heart trouble were encouraged to take the sea air, and there was no charge for it. Why should people pay for air?" he said.

U Maung Nyo also pressed for the provision of cheaper means of transport, including ferry boats and motorboats to

'When I told them I was 77 years old, they encouraged me all the more.'

Pauktaw and Minbya, and his success, he says, was one of the sources of his popularity in Sittwe.

"That's why they encouraged me to contest the election. When I told them I was 77 years old, they encouraged me all the more. I won by more than 40,000 votes," he told *The Myanmar Times*.

His age – by parliamentary tradition, he

is the Father of the House – entitles him to respect, from other MPs and even from the Speaker.

Another factor impelling him to run, despite financial constraints, was his concern about the communal situation in Rakhine State. As a member, he set himself three tasks: securing a 24-hour power supply for Sittwe; changing the name of popular attraction Kandawmin Garden back to U Oaktama Garden; and stopping the use in parliament of the term "Rohingya".

He has not succeeded in his first goal, but he has achieved the other two.

"Bengalis are allowed to marry four wives, so their population was steadily increasing. I told myself, we can't continue like this. Something has to be done," he said.

He says his proudest achievement is getting hluttaw to abandon the term "Rohingya".

"That name was created with the intention of insulting the sovereignty of the Union of Myanmar," he said. "When they first came to Rakhine and filled in official forms, they listed their religion as Islam and their race as Bengali. When I pointed this out, hluttaw agreed," he said.

There is a quaver in U Maung Nyo's voice now. He will not stand in the November election. "I'm too old. But I will support younger people. If the election is fair one, there will be many opportunities for young people, especially with the transition to democracy. We always wanted that. I became an MP because of the people's will, not because of my own qualities."

– Pyae Thet Phyto,
translation by Kyawt Daryl Lin

National Unity Party

Formed: **1990**
Hluttaw seats: **5 (Amyotha), 12 (Pyithu)**

U Han Shwe, executive committee member

MYANMAR is a Union country built of national ethnic groups. Today the current policy of the country is to make ethnic groups united. The unity of national ethnic groups is more important than democracy.

Our party has the following principles for conducting meetings and reunification of ethnic groups; to have equality of the national ethnicities; to have the right of self-prescription; to have the right of official existence as a national ethnic group; and to have equal development. If both sides accept these four facts, an agreement would be gained. If so, there would be no reason not to be able to negotiate. This is the necessary way of proceeding.

The next thing is building trust. In building trust, both sides have to make an effort because there are two sides. This means both sides must try to achieve it. It doesn't work only with the effort of one side. It is like riding a cart: Both wheels need to spin. That cart would be dragging if only one wheel spins. Today, it is like both

'The unity of ethnic groups is more important than democracy.'

wheels are not spinning. We have to watch whose side is not spinning.

It is said, "It is necessary to give priority to the people; it must represent the people in some way." So to the state as well as the armed organisations, please just give first priority to this empathy: "People are suffering. They have to stay in the refugee camp. Women, children and old people are suffering most." An agreement for

the peace I mentioned just now would come. But now, I guess, it isn't coming along because they are giving the first priority to their organisations, not to the people.

Now is a very important time. The election is about to be held. There is only about seven months left before the election. This election is so important. It is going to make a change. Maybe it will be the government [staying in power] or maybe the government will be changed. The people have to make a decision on that.

The people, decision-makers, have to be in a relaxed situation in which they can consider carefully the policy of each party is, what the announcement letter of each party says. Farmers would watch farm affairs; workers would watch work affairs; other sectors would think how to change, who to select in areas connected with them. We don't want them to have fears and worries. We want people to think happily and politically how to change their future. In other words, the people must be given the first priority. [The election in] 2015 is a people's affair. Good conditions must be created for them to be able to make decisions.

If the people would give our party responsibility, we are intending to distribute 19 subjects which would be conducted with our policies to the people in states and regions. National ethnic policy, foreign policy, and policies such as economics related to today's market economy and farm affairs are included in it. Farmers must own farms. And about worker affairs, we will work on wages and salaries would increase gradually up to international standards. For education, we would cooperate with foreign universities. We will distribute details about this at the end of March.

– Mya Kay Khine, translation by Kyawt Daryl Lin

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

In religious or moral cases, apologies and forgiveness mean repentance for bad actions done in the past, prior to reconsideration according to doctrines. In all cases, forgiveness is valuing the recovery of a relationship between both sides.

Tolerance always features in forgiveness. It leads to stepping back from acts of revenge. Meanwhile, sympathy for the offender also features to some extent.

Based on these definitions, forgiveness can be achieved in only one situation: Both sides involved in a conflict need to understand that an unjustifiable incident happened between them. And both sides need to show they have similar views now. It is in this situation that forgiveness can appear.

Sometimes we may confuse forgiveness with apology. They are sometimes the same but sometimes different. Forgiveness has a wider definition than apology. Apology means only an action to ask forgiveness. Forgiveness comprises the offender's apology and the sufferer's forgiveness. It means a mutual action from both sides.

In 1998, Murphy and Hampton defined forgiveness as follows: "Forgiveness is the forswearing of resentment – the resolute overcoming of the anger and hatred that are naturally directed toward a person who has done one an unjustified and non-excused moral injury."

There is no specification that sufferer must forgive when someone apologises for misdeeds, but forgiveness shows the extent to which people can keep morality such as tolerance, love and sympathy.

It is important for our country that citizens can forgive each other. If we can't forgive, we won't get reconciliation. And then we will lack the collective energy that allows our country to compete with other countries. Our new generation won't enjoy the normal privileges of life.

– Translation by Thiri Min Htun

Book Review

Sit-htaut-hlan-yay A-yar-shi-haung Ta Oo Yei Naing Ngan Yay A-Yu-A-Sa-Myar (Political thoughts of a former military intelligence officer)

By Nay Yi
Yadanar Thike Sapay (Treasure Publishing House)
November 2014

THIS book by a former Military Intelligence officer reveals the inside stories of what happened to the once very powerful MI organisation led by former prime minister General Khin Nyunt.

The 206-page book in Myanmar language starts with a chapter on why Military Intelligence collapsed in late 2004, with a great deal of detail about how it was purged.

Then-MI personnel were forgetting their basic principles and losing the common touch, the author says. He blames MI's weaknesses in dealing with other military personnel as well as administrative mechanisms and departments.

He also blames the failures to effectively take action on corruption and arrogance among MI personnel.

One interesting revelation, which the author describes as an ugly event, was that former Senior General Than Shwe was scheduled to meet with NLD

chair Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in mid-2003, organised by former MI chief General Khin Nyunt. But unfortunately the meeting was cancelled at the last moment, evidently from spite.

Had it not been, who knows how the years since then might have been different.

In one chapter, the author examines why the Tatmadaw has not been able to suppress ethnic armed groups even after 60 gruelling years of civil war. He directs his views to those who blame the Tatmadaw for procrastinating over the long-running conflict.

The author also presents some salient points as to why President U Thein Sein should perhaps serve a second term.

The final chapter looks at facts and figures of Myanmar in a satirical style, blaming those who supported sanctions against Myanmar before they took power.

– Myo Lwin



Business

Kengtung coal plant on despite complaints

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A CONTROVERSIAL coal-fired power plant in Kengtung, eastern Shan State, will move ahead despite opposition from local residents and claims from senior officials that coal plants are on hold.

Thai-based Lumpoondum Company has inked a memorandum of agreement with the Ministry of Electric Power to proceed to the next stage, according to officials.

It is the first memorandum of agreement on a large coal-fired plant to be inked, though about 12 large memorandums of understanding have been signed around the country since 2010.

"This agreement will allow the company to proceed after finishing the feasibility study, though a joint venture agreement still needs to be signed before the project can be implemented," said U Aye San, director general of the Department of Hydro Power.

The Kengtung area near the border with Thailand is believed to be rich in coal, and the agreement calls for it to be fuelled from locally mined sources.

The latest agreement was signed between the Ministry of Electric Power and the Thai firm on March 11 in Nay Pyi Taw, calling for the project to be a total 660 megawatts.

Some local residents say they oppose the project, adding they are uncertain about its effect on Kengtung town.

"Nobody agrees with this project," said local resident U Sai Tun Tun Naing. "I haven't heard of any environmental impact study on the project site, but we hear the whole village is going to be moved."

The plant is expected to be built about 5 kilometres (3.1 miles) from Kengtung town. U Sai Tun Tun Naing said he is unsure if townspeople will be better off from the project, even though the Ministry of Electric Power has been pushing for the electrification of eastern Shan State.

"We don't know who exactly is behind this project. Who is taking responsibility for its consequences? These administrators and authorities are not from this region. Through the whole thing, we don't get any benefit from this project," he said.

The Thai firm was approved to conduct a feasibility study in October 2013 after signing the original memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Electric Power. The initial phase is to see 25MW of installed capacity, with another 400 to 500MW added in the next phase. The project was initially scheduled to be implemented from 2015 to 2018.

Shan State Minister of Industry and Electricity U Sai Tun Yi said the initial project was pitched as much smaller in size. "It was previously said to be only 20MW," he said. "I am not involved in it anymore, as it is larger than 30MW and, according to the law, belongs to the Union Government." He added he had not been invited to further study the project or attend the memorandum of agreement signing.

A senior official from the Ministry of Electric Power last week claimed that all major coal-fired power plants in the country are currently on hiatus due to social and environmental concerns.



A rice farmer works in his field. Representatives of small and medium businesses say they have been shut out of legal China-bound exports. Photo: Kaung Htet

Criticism dogs Myanmar Rice Federation's China choices

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THE Myanmar Rice Federation's choice of companies that will be registered for legal exports to China is receiving criticism from small-scale players as well as large businesses.

Some of the country's largest exporters were left off last month's list of nine companies that would be permitted to handle the rice trade, while several of the chosen firms are relatively unknown and have not yet been formed.

Now smaller companies are saying they have also been excluded, missing out on a chance to take part in the lucrative trade.

Myanmar Rice Federation officials counter that China has established a strict set of criteria that must be met, and many local firms simply fall short.

Following criticism from traders of its selection of the first nine companies, Myanmar Rice Federation organised a second round of permitting. No companies submitted applications, despite over 100 companies having submitted bids for the first round.

Federation officials have said they always intended to organise subsequent rounds of licensing, and say a third licensing round is now in the works - though critics

say the process needs to be more transparent.

U Thein Aung, president of the Freedom Farmers League, said the company selection has so far left well-connected firms in the lead.

"If the exports only travel via the selected companies, we farmers can only rely on those companies, and the rice price will be low, even though China pays a good price," he said.

"It's not a market-oriented economy if only one group of people hold the whole market."

A deal was brokered to legalise rice exports to China last year, which had long been illegal from Beijing's point of view, but usually allowed anyways.

Myanmar Rice Federation has been given the responsibility to facilitate trade with China National Cereals, Oils and Foodstuffs Corporation (COFCO), including registering local companies to enter the trade. The chosen companies must also meet China's health standards for the rice before they can begin shipments by sea as well as overland.

Small businesspeople say the Myanmar Rice Federation's selective criteria hinder local businesses which would like to expand.

Local exporters shipping rice through Muse border gates have faced challenges in their bids to become registered.

U Sai Kyaw, president of Tawwin Adipati and managing director of Sanpya Nwe - both companies which export through Muse to

Ruili in China - said as far as he can tell there is no avenue open to him to legalise his exports.

"If companies like mine want to export normally, they have no choice other than to connect with the selected companies," he said.

"The criteria is simply too high for my companies to be selected to participate."

U Sai Kyaw exports an average of 25,000 tonnes of rice to Yunnan province per month.

Industry insiders say China Certification and Inspection Group will open offices in Yangon, Mandalay and Muse to monitor the quality of Myanmar's rice before it is exported to China.

To receive official approval, local companies must meet seven different standards set by China's General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ).

Myanmar Rice Federation has formed a 36-member committee to tackle issues arising from the China

trade and assist the selection of companies.

Members of the committee have attempted to shift blame from the committee to Chinese authorities, saying it has been responsible for the selections.

"Though we are receiving comments from SMEs and companies not listed in the first round [for legalising exports], it is not the MRF who selects the companies to be registered, but China itself," said U Nay Lin Zin, committee member and managing director of Myanmar Rice Mail, which is one of the nine companies that was originally selected.

"Some companies can't meet the criteria [China] is calling for," he said. "We don't have any choice in options other than the criteria they laid out, as the shipment rules and payment system cannot differ after the stock arrives."

U Nay Lin Zin said SMEs generally cannot meet the criteria. Their milling capabilities and export volumes are usually too small, while areas like warehousing quality are too poor to meet the high bar set by Chinese authorities.

A third round for Myanmar firms interest in receiving permits for rice exports is under way, with a committee meeting set for March 12 and a winner to be announced March 20.

In coming April or May, MAPCO is set to export the first 3000 tonnes of the total 100,000 tonnes of rice Myanmar may export to China this year.

'It's not a market-oriented economy if only one group of people hold the whole market.'

U Thein Aung
Freedom Farmers League

As Bangladesh titans struggle, it is the poor who suffer

BUSINESS 15



China plans large overhaul of its state industries

BUSINESS 16

Exchange Rates (March 15 close)		
Currency	Buying	Selling
Euro	K1089	K1107
Malaysia Ringitt	K307	K308
Singapore Dollar	K763	K770
Thai Baht	K31	K32
US Dollar	K1063	K1068

Stock exchange service providers face staffing trouble

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THE Yangon Stock Exchange is slated to start by October, though the securities industry faces a shortage of skilled workers, according to experts.

Working on capital markets requires specialised knowledge that is currently in short supply, given Myanmar has never had a modern stock exchange.

Deputy finance minister U Maung Maung Thein previously said that service providers on the exchange will face challenges finding suitable staff. Experts say this shortage will complicate efforts to launch robust market businesses, particularly in the YSX's early years.

"Even the number of Myanmar citizens who returned from abroad and have experience in the financial sector are relatively few," said U Aung Thura, CEO of Thura Swiss, a research, consulting and capital markets firm.

"There is also another choice to foreign experts, but they have zero experience regarding Myanmar," he said. "It will take some time to get skilled workers in the financial markets."

Government officials and their private-sector counterparts are ramping up plans to open the Yangon Stock Exchange later this year. The deadline has passed for local firms or foreign-local joint ventures to submit bids as

brokers, dealers, underwriters and consultants, with winners expected to be announced in April.

Domestic knowledge of market operation is already strained, as there are few market professionals and plenty of private sector firms looking to expand.

For the markets to be a success, it necessary that firms are able to hire experienced stock market professionals, said Ko Mynn Nyi Nyi, a financial adviser from Inter Pan Myanmar.

"As far as I see, most people in the financial markets still lack experience," he said. "Who would dare to invest in this kind of businesses [given the challenges]?"

Extensive skills training is required to create capable staff, he added.

Likewise, U Aung Thura said security firms are on the lookout for employs who can handle business and give instruction, while training those who have interest in the sector or graduated with degrees in those subjects.

Among the four types of service providers - underwriters, brokers, dealers and consultants - underwriters require the most talented workers, as the underwriting business is the most complex, he added.

Business is also expected to be slow at first for service providers, who must also face the expense of investing in human capital. But after about three years the market could be much successful, according to U Aung Thura.



Changing money from US dollars to kyat comes at a better rate from informal traders than by following the Central Bank reference rate.

Photo: Staff

Exchange gap widens



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THE official reference rate for dollar-kyat exchange maintained by the Central Bank of Myanmar and the rate charged by unofficial moneylenders are increasingly diverging.

While the Central Bank's reference figure has sat at K1027 per dollar since the end of February, at many informal traders the kyat has depreciated to around K1075 per dollar.

Divergent rates show the Central Bank is still developing its position in the market, experts say.

"This shows the Central Bank does not control the market, and there will be some impacts in the money market," said Asia Green Development Bank executive director U Soe Thein.

The Central Bank and related financial institutions should work to build their influence over the market, he added.

Measures such as higher interest rates on bank deposits would strengthen Myanmar's currency, but with a growing budget and trade deficit and continued strength in the

US dollar, experts say the kyat may continue to weaken in the short-term. The reference rate is officially set by the daily auctions conducted by the Central Bank and authorised domestic dealers.

Yangon Foreign Exchange Market Committee chair U Mya Than said local banks rely on the reference rate for their operations - however, if the rate is not realistic, customers will look outside the banks.

shrunk considerably since a May 2012 move from an unofficial peg against Special Drawing Rights, was widely derided as unrealistic, to a managed float.

However, informal currency dealers have not disappeared completely, providing an alternative to businesses looking for better rates than can be obtained from commercial banks.

U Mya Than said the Central Bank appears to be stubborn on exchanges rates and moving in the wrong direction.

"The rate should be set by supply and demand of the market. We cannot deny the US dollar is strengthening internationally, and this should be reflected in the auction mechanism," he said.

Although Central Bank of Myanmar officials declined to comment on the record, one official said the growing gap is a matter of discussion. The Foreign Exchange Management Department is currently holding internal talks on the issue, and has yet to share a broader strategy within the bank.

Ministry of Commerce trade promotion director U Win Myint said the weaker local currency encourages exports and decreases imports.

"We expect the informal market will be kept alive by exporters selling their forex back into the market," he said.

KYAT

1027

Central Bank of Myanmar's reference rate per US dollar - though some informal moneychangers are selling around K1075.

Most commercial banks currently have small supplies of foreign currency and generally rely on supply from the Central Bank through the daily auctions.

The informal forex trade has



A policeman walks in front of Yangon University convocation hall. Photo: Staff

Yangon University waffles on WiFi

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REDLINK has pledged to provide free WiFi at Yangon University, but the campus has not yet decided to accept the offer, according to U Myo Myint Nyunt, assistant general manager of sales at the internet service provider.

"We haven't reached an agreement with Yangon University to provide the service, because the university hasn't replied to us," he said. "But if Yangon gives us an agreement, we will give free WiFi service inside the university."

Yangon University rector U Aung Thu said the university currently provides sufficient connectivity

for students, though will take up Redlink's offer if it finds it needs help.

Redlink has provided free WiFi at Yangon Railway station and Bogyoke market since February 5, and at Shwedagon Pagoda since December 2013. It may extend the free service further in the future.

Users say the service can be slow, particularly when the areas are heavily trafficked.

"With free WiFi at Shwedagon, there are so many users and speeds slow down," said one disgruntled user, U Than Nine Soe.

U Myo Myint Nyunt said he agreed speeds could be slow if there were too many users of free services, though claimed it works well at off-peak times.



Vacancy Notice (VN No. 2015/002)

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Position	Type of Contract	Grade	Duty Station	Deadline
Census Project Manager (IT)	Service Contract	SC-9	Nay Pyi Taw	31 March 2015

Applications should be addressed to **UNFPA Representative**. **Attention:** International Operations Manager, Room A-07, UNFPA, No.6, Natmauk Road, Yangon.

Email: myanmar.office@unfpa.org

For further details, please see the vacancy announcement posted at UN billboard. No.6, Natmauk Road, Yangon and also at UNFPA website (<http://myanmar.unfpa.org>)

Applications will be considered only when meeting all requirements set in detailed vacancy announcement.

IN BRIEF

Legal wine imports coming

Legal imports of foreign wine will begin soon as the Ministry of Commerce is to announce plans this month to give out import licences, according to state media. The rules on imports have been completed and will be brought forward in March in an attempt to meet rising demand and control illegal trade, *Global New Light of Myanmar* on March 13 quoted Ministry of Commerce director of the directorate of trade Daw Tin San Yi as saying. — Staff

BG and Woodside to ink contracts

UK-based BG Group and Australia's Woodside Energy together with local partner Myanmar Petroleum Exploration and Production (MPEP) will sign Production Sharing Contracts for four blocks on the coming Friday, according to the Ministry of Energy.

The official added that Chevron and Statoil are likely to sign next week.

BG and Woodside won shallow water blocks A-4 and A-7 and deep-water AD-2 and AD-5, though they are partnering with MPEP only for the shallowwater blocks.

The four blocks are offshore Rakhine State. — *Aung Shin*

Success brings its own trouble for Yangon getaway

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CATERING to holidaymakers when the sun is shining, then returning to a former job in the rainy season means two income streams for most families living at Yankin Tha riverfront.

The getaway site, located about 30 miles (48 kilometres) west of Yangon near Ayeyarwady Region's Nyaungdon town, has created something of a boom for what was once largely a sleepy fishing area.

While it has received visitors since 2011, it officially opened part of the riverfront holidaymakers in March 2014. Yankin Tha — formerly known as Nyaung Chaungtha — is certainly not as luxurious an area as Ngwe Saung or Chaungtha beaches further west in Ayeyarwady Region. Unlike those two established holiday spots, it is an easy day trip from Yangon.

But life is not purely a beach for local residents, who say the area's popularity is creating its own set of problems. Local residents say shop rent for the area along the Ayeyarwady River allocated for tourism businesses has doubled in the last year, and other

costs are climbing as well.

The owner of a local shop named Hay Man Oo said rent has doubled from K300,000 to K600,000 in the space of a year, as cars and buses bearing tourists increasingly arrive. Hay Man Oo and other waterfront shops rent out tents and tables to holiday-goers, while also serving food and cold drinks.

Costs of the shop's tents have increased over the last year for visitors from K6000 a day to K15,000, partly to meet its increased rental cost.

"We cannot fix the price. Some visitors visit every year and they say it's getting more expensive each year," said the owner. He added that prices can sometimes be bargained down, but the shop must do what it can to survive.

The Hay Man Oo shop was also somewhat late to open this year, as water levels have taken longer to fall. Normally it opens in February, but this year it could not open until March 2.

Staff at a separate shop, Nay Chi Oo, said locations are allotted by lucky draw.

A local fisherman said that while the tourist seasons runs from January to May, it is best from March to May.



Nyaungdon, the site of Yankin Tha beach, is 30 miles west of Yangon. Graphic: Staff

He said he earns K10,000 a day — more on weekends and holidays — by selling fish and prawn to tourists.

Ko Aung Thuya is one local entrepreneur who figures the destination will continue growing. He invested K3 million to open his small restaurant named Kyal Sin Hein, adding it must be rebuilt each year as the river rises with the rainy season, requiring the restaurants to be taken down.

When he first opened in 2011, the shop rental cost was K50,000 a year,

though that grew to K300,000 — and now K600,000.

"Things have become a little difficult," he said.

Ko Zarni, a local holiday-goer, said he is disappointed his favourite escape near Yangon is becoming popular.

Local vendors, though, say on the whole they are getting much more business.

"I sell seafood, and people like to eat seafood on the waterfront," said U Maung.

Airlines operate with new challenges

PYAE THET PHYO

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A NEW set of challenges faces the domestic air industry, as the number of airlines grow and ASEAN Open Skies is set to fully kick in later this year, according to deputy transport minister U Zin Yaw.

Speaking at the Amyotha Hluttaw on March 12 in response to a question from Yangon representative U Nyunt Tin, he said a national plan is also near completion that covers the concerns of the civil aviation sector.

Parliamentarians say the domestic aviation sector is stronger than it has been in recent memory.

"These days, Myanmar's airway sector has improved. There are now 10 local carriers, whereas before there were only two or three," said U Nyunt Tin.

Myanmar has also signed on to the ASEAN Open Skies Policy, which

'There are now 10 local carriers, whereas before there were only two or three.'

U Nyunt Tin

Amyotha Hluttaw representative

is to allow for freer flights, specifically the right to fly from an airline's home country to a foreign country in ASEAN, and vice versa, without government approval. A number of restrictions on flights still apply, however, notably restrictions on flights between two foreign countries by a third country's airline.

U Nyunt Tun said that while Myanmar agrees in general with the open sky policy, it is concerned its small, local airlines may lose out if foreign competitors are allowed to fly domestic routes.

"Our airlines have trouble competing domestically, let alone in the ASEAN region," he said. "Local airlines will be better-placed to complete in the market if concerned ministries create plans to merge with foreign airlines."

U Zin Yaw said the Ministry of Transport and Department of Civil Aviation have been encouraging mergers with foreign airlines as well as signing contracts to collaborate with foreign airlines to offer the opportunity to improve. Foreign airlines can own up to 49 percent of a local airline, under existing rules.

There are currently 10 local airlines: Yangon Airway, Air Mandalay, Asian Wings Airline, Golden Myanmar Airlines, Air KBZ, Air Bagan, Mann Yadanarpon, Myanmar National Airlines, Myanmar Airways International and FMI Air, with an eleventh, Apex, in the works.

— Translation by Khant Lin Oo

BEIJING



Chinese premier Li Keqiang speaks at his annual press conference yesterday. Photo: AFP

Li Keqiang promises economic action

THE Chinese government has more weapons in its arsenal to boost its flagging economy, the world's second-largest, Premier Li Keqiang said yesterday at his once-a-year press conference.

Mr Li — who is second only to President Xi Jinping in the Communist hierarchy — was speaking at Beijing's Great Hall of the People, where he also addressed topics including Sino-Japanese relations, air pollution and the future of China's notorious one-child policy.

Fears are mounting that Chinese expansion, a key driver of the global economy, may slow further in the wake of official data showing production, consumption and investment growth have fallen to multi-year lows.

China's economy expanded 7.4 percent last year — the slowest pace in nearly a quarter of a century — and Mr Li earlier this month reduced the Asian giant's annual growth target to "approximately 7pc", the lowest since a similar goal in 2004.

Authorities have so far avoided

big-ticket incentives to bolster growth like the unprecedented 4 trillion yuan (now US\$640 billion) stimulus package Beijing deployed at the height of the global financial crisis.

But Mr Li signalled that more measures could be taken, telling reporters after the close of the Communist-controlled National People's Congress parliament, "We still have a host of policy instruments at our disposal."

Top Chinese leaders have said the economy is in a delicate transition away from decades of double-digit annual growth to a new, slower model that authorities say is more sustainable, a stage that they have branded as the "new normal".

Mr Li dismissed theories that China's boom has seen it overtake the US to become the world's number-one economy, describing such purchasing power parity calculations as a "misleading exaggeration".

"According to authoritative standards, China is still the second-largest economy in the world," he said, stressing that it remained "behind

about 80 countries in the world" in terms of per capita GDP.

"China is still a developing country in every sense of this term," he added.

On China's notorious air pollution, which causes widespread public anger, Mr Li told the assembled journalists that Beijing was falling short of expectations.

His remarks came one week after authorities blocked a scathing independent video on China's persistent air pollution, "Under the Dome", that racked up hundreds of millions of views before it was taken offline.

"The Chinese government is determined to tackle smog and pollution," Mr Li said. "The progress we have made still falls short of the expectations of our people."

With the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II approaching, Mr Li offered Japan a chance of improved relations — but only if Tokyo's leadership honestly confronts the country's wartime aggression against China. — AFP



The view from the interior of a Myanmar airline's cockpit. Photo: Staff

IN BRIEF

Indonesia accuses US of paper tariff problem

The World Trade Organization said Indonesia had filed a complaint accusing Washington of breaching global trade rules by imposing punitive tariffs on its shipments of coated paper.

The WTO said it had been notified by Indonesia that it was requesting consultations on the US anti-dumping measures.

Requesting consultations is the first step in trade disputes before the Geneva-based body, which polices respect for global trade accords in an effort to offer its 160 member economies a level playing field.

Bullet train links Tokyo with ancient city of Kanazawa

Japan launched a new Shinkansen bullet train service linking Tokyo with the ancient city of Kanazawa, which is famed for its huge castle and traditional food and crafts.

Operating at speeds of up to 260 kilometres (160 miles) per hour, it cuts travel time to Kanazawa, in the central region facing the Sea of Japan (East Sea), by more than an hour to just two hours and 28 minutes.

Japan already operates bullet train lines from northern Aomori through to southwestern Kyushu.

But the coastal Hokuriku region was not connected with the network, and travellers had to switch trains or fly between both sides of the main island of Honshu.

Airbus to ink South Korea deal

Airbus Helicopters was poised to seal a deal in South Korea to sell some 300 civil and military helicopters worth around US\$ 3 billion, according to sources close to the arrangement.

"The contract should be signed on Monday in Seoul. It's for the development and manufacturing of about 300 helicopters, about 100 of which are for civilian use," said the source, who did not wish to be named.

"The helicopters will be built in conjunction with a local partner," the source added, confirming media reports of a tie-up with Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI).

- AFP

Ketchup-maker bleeds jobs

HJ Heinz, the ketchup maker backed by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc., has slashed about 7400 jobs in 20 months as his partners at 3G Capital worked to boost profitability.

Heinz had 24,500 full time employees as of December 28, the Pittsburgh-based company said on March 13 in a filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission. That compares with 31,900 as of April 28, 2013. Mr Buffett and 3G took the company private in June of that year.

"Heinz is run far better under Alex Behring, chairman, and Bernardo Hees, CEO, than would be the case if I were in charge," Mr Buffett said in his annual letter to Berkshire shareholders last month in which he also praised 3G co-founder Jorge Paulo Lemann. "I knew immediately that this partnership would work well from both a personal and financial standpoint. And it most definitely has."

Gold shows turnaround signs

Gold rose on March 13, halting the longest slump in 17 years, on speculation that the Federal Reserve will hold off raising US interest rates in June.

US wholesale prices in February unexpectedly dropped for the fourth straight month, reflecting a slump in profit margins among wholesalers and retailers, government data showed on March 13. Consumer confidence declined in March to a four-month low, according to a University of Michigan index. Gold for immediate delivery rose 0.1 percent to US\$1154.73 an ounce near close on March 13, though the price dropped 4.9pc in the previous nine sessions, the longest slump since January 1998.

- Bloomberg

DHAKA

Poor hit by Bangladesh strife

FOR weeks, Bangladesh farmer Dibakar Ghosh has been pouring his milk into the river, unable to get it to buyers because of a months-long transport blockade that has crippled the impoverished nation.

As his losses mount, the 30-year-old can no longer afford to feed his cows and fears he may have to sell them for slaughter, destroying his business.

"My losses in the last two months add up to 60,000 taka [about US\$800]" said Mr Gosh, from his village in the northwestern cattle-farming region.

"There are 150 milk farmers in my village cooperative and all of them have had to pour away hundreds of litres of milk in the last two months."

Mr Ghosh is among the millions of small business-owners hit by the nationwide shutdown that opposition leader Khaleda Zia launched over two months ago to try to force fresh elections in Bangladesh.

At least 110 people have been killed, many in petrol bomb attacks on vehicles by opposition supporters.

The government says the protests have cost businesses an estimated 1.2 trillion taka (\$1.5 billion), but rules out holding fresh elections or talks with the opposition.

With no end to the crisis in sight,

wealthy garment traders, bankers and transport owners have staged sit-ins on the streets of major cities to protest the blockade.

But experts say it is the poor and small business-owners who have taken the biggest hit as the blockade - now in its third month - deters investment and stops them getting their goods to market.

In the western village of Gatkhal, hundreds of farmers had to watch flowers grown for the peak Valentine's Day period rot because they could not be transported to cities.

"No new garment factories have opened, and farmers are not getting fair prices for their crops," said economist Ahsan H Mansur.

"The poor are the worst hit as they don't have savings to ride out bad times."

The enmity between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Ms Zia stretches back decades and Bangladesh is no stranger to political unrest.

But experts fear the current stand-off could turn into a prolonged conflict, jeopardising the economic strides forward that the country has taken in recent decades.

Poverty rates have fallen from 59 percent in 1991 to around 25pc last year as the country has emerged as a top garment exporter, while growth

has averaged a healthy 6pc over the last 12 years.

The boom led millions of people to migrate to the cities for work, while the resulting decline in the availability of labour pushed up rural wages and brought prosperity to many villages.

University of London economist Mushtaq Husain Khan said there was

and the international community is to ensure that we do not progress any further in that direction."

Experts say there are already signs of workers leaving the cities because of job cuts in hotels, restaurants and construction.

Domestic tourism has been particularly hard hit, with many hotels in the southeastern resort town of Cox's Bazar laying off staff because people are unable or unwilling to travel.

Holiday resorts on the outskirts of Dhaka that usually do a brisk trade in the cooler winter months have also suffered a sharp downturn.

"Last year we were fully booked months before the winter. But this year all the corporate bookings have been postponed," said Sujon Sheikh, manager of the Chhuti resort.

Construction worker Rajesh Chand is planning to leave Dhaka and return home to the coastal town of Bakherganj after his income fell by more than three-quarter from 16,000 taka to 3,500 taka a month.

The 52-year-old is no longer able to send any money home to his family or support his son, a student in Dhaka. "If the violence continues, I may have to stop his education," he said.

"We don't support Hasina or Zia. All I want is peace and work. But both have gone." - AFP

'No new garment factories have opened, and farmers are not getting fair prices for their crops.'

Ahsan H Mansur
Economist

a danger Bangladesh could emulate Pakistan's spiral into long-term political instability and poverty.

"These are long run processes of decline, but once started they cannot be easily reversed," he said.

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HANOVER

Industry 4.0 has eastern flavour at German fair

GERMAN Chancellor Angela Merkel opened a major IT business fair yesterday, where official partner China will showcase its rise as a high-tech power.

Ms Merkel - who has visited China seven times in a decade - will meet Vice Premier Ma Kai as more than 600 Chinese companies exhibit their tech marvels at the CeBIT fair in the western city of Hanover.

Jack Ma, head of Alibaba - the online commerce giant that is China's answer to eBay and Amazon - will give the keynote address, and companies including Huawei, Xiaomi and Lenovo will fill over 3000 square metres (30,000 square feet) of exhibition space.

China's huge showing "makes it the biggest and strongest partner country presentation we've ever seen at CeBIT", said top exhibition executive Oliver Frese.

Bucking China's wider economic slowdown, information and communication technology are booming in the world's biggest smartphone market with the highest number of internet users.

"China was known as a supplier of components and later as a supplier of hardware, smartphones, tablets and also PCs," said CeBIT spokesperson Hartwig von Sass.

"Now China has numerous companies that have become world leaders ... for example Huawei, ZTE, Neusoft or Alibaba, some of which are far bigger than western IT companies. We see this as a shift on the world map. Digitisation is going east."

The almost three-decade-old CeBIT once dazzled consumers with gadgets but has been overshadowed by big tech events in Las Vegas and Barcelona, leading it to focus on business users.

Last year IT professionals made up more than 90 percent of the over 200,000 visitors.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel seen as visited the Internationale Handwerksmesse trade fair in Munich. She opened another trade fair yesterday, showcasing Chinese technological prowess. Photo: AFP

For Germany, the event aims to further cement economic ties with fellow export power China as both seek to adapt to the sweeping digitisation of the world economy.

Germany calls it "Industry 4.0" - the fourth industrial revolution after steam power, factory mass production and the dawn of electronics and IT.

It refers to connecting automated manufacturing with the online world and the "Internet of Things", where everything from factories, homes and cars to household appliances will be online.

In October China's Premier Li Keqiang praised the "innovation partnership" with Germany.

He said his country must better

harness the creative talents of its 1.3 billion people.

Germany is already by far the biggest European economic player in China, and its exports there have helped it offset the impact of the financial crisis in Europe. Two-way trade last year topped 140 billion euros (US\$177 billion).

Jost Wuebbeke of the Mercator Institute for China Studies said, "The Chinese IT market will grow rapidly in future and have great influence on the global market."

In China-Germany trade, IT still plays a minor role, he said, predicting however that it "could become far more important through German-Chinese cooperation in the field of Industry 4.0". - AFP

HAVANA

Cuba patching up with Paris Club

CUBA has begun reconciling with the Paris Club of creditor nations after a nearly three-decade-long divorce, moving to put its financial house in order as it opens up to the world economy.

"We are going to finish the reconciliation in a few more weeks, and some weeks or months later we will have a negotiation," said Bruno Bezar, the club's chair and the head of the French Treasury.

"We have advanced rapidly. There is a will from Cuba and its creditors' part to complete this work," said Mr Bezar, who was in Havana with French officials preparing for President Francois Hollande's May 11 visit to the island.

The Paris Club is an informal group of public creditors created in 1956. Its members include officials from 20 industrialised countries who meet to try to resolve payment problems of debtor nations.

Cuba's debt is expected to be on the agenda for the visit by Mr Hollande, the first by a French president, and it is possible part of it will be forgiven, something Russia, Japan and Mexico have done in recent years.

Mr Bezar estimates Cuba's debt with the Paris Club at US\$15-16 billion, of which \$5 billion is owed to France. Cuba stopped servicing its debt with the Paris Club in 1987, alleging "interference" in its domestic political affairs by some of its creditors.

A year earlier it had renegotiated its 1982 to 1986 debt payments.

In 2001, Havana proposed a new renegotiation to find a "reasonable solution," but that failed due to what Cuba's Central Bank said were the "totally unacceptable conditions" demanded by the creditors.

The \$8 billion dollar debt that was at the center of the 2001 negotiations, and which Cuba declared "immobilised", will be at the center of the coming Paris Club negotiations.

Cuba's rupture with the Paris Club coincided with a debt crisis in Latin America and a campaign by then-president Fidel Castro to declare the debt "unpayable".

The entire size of the Cuban debt is not known, but is believed to exceed \$22 billion.

But President Raul Castro, who took over from his brother Fidel in 2006, began normalizing relations with creditors in 2009 as part of an effort to revamp the island's Soviet-style economy.

The objective has been to generate confidence, gain access to credit and attract foreign investment.

Cuba begins a new round of talks in Havana last week with the United States over restoring diplomatic ties between the two countries.

The restoration of ties could eventually help lead to the lifting of the US embargo of the nation and further open Cuba up to the global economy.

"For Cuba, it is essential to put in order its international financial commitments. That would be the logical step in the policy of more prudent management of spending in effect since 2009," said Cuban economist Pavel Vidal, at the Universidad Javeriana in Cali, Colombia.

Former economy and finance minister Jose Luis Rodriguez said Cuba paid an average \$3.2 billion a year to service its debt between 2010 and 2014, about 4.7pc of Cuba's GDP.

"This policy of control over expenditures and the other reforms underway allows Cuba to negotiate with international creditors on the basis of financial credibility which it has been rebuilding little by little," said Mr Vidal.

The experts say putting Cuba's finances on sounder footing should enable it to move away from policies that impede economic growth and consumption, to more expansionary policies. "Receiving new financing as a result of the renegotiation of the foreign debt helps ensure that the change in economic policy does not affect macroeconomic balance.

"It would be better yet if not only loans come in, but investments that bring new technologies and access to the global value chains," said Mr Vidal.

- AFP

BEIJING

UK decision to join bank feted by China

BEIJING hailed Britain's announcement that it will seek to join a Chinese-led development bank, after Washington voiced caution about the move.

The US\$50 billion Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has been feted by Beijing as a way of financing regional development, and is seen as a potential rival to US-based institutions such as the World Bank.

Washington, Tokyo, Seoul and others have declined to become founding members - but London on March 12 said it plans to become the first major Western country to join the bank, in a move to bolster relations with China.

"We welcome this decision made by the UK side," Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hong Lei told reporters at a regular briefing.

He said that "if all goes well", Britain would become a prospective member of the bank by the end of the month.

"The AIIB will complement the existing development banks," Hong said.

He added it "will learn from the good practice of the existing multilateral development banks and meanwhile take a detour from their path so as to reduce costs and increase operational efficiency".

British finance minister George Osborne said, "Joining the AIIB at the

founding stage will create an unrivalled opportunity for the UK and Asia to invest and grow together."

London's move drew a cautious response from Washington, a rare note of discord in their "special relationship", which follows criticism from the United States about Britain's cuts to defence spending.

China and 20 other countries signed a memorandum of understanding to establish the Beijing-headquartered bank in October.

"We believe any new multilateral institution should incorporate the high standards of the World Bank and the regional development banks," said US National Security Council spokesperson Patrick Ventrell.

"Based on many discussions, we have concerns about whether the AIIB will meet these high standards, particularly related to governance, and environmental and social safeguards."

The bank has support from countries including India, Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

China's official Xinhua news agency rapped the US for its scepticism, writing in a commentary that Washington "exhibited nothing but a childish paranoia towards China". - AFP

BEIJING

Chinese overhaul of state industry

CHINA is preparing to overhaul its bloated and inefficient state-run companies to bolster an economy forecast to grow at the slowest pace in more than two decades, according to people familiar with the matter.

The proposal would include consolidation and reduce the government's role in state-owned enterprises by stripping ownership stakes from the agency that regulates them, the people said. The plan, which could be released as soon as this month, calls for bundling the companies by industry and handing their control to state asset-management firms, the people said, asking not to be identified because the talks were private.

The shake-up is poised to affect thousands of companies, including some of the world's largest, such as China National Petroleum and China Mobile Communications. The country's state companies are perceived to be so rife with corruption and poorly run that Sanford C Bernstein & Co. estimates that they trade at discounts totaling US\$2 trillion.

"State-enterprise reform is a make-or-break issue for the Chinese economy," said Zhao Yang, chief China economist at Nomura Holdings. "This is but the first step of many others that will need to be taken."

The proposal follows a road map laid out by the Communist Party in

2013 to make state-run enterprises more efficient and separate their government overseers from their day-to-day managers. The plan may be released soon after the conclusion of the National People's Congress session in Beijing, according to the people.

'State-enterprise reform is a make-or-break issue for the Chinese economy'

Zhao Yang
Nomura Holdings

The changes would reduce the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (Sasac), which now holds government stakes in some of the biggest state companies, to the role of regulator, the people said. Similar changes could later be expanded to the provincial and local levels. Sasac's public affairs office didn't respond to a faxed request for comment.

"It's a step toward the right direction, as a capital holding company would make it easier to allow the market to play a more decisive role," said

Shi Yan, an analyst at UOB-Kay Hian in Shanghai. "Anytime you have a regulator surrender some functions to the market, it's a win for the market."

Premier Li Keqiang set an expansion target for the world's second-largest economy at about 7 percent this year, which would be the slowest pace since 1990. Chinese policymakers are trying to reduce the role of debt-fuelled investment and move toward greater consumption and services.

State-owned companies account for roughly a third of economy and more than a quarter of them are loss-making, Barclays analysts wrote in August.

"Putting SOEs under the supervision of asset-management companies that will focus on improving the efficiency of investment would be a major step toward putting China on a more sustainable growth path," said Arthur Kroeber, the Beijing-based research chief for Gavekal Dragonomics.

The government is pushing Chinese companies in key industries, including communications and power generation, to expand overseas, a plan outlined by Mr Li on March 5 in his report to the annual legislative session. The overhaul comes as state-run companies increasingly find themselves the target of President Xi Jinping's nationwide corruption crackdown.

- Bloomberg



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World

WORLD EDITOR: Kayleigh Long

KOLKATA



Students from the Convent of Jesus and Mary in Ranaghat take part in a demonstration, calling for justice following the gang-rape of a 71-year-old nun. Photo: AFP

Vigil held for gang-raped nun

PRAYERS were said at churches across India yesterday for an elderly nun who was gang-raped at a convent in an attack that has intensified anger over sexual violence and fuelled fears among beleaguered Christians.

The attack on the 71-year-old comes just days after India banned a documentary about the 2012 gang-rape of a student in Delhi, and with Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi promising to crack down on religious violence and ensure freedom of worship for all faiths.

The nun was attacked late on March 13 after a gang of about half a dozen robbers broke into a convent school in eastern West Bengal state some 70 kilometres (43 miles) north of Kolkata and ransacked the premises, police said.

The robbers gagged a security guard before assaulting the nun. They then entered the principal's room and stole cash, a laptop and a mobile phone, according to police.

Four of the six attackers have been identified through CCTV footage and a reward of 100,000 rupees (around US\$1,500) is on offer for any leads on the suspects.

Arnab Ghosh, a police superintendent who visited the convent near the town of Ranaghat town, said the robbery appeared to have been carefully planned.

"CCTV footage showed that six men, aged between 20 and 30, scaled

the boundary wall around 11:40pm and entered the school and disconnected the telephone lines," he said.

"At least two of them were armed and the rest were carrying burglary tools. In the chapel, a holy scripture was found torn and ... a bust of Jesus was broken," Mr Ghosh said.

Prayers were held yesterday at churches in West Bengal for the well-being of the nun, who is recuperating at a hospital in Ranaghat.

"In our Sunday Mass, we prayed for the sister to recover quickly from trauma, fear and her physical injuries. We will pray for her again this evening," Thomas D'Souza, the archbishop of Kolkata, said.

"They not only committed a heinous crime, but they also vandalized the chapel ... This is the first time such an attack has happened in India."

In the western state of Goa, which has a sizeable Christian population, the attack was condemned during the morning mass while there were also prayers for the nun in the national capital New Delhi.

The gang-rape has added to the sense of fear and dismay among the country's Christian minority which has been deeply upset by a spate of attacks on churches, with Mr Modi recently promising to crack down on religious violence.

The premier had been heavily

criticised for not speaking out earlier against religious violence and has also faced flak for remaining silent about a recent spate of mass "re-conversions" of Christians and Muslims to Hinduism.

"Even if you call it an isolated incident, the background and the atmosphere for such an attack had already been there, so you cannot simply ignore it as a one-off incident," Father Savarimuthu Sankar, a spokesperson for the Delhi diocese, told AFP.

The incident also adds to a grim record of horrifying sexual assaults recently in India, which last week banned a documentary about a December 2012 gang-rape which sparked domestic and international outrage.

Authorities said screening the documentary could have caused public disorder, but critics accused the government of being more concerned with the country's reputation than the safety of its women.

The gang-rape of a young physiotherapy student highlighted the frightening level of violence against women in the world's second-most populous country and triggered mass protests.

It led to a major reform of India's rape laws, speeding up trials and increasing penalties, although many campaigners say little has changed for women on the ground.

— AFP

PORT VILA

Vanuatu reelin

CYCLONE-DEVASTATED Vanuatu declared a state of emergency yesterday as relief agencies scrambled to get help to the Pacific nation amid reports entire villages were "blown away" when a monster storm swept through.

The official death toll in the capital Port Vila stood at six on March 15, although aid workers said this was likely just a fraction of the fatalities nationwide.

Communications were still down across most of the archipelago's 80 islands, although Air Vanuatu said the airport in Port Vila had reopened with limited facilities and commercial flights were scheduled to resume today.

The government said it was still trying to assess the scale of the disaster unleashed when Super Cyclone Pam, a maximum category five system, vented its fury on the night of March 13, with winds reaching 320 kilometres (200 miles) an hour.

The UN had unconfirmed reports that the cyclone had killed 44 people in one province alone and Oxfam said the destruction in Port Vila was massive, with 90 percent of homes damaged.

"This is likely to be one of the worst disasters ever seen in the Pacific, the scale of humanitarian need will be enormous... Entire communities have been blown away," said Oxfam's Vanuatu director Colin Collet van Rooyen.

"People have completely amazed me," he added. "I've seen people walk away from totally destroyed houses and help others."

Vanuatu's President Baldwin Lonsdale described the storm as "a monster that has devastated our country," his voice breaking as he described Port Vila's devastation.

"Most of the buildings have been destroyed; many houses have been destroyed; school, health facilities have been destroyed," he told the BBC from Japan, where he was attending a disaster management conference when the cyclone hit.

Aid workers described destroyed

homes, uprooted trees and blocked roads following what UNICEF spokesperson Alice Clements said was "15-30 minutes of absolute terror" as the cyclone barrelled into the island.

"People have no water, they have no power. This is a really desperate situation right now. People need help," she told AFP.

Ms Clements said most of the dwellings on Port Vila's outskirts, largely tin shacks, stood no chance.

Oxfam's executive director Helen Szoke said it was a "worse than worst-case scenario," while World Vision spokesperson Chloe Morrison said the situation appeared grim for the outlying islands in the nation of 275,000.

"We're seeing whole villages and houses blown away," she said.

The Fiji-based head of delegation for the Red Cross in the Pacific told AFP she spoke with a man who flew a light aircraft yesterday into the southern island of Tanna, home to 34,000 people.

"He said all the corrugated iron structures he saw in the western part of Tanna were destroyed and all concrete buildings were without roofs," Aurelia Balpe said.

"All foliage was destroyed, there was no water and there were unconfirmed reports of two dead."

"Shelter and food are the major issues," she added. "We are still struggling to understand the number of casualties."

Save the Children's head of humanitarian response Nichola Krey raised fears of food shortages in the subsistence economy and said conditions in evacuation centres were challenging.

"Many of the evacuation centres have lots of women and young children sleeping cheek-by-jowl, so health and protection will be key in the coming weeks," she said.

Ms Clements said the hospital had also been flooded and most of its medical supplies were compromised.

Despite the problems, relief be-

MANILA

13 treated after eating rabid dog

PHILIPPINE health officials are treating 13 people after it was discovered that they had eaten meat from a dog that was later diagnosed with rabies, a city veterinarian said yesterday.

The discovery that the four adults and nine children had eaten the infected dog meat came during an investigation into a suspected rabies case in the outskirts of the southern city of Zamboanga, said local government veterinarian Mario Arriola.

The dog had died mysteriously last week, Mr Arriola told AFP.

"We went to the place to

investigate if it bit other animals. We had them chop off the head and send it to the laboratory for an examination," he said.

It was only after the examination confirmed that the dog had rabies that it was learned that the animal's meat had been served up by local residents.

"We were informed that the adults ate the diseased dog. They did not know it was positive for rabies. Unfortunately, there were some kids who ate it too," he said.

Zamboanga's local health

department is giving all those who ate the meat the required four anti-rabies injections to ensure they do not develop the fatal disease, he added.

Mr Arriola said they ordered the swift action as part of the government's effort to eradicate human deaths from rabies. He said that in 2014, for the first time in recorded history, no one died of rabies in the Philippines.

Although butchering dogs for food is illegal in the Philippines, dog meat is still a popular delicacy that is eaten discreetly in certain quarters. — AFP

MANILA

Buffalo rampage in Manila

A WATER buffalo gored two butchers at a slaughterhouse before going on a rampage through the Philippine capital on March 14, terrorising hundreds of people and tossing furniture in the lobby of a small hotel.

The three-year-old female, weighing nearly half a tonne injured a total of three people with its 18-inch (46-centimetre) horns and caused the evacuation of about 200 call centre workers during its two-hour bid for freedom.

"I ran, but it was faster. It tossed me into the air with its horns and when I woke up, I was being stitched up in hospital," said butcher Jonet Rufino, the first victim.

"In my 14 years at work, this is the first time I was attacked by an animal," said the 35-year-old, who required 14 stitches to a wound on his backside.

The animal broke loose as it arrived by truck at a central Manila abattoir and went after the butchers with its potentially lethal horns, said

police investigator James Bagay.

It then galloped through some of Manila's busiest streets, goring a woman bystander before reaching the Cubao business district, more than 1 kilometre (0.6-mile) away.

There, Mr Bagay said, it entered the lobby of a small hotel and tossed some furniture, before breaking into a call centre building.

It broke some glass panels at reception, but no one was hurt — although the building had to be evacuated, he said.

The huge animal was eventually trapped about two hours after the rampage began.

"I've been a policeman in this city for 15 years. I have never seen anything like it," Mr Bagay said.

"The animal was probably stressed after the overnight trip. Its handlers should have paid more attention," he added. Mr Bagay said the buffalo, which was taken to a police station, would likely still be destined for the abattoir. — AFP

Taliban claims responsibility for Lahore bomb attack

WORLD 20



Outrage in the Maldives over Nasheed sentence

WORLD 20

g after cyclone

gan to trickle in yesterday, a day after Vanuatu's president Mr Lonsdale made an emotional call for international aid at the Japan conference.

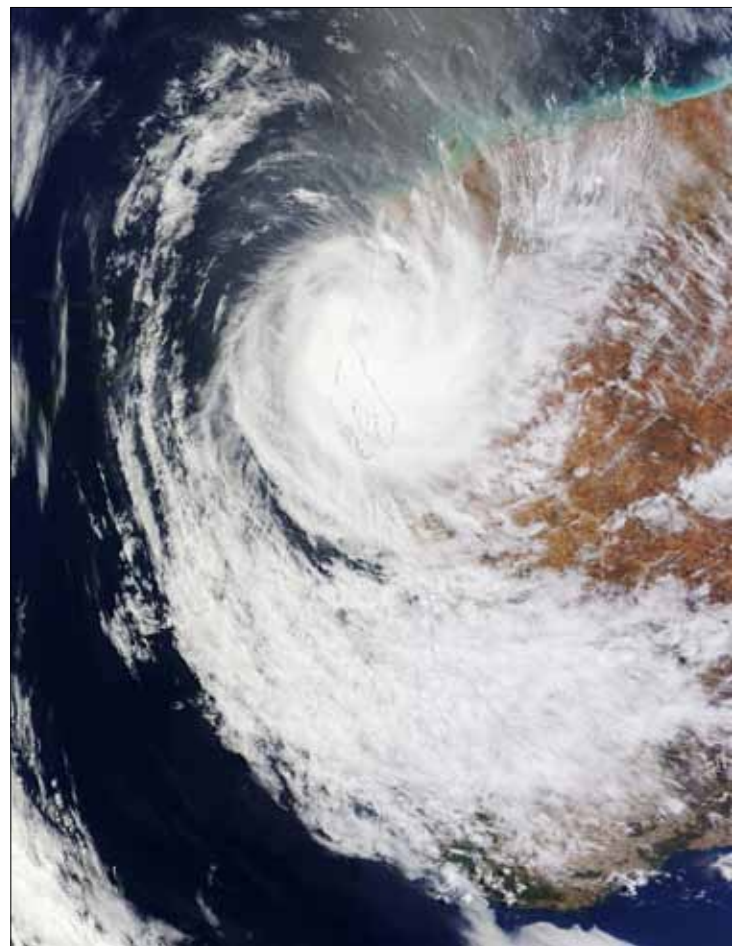
An Australian air force plane landed with supplies of food, shelter and medicine while a New Zealand plane flew supplies to neighbouring Tuvalu, where Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga said 45 percent of the 11,000 population had been displaced.

"We are worried about the aftermath in terms of hygiene and supplies of essential materials like food, medicine and water," Mr Sopoaga told Radio New Zealand after declaring a state of emergency.

Other Pacific nations were also struggling to cope. The Solomon Islands and Kiribati were both battered by the storm, although not to the extent of their neighbour.

NGOs have launched public appeals while governments around the globe pledged relief funding including US\$3.8 million from Australia, \$2.9 million from Britain, \$1.8 million from New Zealand and \$1.05 million from the European Union.

France was also sending flights from its Pacific territory of New Caledonia and was considering ordering the frigate Vendemiaire to sail from Noumea so it can help assess the scale of the damage. — AFP



BANGKOK

Upgrade for Thai prisons

AYUTTHAYA central prison is to become Thailand's first correctional facility to provide inmates with a distance-learning study programme, as part of an effort to revamp prisoner training program across the country.

Department of Corrections director-general Witthaya Suriyawong announced on March 14 the prison would become a model for specialised education services.

About 1000 inmates, all with less than 10 years left to serve on their sentences, will be enrolled in the programme, which will cover *Matthayom* 1-3, or Grade 7-9.

The prison's other 500 inmates would be relocated, Mr Witthaya said.

He said those who enrol in the program would have enough time to complete their courses before being released.

The study programme is being arranged by the prison in

conjunction with the Office of Informal Education, as well as Klai Kangwon School which specialises in providing distance learning.

The Department of Corrections is also looking to convert other prisons into learning centres, promoting more specialised training in fields from sport to agriculture in an effort to boost the career prospects of convicts after their release. Pathum Thani's central correctional institution for young offenders will offer specialised sports training, while Nakhon Ratchasima's Khao Phrik central prison will become an agricultural training centre, Mr Witthaya said.

There are four prisons in Ayutthaya — the provincial prison, central prison, a correctional institution for male drug addicts and another for young offenders. They house a total of 9000 prisoners. — *Bangkok Post*

PHNOM PENH

Despite deportations, Australia to push on with Cambodia deal

AUSTRALIA'S Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has heaped praise on the Cambodian government, which last month deported dozens of ethnic Montagnard Vietnamese asylum seekers back to Vietnam, as a "very responsible" partner in refugee resettlement.

In an interview on March 13, he said the controversial bilateral deal's numerous critics will soon be proved wrong when up to five refugee families are initially settled in the Kingdom.

Cambodian officials are to travel to Nauru in the coming weeks to meet the approximately 400 refugees eligible for resettlement here in a bid to find three to five families willing to make the move.

No refugees processed in Australian-run detention centres on the South Pacific island have yet officially volunteered for the resettlement scheme, but Mr Dutton said he had no doubt that sufficient numbers would agree to be part of the trial group and that many others would follow.

The deal — which was inked last September and will see Australia give Cambodia US\$35 million in extra aid over four years — has been lambasted by rights groups and opposition parties in both countries.

But the Australian minister, speaking to the *Phnom Penh Post* during a 24-hour visit to Phnom Penh, claimed critics will be left embarrassed when the initial group is successfully resettled in Cambodia with the assistance of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

"I think the criticisms have been

lacking substance, and I think they haven't been based on fact, and I think some of the critics will be embarrassed when they understand the depth of the arrangement and the depth of support that will be provided," he said.

Mr Dutton, who was appointed in December, declined to comment on the deportation of 45 Montagnard asylum seekers back to Vietnam by Cambodian authorities over the past month without subjecting them to the status determination processes legally required.

He said he did not have "the full facts" in relation to the matter and thus it would not be appropriate for him to comment.

But he applauded the government's "responsible approach" to Australia's proposal.

"I think critics will always find a point to criticise, but my experience has been a very positive one and that's only been reinforced by the meetings today," he said, referring to back-to-back meetings with Interior Minister Sar Kheng, Immigration Department chief Sok Phal and Foreign Minister Hor Namhong.

"I think the Cambodian government understands their responsibilities, I think that they are meeting their responsibilities, and I think they have the capacity to work well with the Nauruans to provide a new life [for the refugees]."

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Kuy Koung told reporters following Mr Dutton's meeting with Namhong that the Cambodian minister had made it

clear that the refugees that come here will have the right to be resettled in a third country if they so desire.

But Mr Dutton said yesterday that given the initial families will receive housing, education, employment arrangements, language-learning support and a host of other support services, he believed "their commitment to Cambodia would be long-term".

He said the IOM, which after long deliberations agreed to assist with the scheme last month, had been identifying local partners to work with in resettlement.

"They've been able to scope out potential housing arrangements. They've been able to enter into some discussion with employment providers and with people in Cambodia that might be willing to partner to make this a success."

Rupert Abbott, Amnesty International's Research Director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, said Australia should not be separating Cambodia's recent treatment of Montagnard asylum seekers and its patchy track record on refugee rights from the bilateral deal.

"Australia's silence on the treatment of the Montagnards does speak volumes. Australia is showing that it is willing to stay quiet when human rights violations are happening and stay quiet about the protection of refugees in order to get this deal," he said.

"What other compromises is Australia prepared to make?"

— *Phnom Penh Post*

BANGKOK

Thai capital on high alert over weekend

THE Thai government tightened security in public spaces across the capital over the weekend, as officials attempted to play down fears that violent attacks will target up to 100 locations.

One of the suspects in the Criminal Court grenade attack last week alleged that a wave of attacks would be unleashed yesterday across Bangkok.

National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) spokesperson Winthai Suwaree said the suspect's statement held no weight, adding that intelligence from security agencies had not uncovered any irregular activities.

But security officials were deployed to public areas across the capital, particularly train stations and bus terminals, on March 14.

Col Winthai said the relevant authorities were doing their best to keep the public safe in the face of threats.

"Let me assure you that the police and the military are monitoring the situation closely," he said.

"Security measures may be adjusted or intensified as required.

"Searches of vehicles and personal belongings may be increased as the authorities see fit."

He added that key locations were being monitored by uniformed and plainclothes officers.

Yutthana Yenpinyo, the suspect accused of throwing the RDG-5 grenade into the Ratchadaphisek Criminal Court compound on March 7, told police that his group communicated via the Line mes-

saging application and had discussed a plot to bomb at least 100 places.

A source close to security authorities said the military and police had investigated the suspect's claims, but no suspicious activities had been detected.

Security was being stepped up at key locations and crowded places such as shopping malls, MRT and BTS stations to be on the safe side, said the source.

No extra personnel were being deployed, the source said, but the authorities would focus on increased patrols, intensive searches and mobile checkpoints.

Col Winthai confirmed there was so far no evidence to link a former senior military officer and an ex-police officer to the grenade attack at the Criminal Court.

He said the suspects in the grenade attack had connections to other known groups, but no intelligence suggested those groups had anything to do with the two retired officers.

The two men have been thrust into the spotlight following a leak which revealed police had found their names on the phone of a suspect in the grenade attack.

Both men have strongly denied any involvement.

According to police reports, former army chief Chaisit Shinawatra and the ex-metropolitan police chief Kamronwit Thoopkrachang were implicated by a suspect in the alleged plot.

Gen Chaisit is the cousin of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Gen Chaisit and Pol Lt Gen Kamronwit strongly deny the allegations.

Col Winthai's remarks came as police yesterday asked the Military Court to approve warrants for the arrest of five other suspects in connection with March 7 grenade attack.

Pol Col Chayut Marayat, deputy commander of Metropolitan Police Bureau Division 6, said the five — who are yet to be identified publicly — were wanted on charges of terrorism and masterminding the March 7 attack. The court approved the request.

He declined to discuss details of the suspects, saying the total number of people facing arrest warrants now stood at 14.

The Military Court yesterday approved a 12-day detention extension for the four suspects arrested in the grenade attack.

The four suspects are Mahahin Khunthong, who allegedly drove the motorcycle; Mr Yutthana, and their wives — Nattapat Onming and Thachapan Pokkhrong — who are accused of colluding in the attack.

Police claimed they needed more time to question another 15 witnesses, examine firearms seized during the arrests and look into the criminal records of the suspects.

The four have been charged with attempted murder, causing an explosion that could harm people or damage property, and possessing war weapons. — *Bangkok Post*

IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP



Palestinian youths practise their Parkour skills on a mural said to have been painted by British street artist Banksy showing children swinging on an Israeli army watch tower, in the Gaza Strip town of Beit Hanun, on March 13.

MALE

Nasheed trial 'flawed'

FORMER Maldives president and opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed has been sentenced to 13 years in prison on a terrorism charge after what rights groups said was a "flawed" trial, sparking international concern over the honeymoon islands.

Mr Nasheed called on his supporters to take to the streets to protest against the sentence after a trial his party said was "blatantly politicised".

"I appeal to all of you today to stay courageous and strong, to confront the dictatorial power of this regime," his office quoted him as saying.

Mr Nasheed, the Indian Ocean archipelago's first democratically elected leader, was convicted late on March 13 under the country's tough anti-terror law of ordering the arrest of a chief judge when he was president in January 2012.

The 47-year-old was then taken to Dhoniidhoo prison on an island near the capital Male.

Mr Nasheed's lawyers resigned before the end of his brief trial, saying it was biased and aimed at destroying his political career.

It came amid growing opposition to the government of President Abdulla Yameen and will effectively prevent Mr Nasheed from running for president at the 2018 elections.

The opposition has held regular night-time rallies over the past year to protest what they call growing authoritarianism, which has damaged the atoll nation's image as a tourist paradise.

Local media reported that police clashed with Mr Nasheed's supporters across Male after the verdict.

Mr Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) said the verdict dealt a blow to the young democracy seven years after it embraced multi-party elections following three decades of rule by former strongman Maumoon Abdul Gayoom.

"Democracy jailed for 13 years on March 13, 2015," said MDP spokesperson Shauna Aminath. "Nothing good will come out of this. It's a sad, sad, sad day for the Maldives," she added.

Regional power India, whose prime minister cancelled plans to visit the



Former Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed looks on while attending a military parade in the central Sri Lanka in 2011. Photo: AFP

Maldives over the unrest, said it was "deeply concerned" and was monitoring the situation closely, while Washington, London and the European Union also expressed concern.

Rights group Amnesty International said the trial was "deeply flawed" and called the conviction "unsound".

"Rather than responding to international calls to strengthen the impartiality of the judiciary the government of the Maldives has proceeded with this sham trial for political reasons," said the group's Asia-Pacific Director Richard Bennett.

Mr Yameen's spokesperson Ibrahim Muaz Ali on March 14 tweeted a denial of any "irregularities in the legal process", saying Mr Nasheed could appeal the verdict and that the government would "not allow civil unrest" in the country.

The MDP said its lawyers would appeal Mr Nasheed's conviction in the high court.

Mr Nasheed resigned as Maldives leader in February 2012 after a mutiny by police and troops that followed weeks of protests over then-criminal court chief judge Abdullah Mohamed's arrest.

He was charged with corruption over the arrest three years ago but those charges were dropped last month. A few days later the prosecutor general had him re-charged and

arrested under tougher anti-terror laws.

Mr Nasheed, who was dragged to court on February 22 and appeared to be in pain after being pushed and pulled by police, has maintained his innocence throughout.

His party said he was denied medical attention while in police custody.

The United States said in a statement after the verdict it was concerned at the "apparent lack of appropriate criminal procedures during the trial" against Mr Nasheed.

State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki said the US called on Male to "restore confidence in its commitment to democracy and the rule of law".

"We urge the government to ensure former president Mr Nasheed's safety and well-being in custody, and we hope all Maldivians will express their views peacefully," she said.

Britain's junior foreign minister, Hugo Swire, tweeted that he was "deeply concerned".

"Many questions over due process and transparency," he wrote.

The EU said Mr Nasheed's conviction raised "very serious questions about due process".

Mr Nasheed came to power after building a pro-democracy movement with local and foreign support in opposition to the 30-year autocratic rule of Gayoom - Yameen's half-brother.

He formed the MDP in exile but then returned home to a hero's welcome, sweeping 54 percent of the vote in the 2008 elections.

He built a reputation as a campaigner against climate change, holding an underwater cabinet meeting in 2009 to press the world to cap the carbon emissions that cause global warming and threaten low-lying countries such as the Maldives.

But he was beaten to the presidency by Mr Yameen in a run-off contest in 2013.

Current defence minister Moosa Ali Jaleel, who was head of the armed forces under Mr Nasheed, is among four others facing terrorism charges. - AFP

LAHORE

Taliban claims blast

AT least six people were killed and 50 others wounded when twin blasts rocked a Christian neighbourhood of Pakistan's Lahore yesterday, police said, with the Taliban claiming responsibility for the attacks.

The explosions occurred during prayers near two churches in the city's Youhanabad area, home to more than 100,000 Christians, sparking angry protests and mourning among the beleaguered minority community.

The Pakistani Taliban described the blasts as suicide attacks and vowed to continue their campaign for the enforcement of Sharia law.

Nabila Ghazanfar, a spokesperson for the police, told AFP at least one policeman was among the dead, adding that a state of emergency has been imposed in the city's hospitals as the death toll was expected to rise.

Pastor David, a local cleric at the site, said, "One blast took place at the entrance of one church

where a congregation was going on. Another blast took place in the second church," adding that the two buildings were 500 metres (1600 feet) apart.

Hundreds of Christians took to the streets of the locality to protest against the police and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif criticised the attacks.

"Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif has condemned the Lahore blasts and directed provincial governments to ensure the security of public and their properties," a statement carried by state media said.

Christians make up around 2 percent of Pakistan's 180 million people and have been targeted in attacks and riots in recent years, often over allegations of profaning the Koran or Prophet Mohammed.

Yesterday's attack was the worst on the community since a devastating double suicide bombing in the northwestern city of Peshawar in 2013 killed 82 people. - AFP

ANKARA

Erdogan talk Turkey

TURKISH President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has dismissed claims that a new constitution expanding his powers would install a "dictatorship".

"They say the presidential system would bring dictatorship. Is there dictatorship in the United States, Mexico or in Brazil?" Mr Erdogan said in the western province of Canakkale on March 14.

"Change is inevitable. The building of a new Turkey is inevitable. A new constitution is inevitable. A presidential system is, God willing, inevitable," Mr Erdogan said.

The co-founder of the ruling Islamic-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP), who was elected president in August after more than a decade

as prime minister, wants to cement his role as Turkey's number one with a US-style executive presidency.

The August vote marked the first time the president - currently a largely ceremonial post - was directly elected.

Constitutional amendments require the support of more than two-thirds of the 550-seat parliament, or at least 367 votes.

The AKP, which currently has 312 seats, is aiming for a significant boost in numbers following June 7 parliamentary elections.

The opposition has frequently accused Mr Erdogan of having dictatorial tendencies.

But the president said on March 14: "If people want [the executive presidency], it will happen." - AFP

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LAUSANNE

US-Iran talks underway

IRAN and the US began talks starting yesterday in Switzerland with the aim of closing in on a deal reducing Tehran's nuclear activities to within strict limits after 18 months of tortuous negotiations.

Time is however running short and tempers are fraying in Washington where critics fear that the mooted accord will not do enough to prevent the Islamic Republic getting nuclear weapons.

US Secretary of State John Kerry, due to meet his Iranian counterpart in Lausanne later, sought to allay such concerns, saying the aim was "not just to get any deal, it is to get the right deal".

The target is for Iran and six world powers – the US, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany – to agree the outlines of a deal by March 31 and to fine-tune the details by July 1.

Mr Kerry said on March 14 that his "hope" is that the deal can be clinched "in the next days". But he cautioned that there remained "some important gaps" between the two sides.

"We believe very much that there's not anything that's going to change in April or May or June that suggests that at that time a decision you can't make now will be made then," Mr Kerry told CBS television.

If Iran's nuclear programme is indeed "peaceful", as Tehran says, "let's get it done," Mr Kerry said.

The US and Iran have not had diplomatic relations for 35 years and the standoff over Tehran's nuclear program has dogged its international relations for more than a decade.

But the 2013 election of President

Hassan Rouhani resulted in a minor thaw and the past 18 months have seen an intense diplomatic effort to resolve the issue.

Under a landmark November 2013 interim deal, Tehran stopped expanding its activities in return for minor sanctions relief. Since then the parties have been pushing for a lasting accord.

But to the alarm of Israel and US Republicans, Washington looks to have abandoned insisting that Iran dismantles all nuclear activities, tolerating instead a small program under tight controls.

In theory, this still leaves Iran with the possibility to get the bomb, critics say, and last week 47 Republicans took the unprecedented step of writing an open letter to Iran's leaders.

They warned that any nuclear deal could be modified by Congress or revoked "with the stroke of a pen" by whomever succeeds President Barack Obama, a Democrat.

This followed a barnstorming address to US lawmakers – on a Republican invitation – by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warning against a deal.

Republicans have also threatened to bring draft legislation imposing more sanctions towards the end of March, something which would likely prompt Iran to walk away.

The letter provoked a storm in Washington with Vice President Joe Biden calling it "dangerous".

Mr Obama said in a VICE News interview that he was "embarrassed" for the signatories, while Washington's allies in its talks with Iran were also

unimpressed.

"The negotiations are difficult enough, so we didn't actually need further irritations," German Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier said.

And Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, due in Lausanne yesterday – and in Brussels today to meet his British, German and French counterparts – said it "told us that we cannot trust the US".

Some progress has been made toward a final deal but the two sides remain far apart on several key issues.

These include the future size of Iran's uranium enrichment capacities – which can make nuclear fuel but also the core of a bomb – the pace at which painful UN, US and EU sanctions would be lifted and the accord's duration.

Two deadlines, in July and November, passed without an agreement but in view of the controversy in Washington – and pressure in Iran on Rouhani to deliver – extending yet again will be very tough.

"There is no time for additional extensions," said Kelsey Davenport, an analyst at the Arms Control Association.

"After March, it becomes much more difficult to hold off legislative attempts by Congress to sabotage the deal," Ms Davenport told AFP.

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has meanwhile criticised the two-step process, saying matters should be handled in one fell swoop.

Mr Khamenei is due to give a closely watched Iranian New Year's address on March 21. Last week he said the other side in the talks was "deceitful and stabs in the back". – AFP

FREETOWN

Sierra Leone VP asks for US asylum

SIERRA Leone's Vice President Sam Sumana has applied for asylum at the US embassy in Freetown and is in hiding while his request is considered, a source close to him said.

Mr Sumana, 52, was expelled from the governing All People's Congress (APC) party this month for what was described as "his anti-party activities, including fomenting violence", although he denied the allegations and has appealed against his suspension to the party leadership.

Mr Sumana "is now in hiding at a secure location awaiting a reply to a request he has made by telephone to the American embassy for asylum for himself and his wife", a member of his entourage said.

Heavily armed soldiers stormed Mr Sumana's hilltop residence on March 14. The soldiers left with bundles of files, one witness added.

The BBC said on March 14 it had spoken to Mr Sumana and reported that the vice president and his wife had fled their home in Freetown and requested asylum at the embassy. Their current whereabouts was not clear.

AFP was unable to reach Mr Sumana himself and the US embassy declined to comment.

Deputy government spokesperson Abdulai Bayratay told AFP "The vice president is not under any threat", amid reports that Mr Sumana believed his life was in danger.

In a statement issued late on March 14, the APC said it "has been

informed by the American embassy in Freetown that VP Samuel Sam Sumana has requested to seek asylum ... alleging that his life is under threat and that his residence has been looted."

The party denied that he been threatened and his home vandalised, adding that Mr Sumana's allegations and conduct were likely to embarrass the party and bring it into disrepute.

Military checkpoints in Mr Sumana's neighbourhood were seen turning away people attempting to go to the house.

Witnesses said troops had dismantled Mr Sumana's guards.

Late on March 14 evening the military presence was reduced and the house was deserted, residents said.

Announcing his expulsion on March 6, APC secretary general Osman Yansaneh said the party accused Mr Sumana of falsely claiming to be a Muslim, and claiming to hold a degree from a US university.

He is also accused of being responsible for "frequent unrest" in his eastern home district of Kono and the party believes he was plotting to set up a breakaway political party.

Mr Sumana's expulsion came a few days after he had quarantined himself due to the death of one of his bodyguards from Ebola.

Sierra Leone has registered almost 3600 deaths in the nine months since the Ebola outbreak spread across west Africa. – AFP

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CARACAS Venezuela gears up military machine

ROLLING out tanks, missiles and 100,000 men, Venezuela launched 10 days of military exercises on March 14, amid sky-high tensions over US sanctions slapped on officials accused of an opposition crackdown.

President Nicolas Maduro's socialist, Cuban-allied government - struggling with sliding oil prices, the region's highest inflation, desperate shortages and rising discontent - threw the spotlight on its Chinese amphibious tanks, Russian-built missiles and other military hardware.

"Congratulations to the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, and to the people, for the joint exercises," tweeted Mr Maduro, who in two years time has alleged over a dozen coup bids against him and his government by the United States or local opposition members.

"Civilian-military union to keep having a Fatherland," Mr Maduro added. "And may our sacred fatherland never have a (US) imperial boot set foot on it. Long live Venezuela!"

The nationwide exercises, covered for hours on end on local television, will last 10 days and enlist the participation of 20,000 civilians, in addition to government troops in the South American OPEC member with the world's largest crude reserves, officials said.

The maneuvers come at a time of heightened tensions with the United States, which Venezuela has labelled an imperial brute since the time of Mr Maduro's late mentor, longtime president Hugo Chavez.

Both elected socialists, they have



Venezuelan security forces participate in military exercises on March 14. Photo: AFP

been harsh critics of the United States, which they slam for failing to cooperate with leftists when they win democratically held elections.

But critics note that the government under Mr Chavez and Mr Maduro has acted to curb dissent in the legislature and on the streets.

And Venezuela, closely allied with communist Cuba, is now experiencing severe shortages of even the most basic needs, such as milk, toilet paper or

diapers.

Mr Maduro recently accused Washington of backing an opposition plot to overthrow him in a coup that would have involved bombing the presidential palace. The US government has dismissed the charges as baseless.

In April 2002, when Mr Chavez was briefly ousted for two days, the United States did not come to his aid but instead threw its support behind an adversary, in a move that cost the US

much credibility in the country.

Relations hit a new low early last week, when US President Barack Obama slapped new sanctions on the regime, calling Venezuela "an extraordinary threat to the national security" of the United States.

Caracas responded by angrily recalling its envoy to Washington and ramping up its military preparedness.

The South American bloc UN-ASUR labelled Mr Obama's executive

order an "interventionist threat", with Ecuadoran Foreign Minister Ricardo Patino saying it "violates Venezuela's sovereignty".

Despite the frosty ties, the United States is still the biggest consumer of Venezuela's oil.

Venezuelan Defense Minister General Vladimir Padrino Lopez said that the military maneuvers, many of which were to be held in the south of Caracas, were meant to prepare soldiers for "their mission, their goal and with the will to be victorious".

Other exercises in the show of might focus on Venezuela's oil-producing areas, including the Caribbean coast and an oil field some 200 kilometers (125 miles) to the west of Caracas.

Military officials said they will also test the nation's air defences and will ensure that its anti-aircraft systems are ready to be deployed if needed.

Interviewed on television about the exercises, the officials echoed Mr Maduro's line that the "civilian-military union" was defeating "imperialists", "people who have no fatherland" and "invaders".

Now Mr Maduro is seeking extraordinary powers from the legislature that would allow him to rule by decree.

His popularity has sunk in the past year amid the economic crisis.

Elected to succeed his late mentor Mr Chavez in April 2013, Mr Maduro had obtained yearlong powers to impose economic laws by decree.

- AFP

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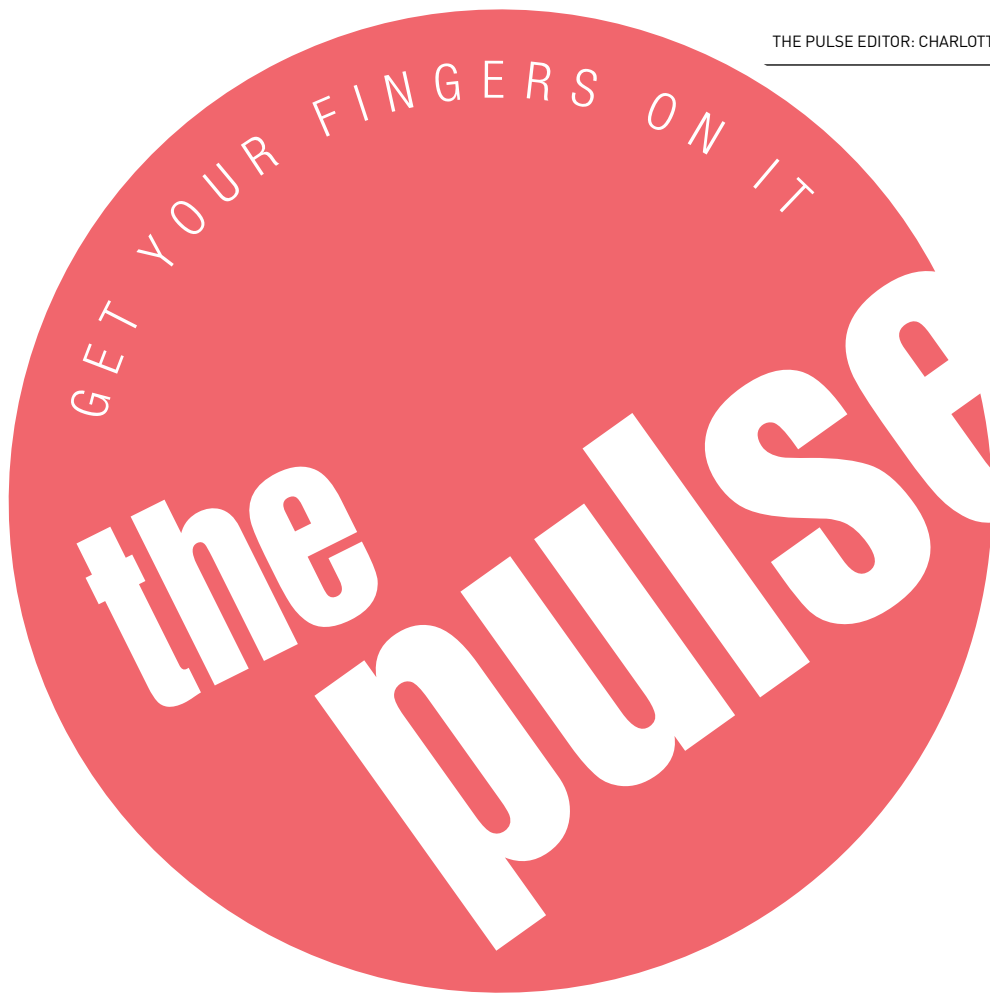
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Rebels with a cause

CHIT SU



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AS the band's first chord rang out across Letpadan, the crowd of students cheered jubilantly, the atmosphere buzzing with excitement. One day later, images of the same students being brutally beaten by police were broadcast around the world. "I was shocked when I saw police were beating students in Letpadan. We were performing there only the day before. They [police and students] were really peaceful and enjoyed our performance," said Kyaw Kyaw, lead guitarist of punk band The Rebel Riot.

The Rebel Riot are one of several bands that performed in Letpadan last week, just hours before tensions boiled over at the protest site, resulting in a violent police crackdown. The self-styled "political punk band" say they want to promote freedom through their music and express their views about the political system.

"I've always wanted to perform outside like that. It has more of an impact than performing on stage because we can get our message out to the students directly," 23-year-old Kyaw Kyaw said.

The band - made up of drummer Zarni, bass player Okka and guitarist Kyaw Kyaw - formed in 2007 during the country's Saffron Revolution, which saw dozens of protesters, including monks, arrested or detained. The events provided the inspiration for many of the band's songs. Since then, the band says they have strived to promote positive change in Myanmar through their music.

"The Rebel Riot hates racism and discrimination," said Kyaw Kyaw. "We want to make a statement about the government's human rights abuses with our songs."

But it's not always easy being a punk band in Myanmar. When the group started out, scarce internet and slow connections meant even listening to punk music was difficult.

"I came to love punk because of the Sex Pistols, but back then it wasn't easy to get hold of their music. There were two internet cafés in Yangon and I used to go there and download songs. It took over an hour to download a three-minute song," said Kyaw Kyaw.

In the seven years since they formed, The Rebel Riot has released two albums - *Puppet Society* and *Fuck Religious Rules*. They have toured Indonesia twice, in 2013 and 2014, playing at festivals such as Libertad Fest.

Despite their anti-establishment messages the band is yet to encounter any resistance from the government. But they have received threatening letters from religious groups in response to one of their controversially titled songs "Fuck Religious Rules/Wars".

"They said they would kill us if we didn't stop writing songs like that," Kyaw Kyaw said.

Undeterred by the threats, the band continues to eschew the mainstream with their provocative music. On March 14 they released their single "Military's Slave Education" which contains the lyrics "No more military's slave education, education is not for sale. Jobless even though we are graduated. Go overseas and work like a cow."

According to the trio, people's attitude toward punk rockers is changing. "Five years ago, if people saw punks they assumed they were bad people," said Kyaw Kyaw. "They still think we look weird but they are more used to our music."

But while the band seeks to make an anti-establishment statement with their music, they say they refuse to engage in politics.

"We are not politicians. We are not even musicians. We are just three people who love punk music and want to do something to benefit other people," said Kyaw Kyaw. "We have no interest in getting involved in politics. We just want to write music and sing punk songs. We will defy the system till we die."





Photos: Supplied



Translation of 'Golden Parasol' published

ZON PANN PWINT
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THE Myanmar-language version of Wendy Law-Yone's 2013 book *Golden Parasol* was released on March 14, translated from the original English by Hein Latt.

Golden Parasol: A Daughter's Memoir of Burma is the story of editor Edward Law Yone, who published the prestigious English-language newspaper *The Nation* from 1948. Written by his daughter Wendy, the story is based on Law Yone's autobiography, which he compiled during the 1960s in a series of unpublished manuscripts which he handed over to his daughter for editing. For half a century, Wendy did no work on the manuscripts, reading them only when her father passed away in 1980.

Wendy, author of *The Road to Wanting*, *Irrawaddy Tango* and *The Coffin Tree*, finally wrote a memoir, weaving together the various strands of her father's life, including her own memories of him.

The Nation's office, at 290 40th Street, is located behind the offices of *The Myanmar Times*. A renowned independent newspaper, it was abruptly shut down after Law Yone was taken to a secret place by the authorities for no apparent reason, two years

after Ne Win seized power in a military coup in 1962.

Wendy was 15 years old when her father was arrested. Edward spent five years in prison, and expelled from the country after his release. After a brief and troubled stay in Thailand, Edward's family moved to America, where he died without the chance to return home.

"When my father left Myanmar in 1968 after five years in prison, I don't think he ever allowed himself to imagine that he would never return. He had lost just about everything," Wendy Law Yone told participants at the launch of her translation at the River Ayeyarwady Gallery on March 14.

"He had lost his newspaper, his livelihood, his freedom of speech and his role as the voice of public conscience," she said.

Wendy came to believe that her father's real crime was his patriotism. "He believed he would be able to save the country from the government once he had left. Sadly, his attempts were unsuccessful and passed away in exile," she said.

"At least the publication of his book in Myanmar will enable part of his spirit to return to his home," said Wendy Law Yone.

Golden Parasol, published by Ngar Doe publishing house, is available in bookstores for K2500.

HONG KONG



Hong Kong's Art Week will consume the city for the next few days but creative displays will not be confined to galleries and exhibition halls – they will also be splashed across plates and into cocktail glasses, like these cocktails inspired by the works of Andy Warhol. Photos: AFP/Philippe Lopez

Art is on the table at Basel

HONG Kong's Art Week will consume the city for the next few days but creative displays will not be confined to galleries and exhibition halls – they will also be splashed across plates and into cocktail glasses.

The city's restaurants and bars have drawn up their own culinary canvas to tap into the growing interest surrounding Art Week, which centres around Hong Kong's Art Basel fair and sees art shows pop up all over town.

More than 65,000 people from across the world are expected to attend Art Basel from March 20 – the biggest art show in Asia – and thousands more will visit satellite events.

But visitors increasingly expect their creative experience to extend beyond the main event, says chef Uwe Opocensky of the city's Michelin-starred Mandarin Grill + Bar, at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel.

Opocensky has created an Asian art-inspired menu with dishes including "Jade" – what look like vivid green gems on a grey rock but are actually salmon and scallops covered in gelatin flavoured with yuzu, an Asian citrus fruit; or "Warrior" – a chocolate dedication to the Terracotta Army in China's Xian.

"It is not just artists or gallerists or collectors that come here for the special menu. We have businessmen, young couples, ladies who lunch. Even if you are not directly involved in Art Basel, I think people like feel they are still taking part," he says.

At rival luxury hotel The Peninsula, chef Yoshiharu Kaji of its Felix restaurant has put together five courses celebrating the arts, including a replica of the Taj Mahal.

The Mira Hotel – made famous when American whistleblower Edward Snowden used it as his initial refuge after his explosive leak of National Security documents – is serving drinks inspired by Andy Warhol and a dedicated Art Basel menu based on the different elements of the exhibition.

Prices for most art-inspired set

menus start from around US\$129 per person and wine pairings will add around 50 percent to the bill.

"Perhaps they won't buy an expensive piece from a gallery, but they can buy some art on a plate," Opocensky says.

With smartphones an almost requisite utensil in Hong Kong as diners take pictures of their food, photogenic dishes explode across social media and are a valuable marketing tool.



This Damien Hirst inspired cocktail is just one of the libations on offer at Art Basel this week.



"In a social media world where cameras take the first bite or sip, it's important to work on new ways to wow and intrigue," says Victoria Chow, co-owner of The Woods bar.

Her venue has created cocktails inspired by Damien Hirst, Mark Rothko and Andy Warhol to coincide with Art Basel, but she says the fusion of art and food in the city has been growing for a while.

"Eating and drinking are becoming multi-sensory experiences. People expect more from their plate. We frequently turn to art, architecture and designers to influence our presentation," she said.

Hong Kong is now the world's third-largest art market by auction sales and the number of galleries has grown from fewer than 10 to 90 in the past 15 years, government figures say.

Greater China, grouping the mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan, maintained its market-leader status in 2014, accounting for \$5.6 billion in global art sales according to data firm Artprice.

The boom has fed through to other industries in the city, with the fusion of art and eating a prime example.

New French restaurant Bibo is packed with works by some of the art world's biggest names, including Jeff Koons, Banksy and Takashi Murakami – and with just 14 tables diners are guaranteed a blockbuster view.

Duddell's – a two Michelin-starred Chinese restaurant, which is part members club, part gallery – displays rare collectors' pieces and has hosted exhibitions curated by internationally acclaimed artists including Amelie von Wedel, Ai Weiwei and Danh Vo.

"It's not just about hanging a few pretty pictures on the wall," says Duddell's co-owner Alan Lo.

"From day one we strived to present an exhibition program that is both international and critical, to instigate conversations and debates."

On the flip-side, galleries such as The Popsy Room are using food to help get people talking more about art.

Owner Jennifer Chung runs a nightly eight-course dinner where each course is paired with a different piece of art. The pieces are hung around the gallery and as each dish is served guests are given a talk on the art it goes with.

"I wanted to create an environment where people feel relaxed and less intimidated by the arts," says Chung.

"The dining environment creates the right atmosphere and I think it's more effective than art talks or panel discussions."

But while fusing food and art is a trend that shows now signs of diminishing, Duddell's Lo says that to reap the best creative rewards, it's important to avoid flash-in-the-pan "gimmicks".

"To make a real impact you need to engage with the creative community year round," he says.

And for restaurants, the food should come first.

"Beautiful food is always the draw – you want to like the look of what you're eating as well," he says. – AFP

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Dated: 16th March, 2015

On the trail with Bangkok's number one ladies' detective agency

Catching out cheating husbands and two-timing mistresses is all in a day's work for one pioneering private eye

WHEN Amnuaiporn "Kung" Maneewan first graduated in 1995, her only ambition was to find a well-paid job. The answer to her dreams was just around the corner, and she managed to land a position as an accountant at the IBS law firm, near her home in the Ram Intra area of Bangkok.

But her days at work passed tediously. She came into the office every morning, sat at her desk all day long and went home at 5pm.

Her life continued in the same old routine for several months until the day a desperate housewife turned up in front of her desk.

She was the only female member of staff in the office at the time and the woman approached her directly. She had one request: "Can you help find my husband?"

Kung explained she wasn't a detective for the firm, which specialises in family law, but offered to put her in touch with a colleague. But the housewife insisted she wanted a woman to work the case. And not just any woman. She wanted Kung.

"She asked me to help her as a friend and for the sake of humanity. I just couldn't say no to her, so I agreed to do it," she recalled.

The distressed woman's story had struck a chord with Kung, and all she knew was that she had to take action. She put on a long jacket, hat and sunglasses – in a partial attempt at a disguise – grabbed her old-fashioned video camera and jumped in her car.

It didn't take long for Kung to get on the trail of the cheating husband. Shortly after she began tailing his vehicle, he drove straight into a love motel.

She waited outside for a while, giving him time to get into a compromising position, before heading in to capture the moment on video.

"When I was about to get to the door, my heart was racing so fast, I couldn't catch my breath," Kung said. "I wasn't sure whether I should kick the door open or get the key from the staff. I was so confused and decided to knock."

The door opened slowly, with the safety chain pulled across. When the cheating husband saw her, he tried to slam the door closed, but Kung pushed back. She grabbed a piece of wood lying nearby and wedged it into the gap of the door, then kicked the door open.

"I don't know what got in to me. All I was thinking was that I wanted to help my friend. I recorded everything I saw and then tried to run," Kung explained.

But the mistress was not about to let her get away so easily. She pulled Kung's hair and slapped her in the face. Kung punched the woman back and ran out of the room.

"I could feel the adrenalin pumping all through my body," she said. "My face hurt, but it felt so good." That was the moment when Kung knew she was



Amnuaiporn "Kung" Maneewan helps clients who want help tracking down their husbands' mistresses. Photo: Bangkok Post

destined to be a detective.

Kung went back to work filled with fresh ambition. Given the firm's reputation for dealing with thorny family and business disputes, her male colleagues spent much of their time carrying out surveillance and private detective work on behalf of clients. She began volunteering to

'The only human being that can be trusted is a dead one'

Kung

Private detective

help with their investigative work, using her feminine charms to get close to some targets in a way that her male colleagues could not. Her first assignment was to find a man wanted for arrest for defrauding a company of 50 million baht (US\$1.5 million).

"I had to pretend to apply for a position at the suspect's company in order to verify it was really him," Kung said. "I was so excited and nervous. I couldn't even control my voice so I sounded very shaky."

Somehow she got away with it. The man turned out to be the guy their client was looking for, and

Kung was thrilled that the case was successful.

She kept offering to help out with investigations when she could, and phone calls started coming in, requesting Kung's services as a private detective.

"They all said they had found out by word of mouth that I was the detective to come to see regarding family problems," she said.

After almost a year of working at the firm, she was promoted to be the company's first female detective.

The firm's reputation has gone from strength to strength since then, while Kung's work has attracted media attention inside and outside the country. She started with only a handful of clients who wanted help tracking down their husbands' mistresses. She then decided to go back to university, and has since gained a bachelor's degree in law.

Kung is now the head of the team investigating family affairs, fraud and copyright violation for the law firm. She also works as a legal consultant for many cases and holds the position of general manager.

With no formal training as a private detective, Kung picked up her skills from watching James Bond films and similar spy movies.

She now holds her own informal training workshops for others, since she benefited so much from getting her knowledge for free. "I sometimes hold fun workshops for children and for those who are interested. Our work is secretive, but the knowledge is not," she said.

Kung said that lying is now a way of life for her. In any given week, she changes her name frequently and dresses up in many different disguises.

"Sometimes I have to be a *som tam* seller, sometimes I have to be a street sweeper or sometimes I have to dress up as a high-class lady. It all depends on the circumstances," she said.

Tracking down an adulterous lover or untrustworthy business partner is not cheap. Kung charges 5000 to 6000 baht (US\$150 to \$180) a day for her services, or up to 40,000 baht (\$1200) a week if the case is more complicated. Some cases take more than a week, but others can be wrapped up in 24 hours.

Kung receives many inquiries from aspiring private detectives who want to work alongside her. She always gives people the opportunity to try out, but few make the grade. "Many people come to me and say they want to be a detective. I accept all of them, but most of them leave after three days of training," Kung said.

Kung, 48, is living her dream job. Well-dressed, attractive and full of energy, she is single and intends to stay that way.

"I don't want to end up like one of my cases," she said. "The only human being that can be trusted is a dead one." – *Bangkok Post*

The Global Gossip

Cop reveals the bare truth about his weapon

A Portuguese policeman was on March 14 handed a 22-month suspended jail sentence for wearing his service weapon while performing stripteases.

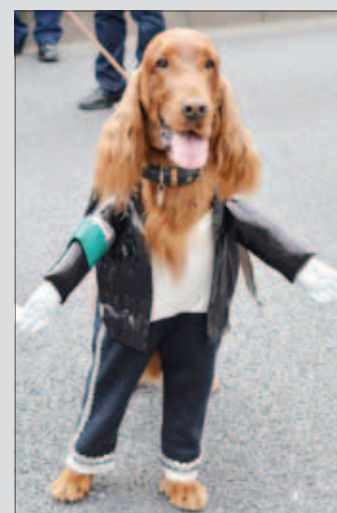
The 32-year-old officer admitted to the court in Novo de Sao Joao that he wore his uniform to make his performances "more realistic", but claimed the firearm was a replica of his service pistol, the Lusa news agency reported.

The policeman, who gave four striptease shows in several bars and restaurants on March 8, 2014, for International Women's Day, said he had turned to stripping because of his financial problems.

He was suspended immediately after the press published Facebook pictures from his performances showing him wearing nothing but skin-tight briefs and his beret.



Model Kate Moss arrives on the red carpet during the 2015 amfAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research, fundraising gala in Hong Kong on March 14. Photo: AFP/Anthony Wallace



An Irish setter wearing a Michael Jackson costume takes part in a St Patrick's Day parade in Tokyo on March 15. Photo: AFP/Kazuhiro Nogi

ROME Century-old semen busts DNA frontier

Forensic experts in Italy said on March 12 they had reconstructed the DNA of a national war hero and poet by analysing semen he left on a handkerchief given to a lover 100 years ago.

In a global first, the proto-fascist warmonger Gabriele D'Annunzio's DNA was reconstructed without exhuming his remains, forensic police said, raising hopes the technique could be used to solve cold cases.

D'Annunzio (1863-1938) gave the semen-splashed hankie to his lover, Countess Olga Levi Brunner, in 1916 as a souvenir after a night of passion.

Police in Cagliari in Sicily analysed the handkerchief, a letter the countess had penned to her beau and an ivory toothbrush conserved in the archives of the Vittoriale degli Italiani foundation.

Using a crimestope light they identified splotches of a liquid on the material not visible to the naked eye and compared the DNA results with that of Federico D'Annunzio, the right-wing revolutionary's great grandson.

Foundation chief Giordano Bruno Guerri joked that the experiment might even open the door to the future cloning of historical figures even if their remains have been lost.

"Nobody wants to clone D'Annunzio, but nobody knows what changes will take place in science and society. It's good the DNA has been collected," he said.

In 1919, D'Annunzio seized the city of Fiume, in what is now Croatia, to set up an independent state.

The state, which had a charter that foreshadowed the later Italian fascist system, fell a year later after a bombardment by the Italian navy.

His poems are still studied today in Italian schools.

LOS ANGELES

May the force live on under Disney

Disney tantalised *Star Wars* fans last week with details of two new films, as the reinvention of the blockbuster sci-fi franchise went into light speed.

With excitement already set to hit fever pitch in December with the release of *The Force Awakens* – the seventh episode in the space saga – the studio revealed that *Episode VIII* would come on May 26, 2017.

Rian Johnson – the force behind *Looper*, *Brick* and *The Brothers Bloom* – will write and direct the newest episode, Disney and Lucasfilm announced, without giving away any plot details.

They also said that the first standalone film featuring characters from the *Star Wars* universe will be called *Rogue One* – and will star Oscar-nominated British actress Felicity Jones.

That film is due on December 16, 2016.

"*Rogue One* is the title for the first film in a unique series of big-screen adventures that explores the characters and events beyond the core *Star Wars* saga," Disney and Lucasfilm said in a statement.

Jones – who was nominated for an Oscar this year for her portrayal of British scientist Stephen Hawking's wife in *The Theory of Everything* – is the project's first actress cast.

The spin-off will be directed by Gareth Edwards, known for his work on last year's *Godzilla* reboot and independent sci-fi flick *Monsters*, while Chris Weitz, who wrote *Antz* and *Cinderella*, will be the screenwriter.

The news comes as fans of the franchise await release of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, due in theatres on December 18.

The movie includes original cast members Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, Anthony Daniels, Peter Mayhew and Kenny Baker, alongside several newcomers including Oscar winner Lupita Nyong'o.

Disney paid US\$4 billion for *Star Wars* founder George Lucas's Lucasfilm in October 2012.

DOMESTIC FLIGHT SCHEDULES

YANGON TO MANDALAY

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

YANGON TO NYAUNG U

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

YANGON TO MYITKYINA

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

MANDALAY TO YANGON

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

NYAUNG U TO YANGON

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

MYITKYINA TO YANGON

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

YANGON TO HEHO

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

YANGON TO MYEIK

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

YANGON TO SITTWE

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

YANGON TO THANDWE

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

YANGON TO DAWEI

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

YANGON TO LASHIO

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

YANGON TO PUTAO

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

HEHO TO YANGON

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

MYEIK TO YANGON

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

SITTWE TO YANGON

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

THANDWE TO YANGON

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

DAWEI TO YANGON

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

LASHIO TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
YJ 752	5	13:15	16:30
K7 829	1,3	15:05	15:55
K7 829	5	15:05	17:25
YJ 752	3,7	15:40	17:55
7Y 742	1,5	16:00	17:48
YH 730	2,4,6	16:45	19:10

PUTAO TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
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INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT SCHEDULES

YANGON TO BANGKOK			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 706	Daily	6:05	8:20
8M 335	Daily	8:40	10:25
TG 304	Daily	9:50	11:45
PG 702	Daily	10:30	12:25
TG 302	Daily	14:50	16:45
PG 708	Daily	15:20	17:15
8M 331	Daily	16:30	18:15
PG 704	Daily	18:35	20:30
Y5 237	Daily	19:00	20:50
TG 306	Daily	19:50	21:45

BANGKOK TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
TG 303	Daily	8:00	8:45
PG 701	Daily	8:45	9:40
Y5 238	Daily	21:30	22:20
8M 336	Daily	11:55	12:40
TG 301	Daily	13:05	13:50
PG 707	Daily	13:40	14:30
PG 703	Daily	17:00	17:50
TG 305	Daily	18:05	18:50
8M 332	Daily	19:20	20:05
PG 705	Daily	20:15	21:30

YANGON TO DON MUEANG			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
DD 4231	Daily	8:00	9:45
FD 252	Daily	8:30	10:20
FD 256	Daily	12:50	14:40
FD 254	Daily	17:35	19:25
FD 258	Daily	21:30	23:15
DD 4239	Daily	21:00	22:55

DON MUEANG TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
DD 4230	Daily	6:30	7:15
FD 251	Daily	7:15	8:00
FD 255	Daily	11:35	12:20
FD 253	Daily	16:20	17:05
FD 257	Daily	20:15	20:55
DD 4238	Daily	19:25	20:15

YANGON TO SINGAPORE			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 231	Daily	8:00	12:25
Y5 2233	Daily	9:45	14:15
TR 2823	Daily	9:45	2:35
SQ 997	Daily	10:25	15:10
3K 582	Daily	11:45	16:20
MI 533	2,4,6	13:35	20:50
8M 233	5,6,7	14:40	19:05
MI 519	Daily	16:40	21:15
3K 584	2,3,5	19:30	00:05+1

SINGAPORE TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
TR 2822	Daily	7:20	8:45
Y5 2234	Daily	7:20	8:50
SQ 998	Daily	7:55	9:20
3K 581	Daily	9:10	10:40
MI 533	2,4,6	11:30	12:45
8M 232	Daily	13:25	14:50
MI 518	Daily	14:20	15:45
3K 583	2,3,5	17:20	18:50
8M 234	5,6,7	20:10	21:35

YANGON TO KUALA LUMPUR			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 501	1,2,3,5,6	7:30	11:30
AK 505	Daily	8:30	12:45
MH 741	Daily	12:15	16:30
MH 743	Daily	16:00	20:15
AK 504	Daily	19:05	23:20

KUALA LUMPUR TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
AK 504	Daily	6:55	8:00
MH 740	Daily	10:05	11:15
8M 502	1,2,3,5,6	12:30	13:30
MH 742	Daily	13:55	15:05
AK 502	Daily	17:20	18:25

YANGON TO BEIJING			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CA 906	3,5,7	23:50	05:50+1

BEIJING TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CA 905	3,5,7	19:30	22:50

YANGON TO GUANGZHOU			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 711	2,4,7	8:40	13:15
CZ 3056	3,6	11:35	15:55
CZ 3056	1,5	17:40	22:10

GUANGZHOU TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CZ 3055	3,6	8:35	10:35
CZ 3055	1,5	14:40	16:40
8M 712	2,4,7	14:15	15:50

YANGON TO TAIPEI			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CI 7916	Daily	10:50	16:10

TAIPEI TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CI 7915	Daily	7:00	9:50

YANGON TO KUNMING			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CA 416	Daily	12:30	15:55
MU 2012	3	12:40	18:50
MU 2032	1,2,4,5,6,7	14:50	18:15

KUNMING TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MU 2011	3	8:25	11:50
CA 415	Daily	11:10	11:30
MU 2031	1,2,4,5,6,7	13:30	14:00

YANGON TO HANOI			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 956	1,3,5,6,7	19:10	21:25

HANOI TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 957	1,3,5,6,7	16:40	18:10

YANGON TO HO CHI MINH CITY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 942	2,4,7	14:25	17:05

HO CHI MINH CITY TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 943	2,4,7	11:45	13:25

YANGON TO DOHA			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
QR 919	1,4,6	7:55	11:40

DOHA TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
QR 918	3,5,7	19:45	04:59+1

YANGON TO SEOUL			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
OZ 770	4,7	0:50	8:50
KE 472	Daily	23:55	07:45+1

SEOUL TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
KE 471	Daily	18:30	22:30
OZ 769	3,6	19:30	23:40

YANGON TO HONG KONG			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
KA 251	Daily	1:10	5:25

HONG KONG TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
KA 252	2,4,6	22:20	00:15+1
KA 250	1,3,5,7	21:50	23:45

YANGON TO TOKYO			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
NH 914	Daily	22:10	06:45+1

TOKYO TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
NH 913	Daily	11:45	17:15

YANGON TO DHAKA			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
BG 061	2	11:45	13:00
BG 061	5	19:45	21:00

DHAKA TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
BG 060	2	8:30	10:45
BG 060	5	16:30	18:45

YANGON TO INCHEON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 724	1,3,5,6	12:50	14:45
W9 607	4,7	14:30	16:20
8M 7702	Daily	23:55	07:45+1

INCHEON TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 723	1,3,5,6	11:00	11:55
W9 608	4,7	17:20	18:10
8M 7701	Daily	18:30	22:30

YANGON TO CHIANG MAI			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 251	2,4,6	6:15	8:05
7Y 305	1,5	11:00	12:50
W9 607	4,7	14:30	16:20

CHIANG MAI TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 252	2,4,6	9:25	10:15
7Y 306	1,5	13:45	14:35
W9 608	4,7	17:20	18:10

YANGON TO GAYA			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 601	1,3,5,6	10:30	11:50

GAYA TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 602	1,3,5,6	12:50	16:00

MANDALAY TO BANGKOK			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 710	Daily	14:15	16:40

BANGKOK TO MANDALAY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 709	Daily	12:05	13:25

MANDALAY TO SINGAPORE			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MI 533	2,4,6	15:45	20:50
Y5 2233	1,2,4,5,6	7:50	14:15

SINGAPORE TO MANDALAY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 2234	Daily	7:20	16:30
MI 533	2,4,6	11:30	14:50

MANDALAY TO DON MUEANG			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
FD 245	Daily	12:50	15:15

DON MUEANG TO MANDALAY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
FD 244	Daily	10:55	12:20

MANDALAY TO KUNMING			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MU 2030	Daily	13:50	16:40

KUNMING TO MANDALAY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MU 2029	Daily	12:55	12:50

NAY PYI TAW TO BANGKOK			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 722	1,2,3,4,5	19:45	22:45

BANGKOK TO NAY PYI TAW			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 721	1,2,3,4,5	17:15	19:15

International Airlines

Air Asia (FD)
Tel: 09254049991-3

Air Bagan Ltd.(W9)
Tel: 513322, 513422, 504888. Fax: 515102

Air China (CA)
Tel: 666112, 655882

Air India
Tel: 253597-98, 254758. Fax 248175

Bangkok Airways (PG)
Tel: 255122, 255265. Fax: 255119

Biman Bangladesh Airlines (BG)
Tel: 371867-68. Fax: 371869

Condor (DE)
Tel: 370836-39 [ext: 303]

Dragonair (KA)
Tel: 255320, 255321. Fax: 255329

Golden Myanmar Airlines (Y5)
Tel: 09400446999, 09400447999
Fax: 8604051

Malaysia Airlines (MH)
Tel: 387648, 241007 [ext: 120, 121, 122]
Fax: 241124

Myanmar Airways International (8M)
Tel: 255260. Fax: 255305

Nok Airline (DD)
Tel: 255050, 255021. Fax: 255051

Qatar Airways (QR)
Tel: 379845, 379843, 379831. Fax: 379730

Singapore Airlines (SQ) / Silk Air (MI)
Tel: 255287-9. Fax: 255290

Thai Airways (TG)
Tel: 255491-6. Fax: 255223

Tiger Airline (TR)
Tel: 371383, 370836-39 [ext: 303]

Vietnam Airlines (VN)
Tel: 255066, 255088, 255068. Fax: 255086

Airline Codes

3K = Jet Star
8M = Myanmar Airways International
AK = Air Asia
BG = Biman Bangladesh Airlines
CA = Air China
CI = China Airlines
CZ = China Southern
DD = Nok Airline
FD = Air Asia
KA = Dragonair
KE = Korea Airlines
MH = Malaysia Airlines
MI = Silk Air
MU = China Eastern Airlines
NH = All Nippon Airways
PG = Bangkok Airways
QR = Qatar Airways
SQ = Singapore Airways
TG = Thai Airways
TR = Tiger Airline
VN = Vietnam Airline
Y5 = Golden Myanmar Airlines

Subject to change without notice

RUGBY UNION

Six Nations will go to the wire

STUART Lancaster admits his England players simply must be more clinical and ruthless against France if they are to capture the Six Nations title at Twickenham.

The head coach was left with mixed emotions after the 25-13 victory over Scotland which was much more of a struggle than it needed to be with the hosts blowing hot and cold in front of the try line.

Jack Nowell's late try, England's third of the game, ensured Lancaster's team jumped to the Six Nations summit after the Welsh blew open the title race by beating Ireland 23-1.

England have a superior points difference over Ireland (37 to 33) with Wales third (plus 12).

The scene is now set for a nail-biting, tense and thrilling final day of the Championship on March 21 when Wales kick off the day in Rome, the Irish then play in Edinburgh and the English host France.

England, who will know what they need to do by the time their game kicks off, will start favourites to lift the trophy if only because of home advantage and Wales need a huge win over Italy.

But Lancaster insisted, "We will have to be sharper than we were here to beat France, that's for sure. The French will not let us miss so many attacking opportunities. They will be dangerous and we must be more clinical."

"We have given ourselves a chance thanks to this win and to the Welsh beating Ireland. And it promises to be



England's Jack Nowell scores a try during his side's 25-13 Calcutta Cup and Six Nations win over Scotland. Photo: AFP

a very tense and exciting last day. We will know our own destiny come the final game because our one is the late kick off time.

"But we cannot afford to look at what the other two sides have done. We must just concentrate on what we can do and ensure we do the business against France."

"We were delighted here to make

so many try scoring chances but disappointed to let so many go by. To convert three line breaks from twelve we made was not what we wanted."

The Calcutta Cup seemed close to slipping through their fingers as their Grand Slam dreams did in Dublin a fortnight earlier. But the men in white managed to compose themselves in the second half and finish the job.

Fly-half Ford admitted, "There was never any panic at all but we should have taken a few more of our chances. We made plenty of line breaks but now we are in with a shout of winning the Six Nations."

"The French will be a very dangerous team and can beat anybody on their day. We are expecting a very hard Test match because they will want to come to Twickenham and silence the crowd straight away."

"I'm not sure what the coaches

are planning in terms of watching the other games but we will need to know what we need to do on the pitch come kick off time. First of all we will just want to win a Test match and the Championship."

"It's going to be a huge week again. I always think every week is the biggest of my career."

Captain Sam Warburton hailed the defensive effort of his Wales side after they held off Ireland in Cardiff on March 14.

Wales ended Ireland's Grand Slam aspirations thanks to a try from replacement Scott Williams, a drop goal from Dan Biggar and five penalties from Leigh Halfpenny.

Ireland, meanwhile, registered a penalty try and 11 points from the boot of Johnny Sexton but could not mark captain Paul O'Connell's 100th cap with a win.

The home side had to stave off several periods of sustained second-half pressure to secure the win, including a passage of play where they kept out 46 phases of Irish attack.

Flanker Warburton, who led his country for a record 34th time, admitted those spells had pushed his side to their limits of endurance, but was delighted to cling on.

"That win was as satisfying as beating South Africa in the autumn, England in 2013 and Ireland in the World Cup quarter-final, because this Ireland team are that good."

"They are third in the world rankings and chasing a Grand Slam so we knew it was going to take one of our best performances to win."

"We had to make that many tackles because Ireland kept the ball extremely well and just kept coming. It's probably the most exhausted I have ever felt after a Test match. But I couldn't have asked for more from the guys."

While the Six Nations title promises to go right down to the wire with plenty of blood, sweat and tears before it is decided on the final day, Scotland are left to try and avoid the wooden spoon and an embarrassing white-wash at home to Ireland.

Ireland will be still be hoping to firmly secure back-to-back Championship triumphs for the first time since 1948 and 1949.

But head coach Joe Schmidt was adamant his side cannot afford to start thinking too much about their final points difference when they face Scotland at Murrayfield.

"It is a bit similar to last year where we played last and knew we just needed a result in Paris," said the former Leinster coach.

"We managed to do that while England sat and watched."

"But, first things first, you have to win those games. You cannot go anywhere in this championship and go chasing points because you will come unstuck."

"Scotland nearly beat Wales, and now Wales have beaten us, so they will be difficult to beat." - AFP

IN BRIEF

Formula E Like father, like son

France's Nicolas Prost, son of four-time Formula One world champion Alain Prost, won the Miami Formula E grand prix, fifth race in the inaugural season of the circuit for electric cars.

Prost, driving a e.Dams-Renault, finished ahead of American Andreotti Autosport driver Scott Speed, with Germany's Daniel Abt of Audi Sport ABT third.

Prost's first victory in Formula E moved him to the top of the championship standings in the series.

The next race in the series will be next Saturday in Long Beach, California.

The Formula E Championship, which began in Beijing in September, is set to conclude at London's Battersea Park with races 10 and 11 on June 27 and 28.

Basketball NBA stubs out 'butts'

Portland Trail Blazers centre Joel Freeland of England and Detroit Pistons forward Shawne Williams were suspended one game without pay by the NBA on March 14 for exchanging head-butts.

The incident came with 75 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter of Portland's 118-99 victory over the visiting Pistons on March 13.

Athletics Bolt back on track

World 100- and 200-metre record holder Usain Bolt was pleased with his fitness improvement on March 14 after winning a 400-metre heat in his first individual race of the year.

The 28-year-old Jamaican sprint star won in 46.37 seconds at the Foster Classic in Kingston and said after the race that he is happy with his conditioning and coach Glen Mills appears to be as well.

"It's coming on," Bolt said of his fitness. "I think I am doing pretty well in training. The coach is happy as far as I can tell."

Two weeks ago, Bolt ran the anchor leg for the Racers Lions team at the Gibson Relays in Kingston to open his 2015 campaign.

Mills is having Bolt compete in more early season events in his homeland to bolster his shape for the upcoming outdoor season and world championships in August at Beijing's Bird's Nest stadium.

"We need more races to get sharper because I haven't run a lot over the past couple of years, so I just need a lot more races to get into race shape," Bolt said.

Boxing Kovalev retains light heavyweight titles

Sergey Kovalev stopped former champion Jean Pascal in the eighth round on March 14 to retain his trio of light heavyweight world titles.

The unbeaten Russian improved to 27-0 with one drawn and 24 knockouts, retaining the World Boxing Association, World Boxing Organization and International Boxing Federation crowns.

He had captured two of those belts last November with a unanimous 12-round decision over Bernard Hopkins, the first time Kovalev had to go past the eighth round.

He didn't have to go further at the weekend, pinning Pascal to the ropes with a series of blows early in the eighth.

The barrage was interrupted when the Russian went to the canvas in what was ruled a slip.

When the action resumed, however, Kovalev landed two hard rights to Pascal's head and Puerto Rican referee Luis Pabon stepped in, giving Kovalev the victory by technical knockout. - AFP



IN PICTURES

The Italian women's rugby team beat France for only the second time on March 14. The result ruins France's hopes of a Grand Slam while opening up the competition, particularly for the winner of the Wales v Ireland game played late on March 15. The winner of that clash will join France on six points with just one game to play, while the loser will join England and Italy on four, while Scotland remain winless.

Photo: AFP

VOLLEYBALL

Myanmar spike Singapore

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MYANMAR'S women's volleyball team completed three comfortable best of five-set victories over Singaporean teams between March 13 and 15, as the team prepare for the 2015 Southeast Asian Games to be held in Singapore.

The women expect to be medal contenders at the June Games, while their male counterparts have their eye on a finals berth, said U Nyi Nyi Lwin, the secretary of the Myanmar Volleyball Federation.

"Our team did what was asked of them in beating the Singaporean women. This victory is an important morale boost to increase the self-confidence of our athletes for the coming SEA Games," U Nyi Nyi Lwin told *The*

Myanmar Times.

In 2013, both the men and the women missed out, losing their respective bronze-medal matches against Vietnam and Indonesia.

The squad that competed in this warm-up contest included six SEA Games-experienced athletes and six rising stars of Myanmar's game. The plan is for this collection of players to remain together and train with local coaches as Singapore approaches.

"Until this point the 4th National Games have been our primary preparation," said U Ye Myint, the head coach of the Myanmar national teams.

"The Myanmar women do not have a great deal of opportunity to play internationally, so friendly matches like this are crucial to improve our competitiveness before the SEA Games."

"Singapore and Malaysia will be our likely contenders for the bronze,"



Myanmar made light work of their Singapore competition, only conceding one set over three games. Photo: Ministry of Sport

he added.

U Nyi Nyi Lwin admitted the men's target would be trickier.

"We hope to climb our way to the final, it will not be easy but we will try our best," said U Nyi Nyi Lwin.

In preparation, Nay Pyi Taw will host the Asian Men's U-23 Volleyball Championship from May 12. This will be the first time that Myanmar has competed at this level.

"Our younger players will gain valuable international experience from

this tournament," said U Nyi Nyi Lwin.

After the tournament, the squad will be joined by more senior members of the national squad in preparation for the Singapore Games.

"A number of our senior players are currently competing in the Thai Volleyball League. It will be invaluable for those players to share that international experience with our junior athletes," said U Ye Myint.

Nineteen teams have so far confirmed their participation in the Asian

U23 tournament.

Australia, Afghanistan, China, Indonesia, India, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Maldives, Philippines, Qatar, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Chinese Taipei and Vietnam will compete against the hosts for a spot in the U23 World Championships.

The two finalists will progress to the tournament due to take place in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from August 24 to 31.



Cars touch at the first corner during the Formula One Australian Grand Prix.

Photo: AFP

FORMULA ONE

Hamilton dominates withdrawal-hit opener

LEWIS Hamilton held off team-mate Nico Rosberg to give Mercedes a dominant victory as the season-opening Australian Grand Prix was hit by a series of withdrawals yesterday.

Reigning world champion Hamilton led from the start to the chequered flag, beating last year's winner Rosberg by 1.3 seconds, with Sebastian Vettel third in his Ferrari debut.

Only 11 cars finished the race after mechanical problems and an injury to Valtteri Bottas left just 15 on the starting grid - the lowest number for a year-opener since 1963.

And Max Verstappen's record-breaking debut at the age of 17 years and 166 days ended on a sour note when his Toro Rosso suffered a power unit failure on the 34th lap.

At the front, Mercedes were in ominous form with Hamilton finishing a whopping 34 seconds in front of Vettel, indicating a tough year ahead for the Silver Arrows' rivals.

It was Mercedes' eighth straight victory, dating back to Belgium last August, and their 20th race in a row with at least one driver on the podium.

Hamilton, 30, has now won seven of the last eight races and 34 from 149 grands prix, although this was his first in Australia since 2008.

"Nico was quick throughout the race," he said of his fierce rival. "In terms of tyres we did not know how far they could go. When Nico turned up the heat I was able to react which was good."

Rosberg, who will have much to ponder after pole-sitter Hamilton's supreme opening week, insisted it was a "nice feeling to be second".

"Lewis has done a fantastic job. He drove like a world champion all weekend. I'll give my maximum and try to

beat him all year," he said.

Four-time world champion Vettel yelled "Forza Ferrari!" as he celebrated a morale-boosting podium finish on his debut for the team after switching from Red Bull.

Ferrari finished only fourth in last year's constructors' championship and Vettel, who beat Williams' Felipe Massa to take third place, was all smiles as he collected his trophy.

"We can be very proud. We have a great car, there is a lot of work ahead of us to beat these [Mercedes] guys," Vettel said. "We want to make sure that life is not easy for these two during the season."

'Lewis has done a fantastic job. He drove like a world champion all weekend.'

Nico Rosberg
Mercedes F1 Driver

Brazilian Felipe Nasr finished a plucky fifth on his F1 debut in a boost to his Sauber team, entangled all week in a distracting legal battle over their driver line-up.

But Australia's Daniel Ricciardo emphasised Red Bull's current struggles when he finished sixth.

With fledgling team Manor unable even to take part in qualifying, the race lost another driver when Williams' Bottas was ruled out with a back injury.

Red Bull's Daniil Kvyat and McLaren's Kevin Magnussen then withdrew with mechanical problems on the reconnaissance lap, leaving a sparse grid of only 15 cars.

Hamilton got away quickly off pole and was first into the right-hand hairpin but Lotus's Pastor Maldonado was sideswiped into the barriers and crashed out as the safety car came out on the opening lap.

When the safety car withdrew, Hamilton opened a stunning 2.4sec gap over teammate Rosberg by the end of the first racing lap.

But Rosberg put in some fastest laps to reduce the gap to 1.2secs behind Hamilton after 10 laps, with Massa and Vettel eight to nine seconds adrift.

At one-third distance, Hamilton led Rosberg by 2.4sec, with Massa 1.5sec clear of Vettel in the battle to join the Mercedes on the podium.

Both Mercedes had a one-stop strategy. Rosberg got the faster pit stop by 2.9sec but Hamilton was able to retake the lead with ease in the race to the chequered flag.

Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen retired on lap 42, moments after his second pit stop, when he drove off with the left rear wheel not properly attached.

Three-time race winner Jenson Button battled on with his misfiring McLaren to finish just out of the points in 11th - but also in last place in the reduced field.

There were cheers when Hollywood star Arnold Schwarzenegger awarded the trophies at the podium ceremony, with Hamilton joking, "I thought you were taller!"

The two-time world champion added, "I'll be back." - *AFP*

FIFA 2018 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

India	2 - 0	Nepal
Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium, Guwahati		
Yemen	3 - 1	Pakistan
Grand Hamad Stadium, Doha (Qatar)		

Sport

Myanmar's volleyballers slam Singapore

SPORT 31



FOOTBALL

Nay Pyi Taw FC Academy threaten salary protest

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OFFICIALS from Nay Pyi Taw Football Club will meet with representatives of the young footballers and their families and coaches from the club's academy set up on March 16 after the latter group threatened to protest over unpaid salaries.

On March 11, the group called a press conference at a tea shop on Bogoyoke Aung San Road to announce their plans to take action to demonstrate this week about having not received salary payments throughout 2014.

"After negotiating four times with officials at Nay Pyi Taw FC, we have received only two months' salary for the whole of 2014. We want our remaining ten months' pay. They continually tell us it will be resolved soon but one year is a long time," said U Win Myint, head coach of the Academy on March 11.

They say the club has failed to pay salaries owed to five coaches and stipends promised to 40 junior footballers.

"We have complained to the Myanmar Football Federation and the Sports Ministry but they have failed to act, so we intend to demonstrate at

the Myanmar Football Federation [opposite Thuwunna Stadium] and the Ministry of Sport [at the Kyaikkasan grounds] as well as the Nay Pyi Taw team office," U Win Myint added.

Nay Pyi Taw FC is part of the ACE Group of Companies, chaired by U Phyo Ko Ko Tint San, the son of Minister for Sport U Tint San, who also acts as patron for the ACE Group.

The Myanmar Times were unable to reach Nay Pyi Taw FC or their owner and chair U Phyo Ko Ko Tint San for comment.

U Tint San has previously refused to comment on this issue, telling journalists this is not a matter that involves him.

The total owed to players and coaches is about K18.5million (US\$ 18,500), the highest unpaid coaches salary was K400,000 a month, while player stipends are at least K15,000 a month.

"Nay Pyi Taw FC agreed with us to give a salary to the junior footballers. The agreement included their enrollment in school and an allowance of pocket money," U Shwe Win the parent of an academy player told *The Myanmar Times* on March 12.

"My son is a talented junior player,



Coaches and parents of players at the Nay Pyi Taw FC Academy attend a the press conference on March 11. Photo: Kyaw Zin Hlaing

who has played with the Myanmar in the U12 team. If he has the right support he could become a star player for Myanmar but now he and we are upset," said U Shwe Win, an academy player's parent.

"As footballers they cannot continue

without their salary, so we will demonstrate," he added.

"Many of the country's potential future stars have come from this academy," said U Htet Aung, another coach from the academy, adding that since the academy was founded in 2013, 28

junior footballers have appeared in the national junior squads between the age groups of U12 and U16.

At the press conference, the coaches also revealed that the Nay Pyi Taw Futsal team has also gone without salary in recent months.

FOOTBALL

Myanmar romp to second Olympic phase

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MYANMAR women netted seven past their Indian opponents at Mandalay's Mandalay Thiri Stadium on March 15.

The 7-0 win qualifies them for the second round and a trip to Thailand in September to face the hosts, fellow Southeast Asian side Vietnam and two other teams.

Uzbekistan and Jordan were due to play off on March 15 for one of the remaining spots, while Chinese Taipei, Laos and Iran will play off later in the month to determine the fifth competitor.

From that competition one team will qualify to meet the top five Asian seeds: Japan, Australia, China, North Korea and South Korea in Japan - a tournament scheduled for late 2015 or early 2016.

Earlier in the qualification round Myanmar had trounced Sri Lanka's ladies 16-0 on March 11, before the Indian side put four past the island nation on March 13.

2016 Olympic Qualifying AFC Round 1 Group 1

Myanmar 7 - 0 India

Khin Moe Wai 7'
Khin Marlar Tun 14', 60'
Naw Ar Lo Wah Phaw 21'
Yee Yee Oo 28', 77'



Khin Moe Wai (11) celebrates after opening the scoring for Myanmar past India's Roshin Devi Okram (1). Photo: Facebook

SQUASH

Myanmar whitewashed

MATT ROEBUCK

MYANMAR lost every one of the 18 matches they contested in squash's inaugural Marigold South East Asia Cup, only managing to win one game in the 43 they played between March 12 and 14 at the Singapore Island Country Club.

The tournament acted as a warm-up for the SEA Games also to be held in Singapore. Squash has not been included in the regional multi-sport event since Thailand hosted the 2007 Games.

The group stages saw ties consisting of two men's single games, two women's singles and one men's jumbo doubles. Myanmar lost all three matches 5-0, to Indonesia, Thailand 2 and eventual group winners Singapore.

Only Than Than Soe, the women's second seed, managed to put Myanmar on the scoreboard when she took Suvipa Kitvijan of Thailand 2 to a fourth game by winning the first 11-8 before succumbing 5-11, 10-12, 9-11.

Myanmar were then defeated 3-0 in a best of five knockout game against Thailand 1.

Singapore went on to beat the Philippines representatives to reach the final where they met neighbours Malaysia, who had overcome Indonesia in their respective semi-final. Singapore got off to a winning start in the men's singles through Vivian Rhamaman before Malaysia won the next three on the trot, making the men's doubles a dead rubber and securing the trophy.