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Ko Htut Ko Ko Lwin (front), U Tun Thurein (centre) and Philip Blackwood (rear) attend the verdict and sentencing at Bahan Township Court yesterday. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

## Shock and anger at verdict

Judge says ignorance no defence as he sentences “Buddha Bar” defendants to two-and-a-half years in prison

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RELATIVES of three men sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison with hard labour for using a Buddha

image in an advert for a bar said yesterday they were “shocked” and “devastated” at the decision, and announced plans to appeal. The verdict and sentencing divided observers and sparked heated debate on social media.  
 Bahan Township Court Judge U

Ye Lwin found New Zealander Philip Blackwood and two Myanmar colleagues, bar owner U Tun Thurein and co-manager Ko Htut Ko Ko Lwin, guilty under sections 295(a) – insulting religion – and 188 – disobeying a civil servant.  
 A third charge under section 295

– defiling a place of worship – was dismissed. Both the section 295 and 295(a) charges require intent to be proven.  
 The defendants’ lawyer, U Mya Thway, declined to comment on the verdict.  
 “I would dare to say [my opinion]

if I was in another country, one with full democracy. But if I make any comment on the court’s decision I will end up in jail,” he said, adding that he would appeal if instructed by his clients.

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## ANALYSIS

## Tentative step forward for peace in Kachin

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WHAT began as an ethnic-driven movement for political autonomy in Kachin State more than half a century ago has long since evolved into a complex struggle for control of lucrative natural resources. With elections looming and Chinese business interests muscling into the region, analysts say the stakes are high as both sides take tentative steps toward a ceasefire.

Rich in resources – jade, copper, gold, iron ore, coal, timber and water – the state covering an area the size of Portugal has attracted private and state-owned Myanmar and Chinese businesses, cutting deals with whoever controls that particular area, whether the central government, allied Kachin paramilitary forces, local military commanders or the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) itself.

In his March 2011 inaugural address ushering in his quasi-civilian and reformist government, President U Thein Sein declared that Myanmar's ethnic minorities had gone through "the hell of untold miseries" and promised a drive to end decades of warfare with numerous rebel forces.

But three months later the military launched a major offensive in Kachin State, ending a 17-year ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Myanmar's second-largest rebel group. More than 100,000 people were displaced by the fighting, many ending up in camps along the border with China. Rights groups documented horrific atrocities.

Matthew Smith, director of Fortify Rights, an NGO, says China's business interests have directly contributed to the ongoing war. He notes that the 2011 offensive by the Tatmadaw was triggered by clashes with the KIA near the Taping hydropower dam project operated by China's state-owned Datang Corporation, which was in dispute with the Kachin over the sharing of electricity.

"While the West focuses on Myanmar's nationwide ceasefire talks, on the ground it's clear the military won't get serious about peace until it gains more territory. Dams, pipelines and mines, often financed by China, have been used as a wartime tool to encroach on ethnic lands and dominate local populations," Mr Smith wrote in a recent commentary.

Against this complex backdrop and engrained distrust, observers are asking what drove the Kachin delegation, led by KIO general secretary La Jar and KIA deputy commander General Gun Maw, to meet for the first time with U Thein Sein and Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in the capital Nay Pyi Taw on March 16.

"The KIA and KIO want to be at

the table. They are frustrated that their own war has struggled for resolution," commented Nicholas Farrelly, researcher at Australian National University.

"Nonetheless it's far too early to be getting optimistic about recent positive signs. Hammering out a final deal with the Kachin, especially as both sides have survived the recent conflict and its reverberations, will take serious patience and a good dollop of luck," he added.

As general elections, expected in November, draw closer, Mr Farrelly said, the Kachin ethno-nationalists fear "they might not get the oxygen they want".

This, he said, was a dangerous prospect given fresh memories of what happened in the lead-up to the orchestrated 2010 elections when the then-military junta excluded KIO-linked politicians. "They met and negotiated and struggled, and all for naught. War has a long shadow in that part of the country," he commented.

U Sithu Aung Myint, a political commentator, said the Kachin leaders were under international pressure to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement along with the other ethnic groups.

**'The KIA and KIO want to be at the table. They are frustrated that their own war has struggled for resolution.'**

Nicholas Farrelly  
Australian National University

"The KIA does not want the international community to see them as the culprits who don't want to achieve peace. That's why they decided to show they were willing, by visiting Nay Pyi Taw. But in reality they don't trust the government and they won't sign [the NCA] without having strong commitments from the government," U Sithu Aung Myint said.

Another political analyst, U Than Soe Naing, said the artillery attack on the KIA training academy near Laiza last November in which 23 people were killed had led to a debate over whether to engage in peace talks.

"For these reasons, the KIA made the decision to move forward to achieve peace, by signing the NCA in order to move to the next step – political dialogue," U Than Soe Naing said.



Chief government peace negotiator U Aung Min speaks yesterday during peace talks in Yangon. Photo: Thiri Lu

## NCCT urges inclusion of Kokang in dialogue

Government and armed ethnic groups resume talks on a nationwide ceasefire agreement in Yangon, a day after meeting between KIO and President U Thein Sein

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THE chief negotiator for a delegation of armed ethnic groups has urged the government side to hold an "all-inclusive" political dialogue that would bring in Kokang rebels now fighting the Tatmadaw in northern Shan State.

"In order to implement genuine and lasting peace, at the talks we need to discuss the issues happening in Kachin State, Palaung region and Kokang region to decrease tensions," Naing Han Thar, chair of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team, said in his opening remarks at the start of the seventh round of formal talks on a draft ceasefire in Yangon yesterday.

"We believe we will get eternal peace if we can hold all-inclusive political dialogue that includes all ethnic armed groups, after signing the nationwide ceasefire agreement."

The government has ruled out talks with the ethnic Chinese rebels in the Kokang self-administered area. Fighting erupted in the region

on February 9 and has spilled over the border into China on at least two occasions.

The talks between the Union Peace-making Work Committee (UPWC) and the NCCT, which is negotiating on behalf of 16 armed ethnic groups, were held at the Myanmar Peace Center and are expected to continue until March 22.

The talks are aimed at finalising a draft nationwide ceasefire agreement that would pave the way for political dialogue and, ultimately, end Myanmar's long-running ethnic armed conflicts. Both sides have had their hopes raised after the Kachin Independence Organisation and its armed wing sent a high-level delegation to Nay Pyi Taw for the first time, meeting President U Thein Sein and Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on March 16.

"We came here with high hopes and [took] many risks," said Naing Han Thar. "If we reach an agreement with the government, the [ceasefire] draft could be concluded."

Talks had been stalled for almost six months, but leaders from both sides said the seventh round represented a remarkable opportunity to conclude a ceasefire agreement following the meeting between the

Kachin delegation and the government in the capital.

Lieutenant General Myint Soe of the Commander-in-Chief's Office said the two sides were able to build trust to some extent when Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met the KIO delegation.

"We openly discussed military issues at the meeting. If we discuss [these issues] among each other based on the trust and understanding that we got in Nay Pyi Taw, then things will happen as we expect," Lt Gen Myint Soe said yesterday.

General Gun Maw, the deputy commander of the Kachin Independence Army, also said they were willing to achieve peace through a national ceasefire as an important step toward political dialogue.

Some analysts cautioned however that there was a risk to the ceasefire talks if the NCCT insisted on including discussions on the Kokang conflict.

"I hope they [NCCT] will not make that request in order to avoid unnecessary consequences. They should discuss this topic outside of the nationwide ceasefire draft. It would be better to hold separate meetings to discuss these issues after they get agreement on the ceasefire," said political analyst U Than Soe Naing.

## Chin politicians discuss unification at public forum

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CAN the Chin unite in a single political party? The question was discussed by political leaders on March 16 at a forum in Yangon organised by the Gender and Development Initiative (GDI).

The participants in a panel discussion led by former professor Salai Tun Than were the chair of the Chin National Democratic Party, U Zo Zam; the general secretary of the

Chin Progressive Party, U Shein Tun; and the assistant general secretary of the Chin National Front, U Sui Khar.

Salai Tun Than, who has recently returned to Myanmar, said unity between the Chin sub-groups – of which there are officially 53 – was essential. "We must be unified in politics and in everything else, if possible. We should be only one Chin, rather than Hakha Chin, Asho Chin and so on," he said.

U Zo Zam of the CNDP said the emergence of a united Chin party

**'I believe that brighter youths will bring about the unification of the parties.'**

U Zo Zam  
Chin National Democratic Party

might occur in the next generation, but did not look possible "at this time".

"I believe that brighter youths will bring about the unification of the parties into one main political party," he said, adding that its focus would be to develop and improve the lives of the Chin people.

U Sui Khar of the CNF discussed the peace process. He said some ethnic armed group leaders "are doubtful about pledges of national reconciliation".

"They want assurances about political dialogue before signing a nationwide ceasefire agreement. But the government wants to sign the ceasefire agreement first, and have the political dialogue later."

A former professor of agriculture, Salai Tun Than, who is now in his 80s, was sentenced to three years' imprisonment in 2001 after he conducted a solo strike for democracy. He left the country in June 2006. On this return he was forced to sign a pledge not to get involved in politics.





Daw Aye Than Than Htoo, mother of convicted bar manager Ko Htut Ko Ko Lwin, speaks to reporters outside court. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

# Relatives and rights groups slam 'Buddha Bar' sentences

CONTINUED FROM NEWS 1

The trio was arrested in early December after a psychedelic image featuring the Buddha wearing headphones was used to promote a discounted drinks night at the now-closed VGastro Bar in Yangon's Golden Valley area.

The image was quickly shared on social media, with many criticising the bar managers for using the image. Realising the offence caused, the bar deleted the image and issued an apology.

But U Ye Lwin said that "ignorance of the law is not an excuse".

"[Mr Blackwood] already knows a lot about Myanmar culture because he has stayed in Myanmar for more than three years. And the owner of the bar failed to instruct his foreign staff about the culture and traditions of the country," he said.

Mr Blackwood's family released a statement following the verdict saying that while they understood the reasoning behind the decision they were "devastated" by the sentence.

"A sentence of two years [and] six months' imprisonment with labour is

in our opinion extremely harsh. This was simply an error of judgement on Philip's behalf. This was not an attack on Buddha and Buddhism and Philip has repeatedly made attempts to show his remorse for the hurt caused," the statement said.

After the sentence was handed down, Daw Aye Than Than Htoo, the mother of Ko Htut Ko Ko Lwin, briefly clashed with a group of monks outside the court. She described the sentence as unfair.

Daw Myat Nandar, wife of U Tun Thurein, the bar owner, said she was "very shocked".

She questioned how someone

**'If I make any comment on the court's decision I will end up in jail.'**

**U Mya Thway**  
Lawyer for the defendants

could be "guilty of something you didn't know about and didn't do" - a reference to the fact Mr Blackwood had admitted to posting the image on his own.

She said she would consult with her husband's lawyer before deciding whether to appeal.

The trio was arrested following a complaint from a hardline Buddhist group, the Patriotic Buddhist Monks Union, that has in the past made its name breaking up events with Muslim speakers. Monks and lay members of Buddhist groups, such as the Committee for Protection of Nationality and Religion - better known as Ma Ba Tha - have regularly attended court sessions, and some were present at yesterday's verdict.

Senior PBMU member U Panna Vamsa, who was present for the verdict, described the sentence as "fair".

"No one will dare to insult any religion after this case," he said, adding that his group had not interfered in the trial.

But human right groups condemned the verdict and said it highlighted growing religious intolerance

in Myanmar.

Matthew Smith, executive director of Fortify Rights said the authorities were using the case for political reasons, and called for the immediate release of the trio.

"This is an election year and religion is already being used for political purposes. It's become a race to the bottom to determine who is a stronger defender of conservative Buddhism. Myanmar still lacks an independent judiciary and that's a concern with this case and others," he said.

Amnesty International described the verdict as "ludicrous" and "another blow to freedom of expression".

Rupert Abbott, Amnesty International's research director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, said Myanmar's shrinking religious tolerance was "deeply worrying, as is the growing influence of rhetoric by hardline Buddhist nationalist groups".

"Authorities should do all they can to reverse this disturbing trend - not seek to inflame the situation further by pursuing cases like this," he said.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun and Khant Lin Oo

## Facebook and Twitter reactions outrage



**@Burmakomite**

Ad of Buddha w/headphones sends New Zealander & 2 Burmese to prison: - Sign of spiraling religious intolerance.



**@CraigHodges9**

Phil Blackwood jailed for 2.5 yr after innocuous USE OF image of Buddha in Myanmar. HE WAS informal Kiwi Ambassador.



**Thetlin Win**

the new zealander has been living in yangon for quite some time, he was previously the gm of the 50th street bar. he would have known the so called "do's and don'ts"



**Anita Prakash**

If you dont like the laws of a country, dont go there.... people in western countries get angry when muslims push for sharia law....but westerners expect foreign nations to adopt western values....if you dont like a country's laws, dont go there!!!



**Great news**



**Yenlinh Tran**

Just let him go. We are buddhists....be tolerant...he apologized....move on and eat some good tofu...



**Ahamad Kunhi Hajee**

If Budha is insulted, it is a terrible crime. If Muhammad is insulted, it is freedom of expression.

# Arrested students barred from meeting families, lawyers

WA LONE

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CONCERNS have emerged about the treatment of those detained at Letpadan on March 10, with police accused of breaking the law during their detention.

Students held in Tharyarwady Prison for protesting against the National Education Law are being prohibited from seeing their families, and have also been denied access to legal advice.

Critics say the government's lack of respect for detainees' legal rights harks back to the abuses of the former military government.

Police Colonel Win Sein from Letpadan township confirmed to *The Myanmar Times* yesterday that detained student leaders were not allowed to communicate with the outside. He

said this was because they were being held on remand and still under investigation.

"Student leaders are among those arrested and in some cases they have not revealed all information," he said. "If we allowed them to communicate with the outside, then they could be influenced. We will allow them to see families shortly after the investigation process ends."

Parents of the students said they were worried about their health condition and had received no information from the authorities. Some were badly beaten when hundreds of baton-wielding police broke up the protest.

"There are no mosquito nets when they sleep at night. When I tried to deliver a mosquito net to my son, the prison didn't accept it," said Daw Yu Yu Khin, mother of one of the student

leaders, Ko Min Thwe Thit.

Those arrested on March 10 appeared in Letpadan Township Court the following day, in two batches. The first arrived at 3pm, but about 70 people - including a significant number wearing bandages - were not brought to the court until 7:30pm.

U Kyi Myint, a veteran lawyer, said it is against the law to hold a session out of hours.

He said police were also acting unlawfully by cutting connections with the arrested students and not allowing them to hire lawyers.

"Students have the right to see families and to hire lawyers according to the law," he said.

The government has said it would release students involved in the protest against the National Education Law, but that it would take legal action

against those who were not students.

"I don't think the protesters committed an offence. But even offenders have a right to defence under the law. The government's current actions are the same as the techniques used by the military government. I can't accept it," said Ko Mya Aye, a leader of the 88 Generation.

Since March 12 the authorities have released 29 people recognised as students by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Education, leaving more than 100 people, including four student leaders who were arrested in Yangon after the crackdown, still in detention.

While the government promised to release all students, Police Colonel Win Sein said this did not include those enrolled in distance education, graduates or diploma students.

"We are to release one student today. He was left out because he gave us a wrong name. The rest are not students. Some are attending distance education. We don't recognise [diploma students] as students," he said.

Parents of distance education and diploma students from Pyay, Nattalin, Pe Nwe Gone and Kyaukpadaung are now at Tharyarwady Prison trying to meet their sons and daughters. They are also waiting to present the authorities with recommendation letters and a petition declaring they are students.

"The government has said the country is practising democracy. But their action does not equate with democracy. They oppress people and have no humanity. They have also arrested those who were not involved," Daw Yu Yu Khin said. - Translation by Thiri Min Htun and Zar Zar Soe



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U Aung Myo Min of Equality Myanmar speaks at a press conference yesterday. Photo: Nyan Lynn Aung

# Local groups, UN rep warn of backtracking on rights reforms



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AS Myanmar hurtles towards its second cycle in a United Nations human rights review process later this year, NGOs yesterday bemoaned the lack of headway the country has made toward recommendations doled out the first time around.

The four-yearly Universal Periodic Review will examine Myanmar's progress on meeting human rights targets it accepted from among the 190 recommendations submitted in 2011.

"Myanmar's human rights conditions have obviously not improved so far, and after 2013 the conditions have gotten worse," U Aung Myo Min, executive director of Equality Myanmar, said yesterday.

During its first review, Myanmar accepted less than half the suggested recommendations, and rejected dozens more because they "were couched in such a manner that acceptance of them would infringe on Myanmar's sovereign rights", Attorney General U Tun Shin told the UN body at the time.

The handful of accepted points included signing and ratifying "core human rights treaties" like the Convention Against Torture. Despite the government's pledge to ratify the conventions however, just one has so far been adopted, a convention on disabilities.

Myanmar is now up against a clock NGOs don't think it can beat with the second review scheduled for November 2-13.

Both the government and rights organisations can submit progress reports to the UN Human Rights Council. Local rights groups have until March 23 to send their assessment and recommendations, while the government is required to submit its own update by July 20.

At yesterday's conference, more

areas and most were about violations by the "Tatmadaw," said Ma Lwae Poe Nge from the Network for Human Rights Documentation-Burma.

The criticism of Myanmar's progress on human rights is not only domestic. On March 16, UN special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee told the council in Geneva that recent events here demonstrate the "numerous challenges" threatening to undermine the quasi-civilian state's successes in reforming.

The evaluation began with a condemnation of the recent arrests and clashes with student protesters in Letpadan and ended with a quote from monk U Wirathu criticising her work. In between, Ms Lee deplored the recent jailing of journalists and ventured into heated waters as she called the situation in Rakhine State "dire", with "abysmal" conditions in the Muslim IDP camps.

She also drew attention to armed conflicts, saying, "Far too often the people of Myanmar have suffered from the resurgence of violence and human rights violations in ethnic border areas."

Like domestic NGOs, her report cautioned that Myanmar may be stalling - or worse, backpedalling - on rights reform.

"It is important to welcome the positive developments in Myanmar, but also to honestly highlight the areas of risk and the numerous challenges that must be addressed rapidly before they undermine the successes achieved so far," she said.

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Human rights-related reforms that local NGOs will recommend the government undertake through the Universal Periodic Review process

than 30 organisations announced the joint NGO report will focus on eight problematic areas, including the judiciary, the constitution, freedom of expression, armed conflict, and arrests, torture and murder by the state.

The draft report suggests 36 reforms, including lifting a section of the constitution that prohibits lawsuits or investigations into army personnel.

"We've received 265 cases of human rights violation from ethnic

# Two-year encephalitis project launched

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A PROJECT linking local and international health organisations aimed at reducing deaths and cases of encephalitis in Southeast Asia has launched in Myanmar. Implementation is expected to get started within six months, according to organisers.

Already under way in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia, the Southeast Asia encephalitis (SEAE) project has arrived in Myanmar on the heels of a technical cooperation agreement signed in September by the Institut Pasteur, the Institut Pasteur in Cambodia, the National Health Laboratory and Myanmar national health authorities, according to a press release. The project proposes tackling encephalitis - a condition where the central nervous system inflames, and which disproportionately affects children - by enabling better prevention, diagnosis and care.

Encephalitis represents a significant health issue in Myanmar as well as its regional neighbours. The project will launch across six countries, with Indonesia and Thailand rounding out the group.

In Myanmar, the project will focus on backing the National Health Laboratory and the Yangon Children's Hospital, where a launch event was held yesterday.

This past year, the Yangon Children's Hospital logged 18,690 entrants. Of that number, 319 were diagnosed with a central nervous system infection such as encephalitis - and 26 of those patients died, a press release said.

Meanwhile, the National Health Laboratory (NHL) has experienced difficulties nailing down diagnosis of the condition, with more than two-thirds of cases going undiagnosed. While sometimes fatal, those who survive encephalitis can also face a lifetime of disability.

"At present we can only diagnose Japanese encephalitis and a few bacteria origins, and it's about 10 percent of cases," said Dr Khin Yi Oo, deputy director of the National Health Laboratory. "With this SEAE program, we'll be able to diagnose a lot of microorganisms, bacteria, viruses, parasites and also fungus infections that cause encephalitis."

Senior medical superintendent Yangon Children's Hospital Dr Thein Htun said the project would help the hospital identify what leads to encephalitis.

"It will help in our management and treatment of the children, so we can give on-time and on-target treatments, and so we don't use unnecessary money and antibiotics," he said. "In this way, we can save many lives ... and reduce complications."

Dr Kyaw Linn, senior pediatric consultant at the Yangon Children's Hospital, told the media the project would begin in the next six months.

# Casting call: Public invited to bellfounding

**CHERRY THEIN**  
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A GIANT bell will be cast tomorrow in Mandalay. The K500 million bronze casing, weighing 16 tonnes, is being built at the U Aung Than Maw foundry, also known as Tampawady, and the public is being invited to watch.

The foundry is no stranger to the art of casting huge bells, having cast a 16.2-tonne specimen two years ago for the Global Pagoda in Mumbai, India,

and another 7.2-tonne bell for a pagoda in Kamarwat, Mon State.

The leader of the team, U Aung Than Maw (Tampawady), said that he was proud the foundry would produce a bell right up there with the greats in Myanmar history, such as the Mingun Bell, which weighs in at 55,555 viss, or 97.5 tonnes.

Team member U Myint Thu said the casting process was arduous even with the use of modern technology. The team will begin melting the bronze at

4pm today, and it will be ready to cast at 4pm tomorrow, he said.

"It is costly and difficult to build such a giant bell, but we are happy to build it because it helps to sharpen our skills," U Aung Than Maw said, adding that the foundry normally makes bronze ware and small bells.

The bell, named Maha Wizaya Khay Ma Thithala Nate Buta Gaw Ta, will be installed at Dawei's Shwetaung Sar Pagoda - better known as Payar Gyi - next month. After casting is

complete, it will be sent to the Tanintharyi Region capital by road or water transport, depending on the weather.

Board of trustees spokesperson U Tun Kyi said the bell was being cast to mark the pagoda's 250th anniversary, with the cost was being covered by donors.

The bell, which will measure 17 feet (5.18 metres) in height including its hook, is a replica of King Tharyarwady's bell, which hangs at Shwedagon Pagoda's Tuesday corner.





Myanmar children eat lunch at the Social Action for Women office in Mae Sot, Thailand. Photo: Si Thu Lwin

## Children find support in Mae Sot

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ABANDONED Myanmar children cared for by a women's organisation are looking forward to a great future – in Thailand. Social Action for Women (SAW), a community organisation in Mae Sot, on the Thai border, provides protection and shelter to Myanmar migrant women and children. The organisation has cared for more than 200 orphans, or children born to HIV-positive mother, and victims of trafficking.

"We sent the children to a Thai

middle school founded by Princess Sirindhorn. Now we've reached agreement with a high school in Thailand that will take them. The school offers 80 percent scholarships and has links with six Thai universities, which opens up educational opportunities and the way toward a secure future. We will help the graduates until they obtain [Myanmar] citizenship," SAW spokesperson Ko Min Min told *The Myanmar Times* in Mae Sot on March 16.

"We want them to be Myanmar citizens, but that depends on the Myanmar government's willingness to

accept them as citizens. Education is crucial for their future, so we gave them a Thai education," he said.

Ma Yamin Hlaing, an ethnic Kayin 8<sup>th</sup> standard student who has been with SAW for two years, said she would prefer a Myanmar school if she could but it was difficult to return.

"I want to be a doctor. I am happy living in this shelter and feel safe," she said.

Founded in 2000, SAW provides health, educational and social services to nearly 400 women and children along the border.

– Translation by Zar Zar Soe

## Lawyer accuses ethnic Rakhine judges of bias

Rakhine judges overturn decision of ethnic Bamar counterparts on Rohingya cases



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A VETERAN human rights lawyer defending Rohingya activists caught up in the conflict in Rakhine State has accused judges of the Sittwe Appellate court of ethnic bias but says he hopes he can find justice in the Supreme Court.

"There is no rule of law in this conflict," U Hla Myo Myint told *The Myanmar Times* in his Yangon office yesterday.

The 64-year-old lawyer, who is well known for taking on human rights cases, said four of the Muslim community leaders had been acquitted last June by District Court Judge Daw Aye Thein, who he noted was an ethnic Burman.

But the Rakhine State attorney general appealed and the judges of the Sittwe Appellate court on February 27 sentenced three of the men – U Ba Tha, U Kyaw Myint and U Hla Myint – to eight years in prison on charges related to rioting, injuring a public servant and armed robbery by a gang.

A fourth accused, U Kyaw Khin, was also convicted but is currently in hiding. Daw Solemon Begum and U Mohamed Hashim, who had been previously convicted and in prison since June 2013, had five years added to their

three-and-a-half-year jail terms by the Appellate Court.

"The two Appellate Court judges were both Arakanese and biased for ethnic reasons," U Hla Myo Myint said, using the former term for Rakhine State's Buddhist majority.

He also said members of the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party – since renamed the Rakhine National Party – had put pressure on him to drop the case while he was in Sittwe in July 2013.

The lawyer is to present his application to have their appeals heard by the Supreme Court in Nay Pyi Taw on March 23-24. He said he was hopeful the judges would be fair "because they are not Arakanese". Rights activists said it could become the first such case to be heard by the Supreme Court.

At least 200 people were killed in

**"The authorities are sending a clear message to Rohingya that any form of resistance will be met by reprisals."**

**Matthew Smith**  
Fortify Rights

2012 when violence erupted between Rohingya Muslims and ethnic Rakhine Buddhists. Some 140,000 people, mostly Muslims, were made homeless.

Fortify Rights, a Thailand-based human rights organisation, has called on the government to release the five detained defendants, whom it described as Rohingya prisoners of conscience. It said the charges against them stemmed from tensions in Rakhine State in April 2013 when government officials attempted to force Muslims to identify as "Bengali" – a term implying they are natives of Bangladesh rather than Myanmar – in order to acquire citizenship.

"The authorities are sending a clear message to Rohingya that any form of resistance will be met with reprisals," said Matthew Smith, executive director of Fortify Rights. "This is a thinly veiled attempt to undermine the community's social and political structures. It's a textbook example of persecution."

Fortify Rights said it met U Kyaw Myint and U Hla Myint in an IDP camp in Rakhine State on March 7, the day before the appellate court remanded them to Sittwe Prison. They told Fortify Rights that the authorities accused them of organising the Muslim population in Rakhine State to self-identify as Rohingya – an allegation they deny.

Rakhine State government officials could not be reached for comment and an RNP spokesperson said he knew nothing about the decision.

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Dated: 18 March 2015



# Women find a controversial niche on Yangon bus system

Owner of line that employs female conductors is considering giving women a chance behind the wheel



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A BUS owner who launched a revolutionary new concept to make customers happier and increase profits – hire only women as conductors – is contemplating breaking another barrier: training women to drive the buses as well.

But even bringing on women conductors has proven controversial, with some questioning whether they would survive in the rough-and-tumble of the “ordinary” buses, where there are no limits on passenger numbers and conductors have to struggle through the crowd to collect fares.

In all of Yangon, only the No 48 bus route employs women conductors, and all 13 of them can be found on the 13 buses owned by Ko Ta Yoke Lay.

The route runs from Danyingone in Insein township along Insein Road and ends on Sule Pagoda Road, near City Hall.

As of last June, Ko Ta Yoke Lay owned only five buses. Eager to improve the city’s public transportation system, the first thing he did was to hire women conductors. Then he trained them.

“They treat passengers politely. Transportation is about providing a service to passengers. Bus conductors are not aware of this. As things stand, bus owners are not getting the profits they hoped for, the conductors are not making money, and the passengers are not happy,” said Ko Ta Yoke Lay.

Unafraid of controversy, nine months ago he installed air conditioning on all his buses too. “I would like to hire more women, but I only own 13 buses,” he said. “Although the No 48 line has 100 buses, I can hire women only for the buses I own. Other women have applied to me for conductors’ jobs, but I don’t have any more buses.”

Next step: teaching women to drive buses. “The most important thing is a good attitude. I want to upgrade the standard of living of bus conductors. If they want to learn to drive, I will support them. Maybe one day, they can be



Conductor Ma Hnin Kay Khine stands on-board a bus in July 2014. Photo: Kaung htet

bus owners,” Ko Ta Yoke Lay said.

The women conductors receive about the same income as their male counterparts – K7000 to K8000 a day, depending on takings from fares.

Ma Myat Su Win said she worked as a conductor for 10 months and found it difficult but satisfying.

“It was no problem for me. We had to deal with many different types of people every day, but I tolerated all passengers as much as I could because my job is to give them service,” she said.

Passengers agreed that the introduction of women conductors had lifted service standards.

“I think women conductors are better than the men. I feel comfortable with them and they ask for the bus fare very politely,” said regular commuter Ma Witt Yee, from Hlaing township.

But Ko Aung Kyaw from Kyauktada said he thought the women conductors might struggle on other lines, which are typically more crowded.

“If they work on ordinary buses,

**‘If [women] work on ordinary buses, which are very crowded with passengers, it can be very dangerous.’**

Ko Aung Kyaw  
Commuter

which are very crowded with passengers, it can be very dangerous for them,” he said. “But I like their service.”

Male bus conductors expressed similar concerns.

“I think women do not make suitable conductors. They can only work on the 48 bus line because these buses have air conditioning and carry the right number of passengers,” said conductor Ko Pyae Phyo Win. “Other buses carry as many passengers as they can get. Even for me it’s difficult to collect fares during peak hours.”

Bus owner U Myo Win said he had no plans to introduce female conductors on his vehicles.

“It’s not suitable for them on an ordinary bus line,” he said. “We take as many passengers as we can because we need money and we need to hit our targets. I’m only having male conductors.”

## Rabies control to target tourist hotspots

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THREE areas of the country could be rabies-free by the end of this year, the health ministry has pledged. The crackdown on the deadly disease is the first step in a five-year effort to eliminate the disease entirely by 2020.

Dr Htun Tin, a deputy director for disease control, said the ministry was considering proposals to concentrate this year on Nay Pyi Taw, Bagan and Inle Lake.

He added that the ministry wanted to focus on areas with the most dogs, but would begin with those that have a high number of foreign visitors.

“We have to work with Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development as well as the municipal authorities,” he said yesterday, saying no specific plan had yet been drawn up. International donor support would be required.

The attack on rabies is mandated by an ASEAN drive to eliminate the disease from its member countries by 2010. But one critic has suggested Myanmar had a lot of catching up to do. Dr Chit Soe of the University of Medicine 2 in Yangon told *The Myanmar Times* that only Laos had a worse rabies infestation than Myanmar.

He said control efforts to date have been far from successful.

“Rabies is very easy to prevent, but the health ministry did not regard it as very important,” he said, noting that rabies killed 400 people in Myanmar each year, compared to 600 deaths from malaria.

The country has an estimated 5 million dogs, of which 80 percent were strays, he said.

The Ministry of Health provides 30,000 vaccine doses to public hospitals. Most human rabies cases are reported in densely populated states and regions, such as Ayeyarwady, Bago, Mandalay, Mon, Sagaing and Yangon.

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## Four-nation task force nets \$2.5m in drugs, cash

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A MAJOR international anti-narcotics operation has seized drugs worth almost US\$2.5 million in eastern Shan State. The Anti-Narcotic Task Force, working with police from China, Laos and Thailand, arrested 147 people on 106 narcotics-related charges, it was announced yesterday.

The arrests were the culmination of Operation for a Safe Mekong, which was conducted between January 12 and March 12 by officers from the four countries. Teams raided properties along the Mekong, and in the townships of Tachileik, Kengtung and Mong Hsat.

They seized 8.3 kilograms of raw opium, 70.7kg of heroin, 336,390 amphetamine tablets and a number of other narcotic substances in smaller quantities, valued in total at K253.19 billion (\$2.45 million), police said.

The haul also included K653.86 million in cash, plus 16,640 Thai baht and 1900 yuan, said to be the proceeds



An alleged drug trafficker stands handcuffed behind a table of contraband. Photo: Myanmar Police Force

of narcotics sales.

Weapons and other equipment seized included three 9mm pistols with 19 bullets and three magazines; two M-22 guns with two magazines and 527 bullets; two hand-made guns with 20 big lead bullets and 20 small lead bullets; 11 handphones; one walkie-talkie; 10 cars; and 37 motorbikes.

– Translation by Emoon



# Views



A conceptual sculpture installed at Rong Khun Temple in Chiang Rai, northern Thailand, shows hands asking for help from the suffering of hell. Photo: Shutterstock

## Defining 'dukkha': The idea of suffering in Buddhism

Suffering can stem from some surprising sources – including believing too rigidly in the *dhamma*, or teachings of the Buddha

PAUL FULLER



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ONE of the key features of Buddhism is its description of “suffering” (*dukkha*). Essential to this is the idea that the Buddha’s teachings should not become an object of attachment. If the Buddha’s teachings do become an object of attachment they are liable to be a cause of suffering. Throughout Buddhist history this has formed the cornerstone of much Buddhist philosophy.

In the Pali Canon, which forms the textual basis of Theravada Buddhism, this idea is expressed in a conversation between the Buddha and Dandapani. One can imagine Dandapani as a philosopher, round-shouldered, spending all his time disputing ideas. His name appears to suggest this, literally meaning “stick in hand”, implying that he walks around, leaning on his stick, looking somewhat arrogant.

Hearing of the Buddha, he decides to find out his position – what doctrine he proclaims, what he believes in – and engage him in debate. The philosophically minded young man approaches the Buddha and asks him, “What is the doctrine of the recluse, what does he proclaim?” (*kimvadi samano kim akkhayi*).

The reply he receives from the Buddha is probably not what he had expected, or particularly wants. He wants a clear doctrine, a set of beliefs, that he can argue with. The Buddha

however replies, “I assert and proclaim such a doctrine that one does not argue with anyone in the world ... Detached from sense pleasures, without perplexity, remorse cut off.” It is a teaching that leads to complete detachment and freedom from craving and suffering.

Dandapani is clearly confused by what the Buddha has told him: He shakes his head, raises his eyebrows, grimaces three times, and walks away, leaning on his stick. It seems to me that this is the kind of response we can expect to a religious teaching which ultimately leads to the abandoning of all positions, indeed the abandoning of all beliefs.

The Buddha does not propose a set of doctrines that followers of Buddhism should believe in, but makes pronouncements about suffering – its arising, its cessation, and the path to the overcoming of suffering.

When the Buddha began preaching, his first lesson was about the nature of suffering. This teaching is preserved in a discourse called the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*, (Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion). The term *dhamma* here has the meaning of the teachings of a Buddha. The text is an indication that the teachings of a Buddha have once again been set in motion. According to the Theravada tradition, all the Buddhas of the past and all the Buddhas in the future will teach a similar teaching. The Buddha’s analysis of the religious path rests on the idea that suffering is an inescapable aspect of all human, animal and godly existence. From the lowest life form to the highest heavenly realm,

suffering is an inescapable part of experience.

The Buddha describes this situation by teaching that birth is suffering. Ageing, illness and death are also suffering. He describes attachment with what is displeasing and separation from what is pleasing as suffering. He states that to not get what one wants is suffering. So, when a Buddha preaches, he preaches about suffering.

The idea of suffering is developed in the context of three key themes that were much discussed in the Indian religious context of the time of the Buddha. The first is the idea that all sentient beings are subject to an endless round of rebirths called *samsara*, or *thantayar* in Myanmar language. Within this round of rebirths suffering is unavoidable. Following on from this the second idea is that our actions are causing us to be repeatedly reborn. This is the familiar notion of karma – that all of our actions have consequences. Wholesome actions, those based upon generosity and

**Obstinately defending any position with the idea ‘only this is true, anything else is wrong’ will lead to even more suffering.**

friendliness, and unwholesome actions, based upon greed and hatred, produce either a positive or negative consequence. But even a good rebirth, in the analysis of the Buddha, will be an impermanent rebirth and this impermanence is a form of suffering. This leads to the final idea: that one should strive to escape from the cycle of rebirths and achieve liberation. In Buddhism liberation is termed *nibbana*, literally the “blowing out” of greed, hatred and delusion, and the escape from the endless cycle of rebirths.

Suffering is then part of all forms of existence. The term does not merely point to physical suffering, but also to mental suffering and anxiety. Everything pertaining to an unenlightened individual is, on the final analysis, suffering. Even happiness is subject to certain conditions and when these conditions are dismantled happiness will disappear.

There is an important point to be made here about Buddhist culture. The Buddhist monastic is removed from society and is symbolically closer to understanding suffering. Through emulating the Buddha they are thought worthy of respect and donations. In this way we might gain an understanding of one of the reasons that reverence is shown to the monk in Buddhist societies.

The first form of suffering described by the Buddha is physical pain – the pain you feel when touching something hot, for example. The second way of describing suffering is that of change. As all things are “impermanent” (*anicca*), everything changes and becomes otherwise. The

third way that suffering is described is that of conditions. This means that we rely on certain unstable conditions for our happiness and these conditions are unreliable. The conditioned and unstable nature of existence means that the world is frustrating.

It is in the context of the Buddhist description of suffering that we might better appreciate why the Buddha replied to Dandapani in the manner he is reported to have done. In an important sense Buddhism teaches a doctrine whereby the follower of Buddhism does not argue with anyone in the world. Elsewhere in the Pali Canon it is explained that to argue and dispute with others leads to worry, vexation and remorse. Obstinately defending any position with the idea “only this is true, anything else is wrong” (*idam eva saccam, moggam annan ti*) will lead to even more suffering.

Therefore, in an important way Buddhism is not a belief system but a description of how to escape from an endless cycle of suffering. Throughout the history of Buddhism its philosophers have been concerned with this fundamental idea contained in the Buddha’s teachings: namely, that to believe too rigidly in what the Buddha taught, in the *dhamma*, is a form of attachment and therefore a cause of suffering. In many ways, Buddhist philosophy is based upon this idea.

Paul Fuller has taught religious studies at universities in Southeast Asia, Australia and the United Kingdom. His research interests include early Indian Buddhist philosophy, the Buddhist ideas of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and ethnocentric Buddhism in Myanmar and Sri Lanka.



# Business

## Residents upset over YCDC crackdown



MYAT NYEIN AYE

KO KO AUNG

WHILE constructing buildings without permits is a problem across Yangon, it has become especially prevalent in Thingangyun township.

Yangon City Development Committee has singled out the township in eastern Yangon, and has promised to tackle the problem by levying penalties on those skirting the law. Some 796 building owners in the township have received warnings from the committee threatening legal action, with many of them to be fined if found to be guilty.

Often, developers do not obtain the necessary permits before starting work on sites, while many others are not making the necessary legal contracts between land owners and developers. Still other developers do not obtain the Building Completion Certificates (BCC) necessary when a building is finished, to allow people to move in.

Before February 2014, the committee had been fining developers K2250 a square foot for excess storeys or buildings without permits. Fines have now been upped to K15,000 a square foot, with more serious punishments also possible, said U Khun Htun Aung, chief engineer of the eastern district of YCDC.

"My duty is for the eastern townships - North and South Okkalapa, Thingangyun and the new Dagon townships," he said at a press conference YCDC held on the issue last week. "Among them, there are 957 issues of buildings going up without contracts, and Thingangyun township is the worst, because it is home to a lot of informal land contracts and unlicensed contractors."

Many landowners lack proper funds to develop their plots, so they turn to construction companies to erect buildings. In return, the landowner and construction companies split the units in the newly built structure, allowing both to prosper.

This system is rife with potential abuse, according to U Khun Htun Aung. Because much of the land is not grant land, it should not contain



A woman passes a building in Thingangyun township that last year had been ordered to suspend construction. Photo: Yu Yu

buildings over three-and-a-half storeys. Many of the halted buildings were planning to go well above this limit.

He added that if the punishments are seen as serious enough, land owners and contractors will follow the rules.

Land owners are less impressed with the fines. Several land owners joined last week's press conference, speaking up to say they had only been following customary practice and asking for the fines to be reduced.

"We aren't trying to pay recent fines because they're so high," said U Mya Than, a land owner from Thingangyun township. "If they are reduced, we will pay them."

Owners also said that the move coincided with a property market slowdown, and left the projects unviable.

U Win Thein, a contractor, said building within three storeys makes

many of the projects unfeasible.

"Now the property market isn't doing too well, so it's difficult to sell units," he said. "We have to pay fines that are too expensive. We will lose money after completing the buildings."

It also takes a long time to change types of land to granted land, meaning most developers are confined to within the three-and-a-half storey limit.

"It takes seven months to change land types," said U Win Thein. Even if land status is switched over, the headaches do not end. There must also be car parking spaces, the approval of which takes about nine months. Final building approval can also take up to a year, meaning it takes more than two years to get a proper building permit.

Other land owners say the Yangon City Development Committee crackdown has severely hit their bottom line.

One owner who did not give his name said that he had neared making an agreement with a contractor to build a property on his land. The move to firmly implement the law has now scared away the contractor, he said.

"We did make an unofficial contract, because the contractor said we didn't need an official one. We made it last year, but nothing's started. The contractor just disappeared," he said.

Others said they are not wealthy enough to afford what is asked of them.

STOREYS

# 3.5

Maximum height for most buildings constructed in Thingangyun - a limit that is frequently ignored

U Thein Zaw said he has been sued by YCDC for his four-and-a-half storey building, which contravenes the three-and-a-half storey height limit.

"Now I have to pay a fine that is a lot of money," he said.

Yet authorities say that the crackdown has improved the local neighbourhood.

A senior Thingangyun township administration officer who declined to provide his name said the township was previously slow to grow. It is developing now, although residents face the problem of a shortage of permits.

"From the administration's point of view, we need to contribute toward developing the township," he said. "I very much welcome the move because Thingangyun has

changed within three years from a township of huts to a township of apartments."

He added that the people who have been sued by YCDC had broken the rules and caused complications for the township department.

"We hope these problems are solved for us, and that everything follows YCDC's law," he said. "We can't be expected to solve every part of the issue on our own."

While much of the legal action has been against contractors violating height rules, YCDC is also becoming stricter on those not obtaining their Building Completion Certificates. Without the certificate, the committee will not be providing the electricity meters that are necessary for connections, according to U Khon Tun Aung, chief engineer at YCDC's Engineering Department (Buildings).

"There are particularly problems in Ka Ward and Saka Ward in Thingangyun township, so that's why we've been suing them," he said.

U Hla Myint, director of YCDC's Electricity Distribution Department, said that while buildings without a BCC do not receive electronic meters, those with BCCs can get meters within a week.

YCDC officials say they are hoping to stem the tide of illegal buildings in the township.

U Soe Tun, a committee member from YCDC's Eastern District, said that until 2011, there were only about 50 licenceless buildings, though there are now 796.

Other officials say the most important thing a land owner can do is make sure their contractor will follow the law.

"YCDC will sue contractors only if they are operating illegally," said chief engineer U Khun Htun Aung. "But it's hard to snag contractors, so often it is the landlord who gets sued and ends up feeling aggrieved."



YCDC engineer U Khun Htun Aung (second from right) and other government officials speak on unlicensed buildings in Thingangyun township last week. Photo: Thiri Lu



Political and economic changes for Myanmar's future: Opinion

**BUSINESS 10**

Draghi warns eurozone must not rest on laurels as recovery starts

**BUSINESS 13**

**Exchange Rates (March 17 close)**

Currency	Buying	Selling
Euro	K1157	K1174
Malaysia Ringgit	K307	K308
Singapore Dollar	K762	K770
Thai Baht	K31	K32
US Dollar	K1041	K1044

**MANDALAY**

## Days are number for Mandalay's rule-breaking buildings

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TWO buildings have been demolished in Mandalay for breaking rules and regulations, with more demolitions possible if contractors do not stay within the law, according to Mandalay City Development Committee member U Tun Kyi.

"If developers clearly propose buildings stating specifications including exact height and stay within the rules, we will approve," he said. "But these two were built with additional storeys outside our permission."

Mandalay is not alone in targeting illegal construction. Yangon authorities as well have gone after builders not following the rules or beginning work without permits.

A total of 50 buildings in Mandalay have been informed they are at risk of being demolished as they have built outside the rules. Construction on some has only started recently, and most are in the downtown area.

Contractors wishing to build new buildings in Mandalay must submit applications to the Build-

ing and Warehouse Department of Mandalay City Development Committee for approval. Since last August, the committee has been stressing that contractors must adhere to the rules.

**'These two were built with additional storeys outside our permission.'**

**U Tun Kyi**  
MCDC member

Officials have pointed to Saittara Mahi housing development near Mandalay palace on 26th Street as being forced to change its plans after high-ranking local officials found out it was set to break the rules.

Mandalay City Development Committee can approve buildings up to four storeys. If they are taller, the plans need to be submitted to other levels of authority for approval.

## Idle plots still plague industrial zones

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RAMPANT speculation has driven up the price of plots allocated for industrial use in Yangon Region, preventing factory construction, parliament heard yesterday.

Although more than 10,000 plots were assigned, factories are running on only 3693 of them, and nearly a quarter are lying vacant, said deputy industry minister U Myo Aung.

Speaking to Pyithu Hluttaw, the deputy minister, who is also secretary of the Myanmar Industrial Development Committee, said factories were under construction on 2970 of the plots, and 1299 of them contained warehouses. He told MPs there are a total of 2339 vacant plots.

The idea behind the allocation of 10,301 plots in 24 industrial zones in Yangon Region was to create job opportunities and support economic development. Land use permits were granted to investors accordingly, said the deputy minister, who did not say when this occurred.

The ministry will now set up a management committee to establish which plots are vacant and consider asking the investors to hand them back.

U Myint Oo, MP for Bago Region's Thanatpin township, said the plots had been taken over by speculators, causing a surge in price and shutting out small and medium enterprises.

"This land was sold at a very high price. Where did that money come from? Meanwhile, SMEs can't afford to do business. It's a big challenge."

The plots were initially sold at about K5 million each, but prices of K300 to 400 million are now common-place, and some particularly desirable plots are valued as high as K700 to 800 million.

**2339**

Number of land plots that are currently vacant, out of 10,301 total plots nation-wide

The deputy minister could not confirm that one investor was granted more than 6000 plots.

The management committee will ask investors holding vacant plots to submit their proposals to set up businesses there within the next three or four months.

Those who cannot produce plans will be asked to return them.

The committee will also have the power to levy fines if the proposals are not carried out in the time stipulated, in an effort to cut down on speculators leaving them idle.

— Translation by Thiri Min Htun



**IN PICTURES**

A man in Kachin State checks out newly-finished amber. The fossilised tree resin can be found particularly in Upper Myanmar, and is popular among Korean and Japanese buyers, according to shop keepers.

Photo: Kaung Htet. For related see Page 10

## DICA aspires to double foreign investment



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FOREIGN investment next year could double this year's target as the regulatory climate is made more attractive, according to government officials.

The Directorate of Investment and Company Administration aimed for US\$4 billion in foreign investment in 2014-15, though the actual amount turned out to be \$8 billion. It has now targeted \$6 billion for 2015-16, though the actual amount could be larger, according to administration director general U Aung Naing Oo.

The main reason for the optimism is work to revamp the foreign and domestic investment laws into one document, which will help protect investors' rights. It is expected to be enacted in parliament this May.

"As the law emphasises fairness and equity, tax and other incentives for investors who can show a high performance for the country, we hope investment will double," he said. The new law aims partly to remove the differences between the existing foreign and local invest-

ment laws to provide for a fair playing field for all.

Work is also under way on a new companies act, which is expected to change the definition of what constitutes a foreign company.

U Aung Naing Oo said over the coming fiscal year he expects manufacturing to draw the most investment, followed by oil and gas and then services like hotels and tele-

**'The garment industry doesn't use local materials when they add value to products, but it is hugely labour intensive.'**

**U Maung Aung**  
Economist

coms. The largest source of foreign investment is anticipated to be Japan, with other investors following including Hong Kong, Taiwan and European countries.

Experts say there are certain

steps being taken that make the country more attractive to foreign investment, with some sectors more open than others to foreign involvement.

Economist U Maung Aung said foreign enterprises are increasingly entering manufacturing and power generation. He added the garment industry is a large employment creator.

"The garment industry doesn't use local materials when they add value to products, but it is hugely labour intensive and helps alleviate the unemployment rate," he said.

Foreign investors also need to see a stable local environment, though this has been a challenge. U Maung Aung said a favourable climate means a stable country, security, rule of law and accountability. However, industry protests may weaken these principles, and it is possible Foreign Direct Investment will depart from the country.

"Labourers can protest, it's their right, but they can't be hostile. They need to show their skills first to claim more salary," he said. "The situation may lose the country's dignity."

Total investment in Myanmar since the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration since it began keeping track has come to about \$53 billion.



## OPINION

# The political and economic challenges of Myanmar's future

SIMON TAY AND CHERYL TAN

FOR a while, when Myanmar opened after decades of isolation and sanctions, it seemed the government could do no wrong as American and European governments rushed to embrace the country. Now, according to headlines from the West, little or nothing seems right.

What was supposed to be a peaceful protest march last week over a proposed new education law turned ugly after Myanmar's police clashed with student protesters, monks and journalists. Then there was the fierce fighting that broke out in Shan State last month between the Kokang ethnic rebels and the military, which has been prominently featured in the Western media. This follows accusations by the United Nations and others about human rights violations in the government's dealing with the Muslim minority in Rakhine State, or Rohingya.

The criticism goes beyond ethnic issues in remote states to the most central of political questions. Observers are increasingly questioning whether the year-end elections will be truly free and fair, and urge constitutional amendments to lock in democratic reform.

Constitutional provisions disallow iconic opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from running for the presidency, and current government leaders and parliament are reluctant to amend them. Moreover, the military are directly represented in parliament and show little desire to reduce their role and influence.

Yet, even as negative views mount, there are signs that others are betting the country will continue to open up.

## Investment gathering pace

A key indicator is the influx of new foreign investments from the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. For instance, Myanmar's Directorate of Investment and Company Administration has approved more than US\$3.71 billion of investments from more than 70 UK-based companies, which lifts Britain to the country's fifth-largest investor.

Asian neighbours have also made their moves. While Chinese companies are the front runners with over \$14 billion in approved investments, Singaporean and

Japanese corporates are visibly active. Last December, Keppel Land of Singapore put in \$474 million to develop a 23-storey office tower in Yangon with Myanmar's Shwe Taung Group. This is a new commitment from the Singapore developer which has long been an investor in Myanmar. Real estate and investment company Rowsley Limited, in which Singapore billionaire Peter Lim holds a stake, will partner a Vietnamese company to build one of Myanmar's largest integrated projects that will have four office blocks, a retail mall, residential and serviced apartments, and a five-star hotel.

Japan's Mitsubishi Corporation will also develop another integrated project worth around \$350 million in downtown Yangon, near the historic railway office. This is in partnership with Yoma Strategic Holdings, which is a Myanmar-focused, Singapore-listed corporation.

Projects are advancing in other sectors too, such as oil and gas, telecommunications, and infrastructure. This is much needed, given Myanmar's current state of development. No doubt there are challenges and questions which foreign investors want answers to. But most relate more to economic policy, rather than to ethnic problems and political issues.

## Priorities and pace

One of the recurring questions is about the priorities of government leaders. Besides physical infrastructure - roads, buildings, electricity - there remain gaps in the "software" of the country to facilitate investment. This includes updated and detailed laws, clear regulations and policies. Many government leaders are making every effort to move ahead, but complaints still arise about red tape further down the ranks.

There is also some debate about whether the country's economic development should rely on plentiful resources like oil and gas and forestry or gear up for industrialisation.

Another major concern is finance. While the government has done well to stabilise the management of the Myanmar kyat since its opening, the country still lacks a modern financial sector that can provide capital and credit efficiently and cheaply. Cash is still king and while some large corporations have the reserves,

others struggle, especially smaller and medium-sized enterprises.

The government has sought to take the first step by awarding nine-foreign banks the first set of foreign banking licenses to operate in Myanmar last October. These are not Western or international entities but major Asian banks - including three from Japan and two from Singapore.

These banks can now lend to foreign investors and help support a second wave of foreign investors. But their licences do not allow them to offer local loans due to concerns that smaller local banks might end up getting shut out from the banking industry. Some have argued that developing the financial sector must involve both foreign and local banks. Only then can Myanmar corporations have more access to credit and other assistance to be competitive.

## Elections and continuity

Amid this gathering economic momentum, the year-end elections bring much uncertainty.

For many in Myanmar, the Lady remains immensely popular. Yet respect has grown for the effort that the current president and his administration have made. Many in the business community and among foreign investors will be keen to see continuity and stability for reforms, and hope for greater speed in the country's progress after the elections.

In contrast, others may wish the 2015 elections to deliver change. Some in the West especially expect not only free and fair voting, but that the country will emerge as a full-fledged democracy.

Neither view may be correct. Judging the country's progress purely as being about political change and democracy can be overly idealistic. But emphasising the path of business as usual may fail to recognise the needs for a more rapid and also steady reform. Myanmar's opening was always about both political and economic challenges and their interplay will continue.

.....  
Simon Tay and Cheryl Tan are, respectively, chair and assistant director of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA). On 23 March, the SIIA will hold an ASEAN-Myanmar Forum in Yangon to discuss the country's next phase of growth. For more information, log on to <http://bit.ly/1M1hp01>.



A worker polishes amber in Kachin State. Photo: Kaung Htet

## Amber aglow with Korean, Japan buyers



NAY ZAW AUNG WIN

nayzawawngwin@gmail.com

JADE may be the most famous precious stone available at Bogyoke Aung San market, but away from its sheen, a number of other precious items are available.

While amber may not have the culture cachet of jade - nor is it a stone in its own right - it is also mined in upper Myanmar and brought to the major cities to sell.

"Most of my customers who buy amber are foreigners," said Daw Nwe Nwe Aye, a Bogyoke market shopowner who is in the gemstone business. Japanese and others from northeastern Asia are particularly likely to make purchases.

Amber is formed from fossilised tree resin, standing out for its distinctive yellowish colour. It is primarily used in jewellery, though also finds its way into perfumes and other items.

Found largely in Kachin State, it is initially brownish and very rough in texture when brought from the ground. Gems trader U Than Oo said there are two main steps that must be done to ensure it is ready to sell. First, after the mass of amber is dug from the ground, it is cut and molded into an approximate shape. Next, the stone is polished to bring out the trademark amber hue.

According to U Than Oo, there are a number of ways to bring out the shine - but often the best is simply using toothpaste.

Most buyers from his Botahtaung township shop are Japanese and Koreans, keen to purchase amber near the source.

Daw Nwe Nwe Aye said many of her buyers from Northeast Asia are particularly enthusiastic.

"Last week, a Japanese man bought a bunch of them as well as pearls as souvenirs," she said. "He seemed obsessed with gemstones. He even asked me if we could drill a hole through them and add them to a necklace."

Similar to jade, the price varies significantly depending on a variety of factors, notably the piece's attractiveness. Daw Nwe Nwe Aye pointed to one piece that was about the size of a thumb as worth K150,000.

Daw Nwe Nwe Aye's grandparents started the business, which was then passed on to her parents and now to herself and her husband.

"My husband actually knows a lot of dealers," she said. "He is also a bit of an expert. He can tell the authenticity and quality of a gemstone just by taking a look."

It can also be difficult to ascertain a gemstone's authenticity.

U Than Oo said he is unaware how to tell apart genuine and fraudulent items.

"I am ignorant of what fake amber would actually be made of," he said. "In developed countries, you can do chemical tests to verify, though."

## TOKYO

## Nintendo gets into phone games

NINTENDO said yesterday it was teaming up with a mobile gaming company to develop games for smartphones in what could be a turning point for the Japanese giant which has long refused to enter the soaring market.

The maker of the iconic Super Mario and Pokemon franchises plans to buy 10 percent of Tokyo-based DeNA for 22 billion yen (US\$181 million) with the pair set to create games based on Nintendo's host of popular characters.

They did not release any details about which characters would be made available to play on smartphones or tablets.

But Nintendo's president Satoru

Iwata said the two companies will launch at least one game this year, and added that the tie-up would help tap a new customer base.

"The world is changing, so any company that is not coping with the change will fall into decline," he told a Tokyo press conference.

Nintendo and DeNA also plan to develop an online membership service accessible from mobile devices.

But Mr Iwata added that the announcement did not mark a move away from consoles, saying Nintendo would release a new system as a successor to its Wii U home console, released in late 2012. "We want people to know that we're still passionate about the hardware business," he said.

Last year, Mr Iwata said he would slash his salary in half as the company faced three straight years of operating losses, and Nintendo has been criticised for its longstanding refusal to license some of its iconic brands for use on mobile applications.

Nintendo has struggled as rivals Sony and Microsoft outpaced it in console sales, while the trio are also fighting off a trend toward cheap - or sometimes free - downloadable games for smartphones and other mobile devices.

The Japanese firm's April-December net profit, however, soared six-fold to \$504 million as a sharply weaker yen boosted its bottom line and helped offset slowing sales of its portable 3DS system. - AFP



Japanese video game giant Nintendo's president Satoru Iwata (left) speaks as Japanese online game operator DeNA president Isao Moriyasu looks on at a press conference in Tokyo yesterday. Photo: AFP





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JAKARTA	471	951
KOCHI	676	1,116
CHENNAI	686	1,126
MALDIVES	690	1,130
DARWIN	712	1,682
NEW DELHI	721	1,161
AMSTERDAM	851	2,740
PARIS	882	2,771
MELBOURNE	1,004	1,884
SYDNEY	1,016	1,896
LONDON	1,095	2,984


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## JAKARTA



A money changer prepares Indonesian rupiah bills for a customer in Jakarta on March 13. According to reports the rupiah continued its decline, reaching a 16-year low. Photo: AFP

## Indonesian trade surplus climbs as total volumes tumble

INDONESIA posted a trade surplus for a third straight month in February, official data showed late on March 16, but the good news was tempered by figures showing a huge fall in both exports and imports.

Southeast Asia's top economy saw a higher-than-expected surplus of US\$738.3 million, the statistics agency said. But exports tumbled 16.02 percent year-on-year to \$12.29 billion, while im-

ports slid 16.24 percent to \$11.55 billion. Indonesia also posted a large surplus in January, which was revised up from \$710 million to around \$750 million.

"The trade surplus was due to lower oil prices and the weakening of the rupiah in February," said statistics agency official Sasmito Hadi Wibowo.

The figures will be bad news for policymakers, who had hoped

a weaker currency might provide a boost to exports and manufacturing by making Indonesian-produced goods cheaper abroad.

The government of President Joko Widodo is struggling to improve the country's manufacturing sector and wean Indonesia off commodity-driven expansion in a bid to boost economic growth, which has fallen to a five-year low.

— AFP

## FRANKFURT



## Draghi calls for quantum leap

THE president of the European Central Bank has called for a "quantum leap" in links between eurozone institutions, warning the region must not rest on its laurels even as he welcomed signs of a recovery.

Mario Draghi said he was "optimistic" about the outlook for the common currency zone, stating during a speech in Frankfurt, "Most indicators suggest a sustained recovery is taking hold."

"These effects look set to persist for some time, meaning we can rightly be optimistic about the outlook," he said.

"But this does not mean we should rest on our laurels. On the

contrary, a nascent recovery provides us with a window of opportunity," Mr Draghi added.

For the union to be sustainable, he said, "There must be a quantum leap in institutional convergence."

"We need to move from a system of rules and guidelines for national economic policymaking to a system of further sovereignty sharing within common institutions. And as part of this process we need to strengthen the democratic accountability of Europe towards its citizens, which would automatically deepen our political union."

Monetary policy is already helping make this possible, he said, referring to a large quantitative easing

(QE) program launched earlier this month by the ECB.

"But it is now up to governments to seize on this opportunity and make those improvements permanent," he said.

The QE stimulus plan will see the ECB buy 1.14 trillion euros worth of bonds over the next 18 months. The aim is to pump liquidity into the system so as to ward off deflation and spur growth in the single currency area.

Some analysts predict the eurozone unit could reach parity against the dollar, amid a growing policy divergence between the ECB and the US Federal Reserve.

— AFP

## DOHA

# Delta defends planes after Qatar comment

THE chief of Qatar Airways denied his company receives subsidies and accused rivals Delta Air Lines of flying "crap" older planes, escalating hostilities between Gulf and American carriers.

Speaking at an arts conference in Doha late March 16, Akbar al-Baker said any money his airline receives from the state is in the form of "legitimate" equity and added his company's fleet of aircraft were much cleaner for the environment in comparison to Delta.

"I think Mr Anderson [CEO of Delta, Richard Anderson] doesn't know the difference between equity and subsidy. We never receive any subsidy," Mr Baker said.

"The state of Qatar is the owner of Qatar Airways and whatever funds are put into the airline is as equity, which is quite legitimate.

"The unfortunate thing is that because they are so inefficient they want to blame us - whilst we are very efficient - for their failures and drawbacks.

"The issue is that they cannot stand the progress the Gulf carriers are making."

Mr Baker was responding to claims made earlier this month by three US airlines - Delta, American and United - that Qatar, along with Etihad Airways and Emirates, received \$42 billion in "unfair" subsidies to wrest business away from competitors.

The US carriers issued a 55-page report claiming this has allowed the Gulf airlines to wrest market share from the American airlines.

These "multi-billion dollar subsidies" had distorted the marketplace, "to the severe detriment of US employment", the American carriers claimed.

They called on Washington to raise the issue with the UAE and Qatari governments and urged changes to bilateral commercial aviation

agreements with them.

The UAE, where Etihad and Emirates are based, angrily denied the claims.

UAE economy minister Sultan al-Mansouri was quoted as calling them "false and unacceptable" by the *Emarat Al-Youm* newspaper.

However, European carriers have also joined the argument.

Last week, French and German transport ministers called on the European Commission to tackle the issue of subsidies to Gulf carriers.

The French transport minister, Alain Vidalies, said the Gulf airlines were benefitting from "unfair competitive practices".

Mr Baker's attack on March 16 though was not merely limited to discussions over competition.

He also defended Qatar Airways record when it comes to CO2 emissions and unflatteringly compared Delta's aircraft to those of his company when asked about aviation pollution.

"I am delighted that Richard Anderson of Delta is not here. First of all, we don't fly crap airplanes that are 35 years old. The Qatar Airways average fleet [age] is only four years and one month," said Mr Baker.

"We have ultra-modern airplanes. We have invested, my country has invested, huge amounts to make sure we are the lowest CO<sub>2</sub> contributor in the aviation industry."

And he was also damning of those who criticised the aviation industry's record on environmental pollution.

"People who make lots of noise about CO<sub>2</sub>, people who make so much noise about greenhouse gases that are emitted from airplane engines, don't realise that they are constantly travelling by airplane, so they should start walking or going on horseback if they really mean what they say." — AFP

## STOCKHOLM

## Ericsson buys into China as it shed jobs at home

SWEDISH telecoms group Ericsson said it has bought the telecom division of a Chinese IT services company, adding 1000 employees to its payroll less than a week after announcing major redundancies in Sweden.

"The acquisition of Sunrise Technology's telecom business will boost our ability to serve mobile operators' IT transformation needs in China," the group's vice president Magnus Mandersson said in a statement released late March 16.

"Most of the country's telecom operators ... will soon replace their legacy IT systems with next-generation solutions," he added, highlighting opportunities for growth in the world's largest mobile phone market.

Most of the employees transferred to Ericsson are based in Guangzhou in southern China.

The announcement came just five days after Ericsson announced it was shedding 2200 jobs in Sweden "mainly in R&D and supply

in order to cut costs. Last year the group said it would refocus its business on telecom equipment and

**'Most of [China's] telecom operators ... will soon replace their legacy IT systems with next-generation solutions.'**

**Magnus Mandersson**  
Ericsson vice president

networks and abandon modems. Ericsson employs nearly 120,000 people worldwide.

— AFP



BEIJING

# China investment surges on Dutch deal



Photo: AFP

Customers ride a spiral elevator in a newly-opened shopping mall in Shanghai on March 17. China's overseas direct investment (ODI) surged in February.

CHINA'S overseas direct investment (ODI) surged in February as a state-owned oil company put nearly US\$3 billion into a Dutch transaction, official data showed yesterday, while inbound investment slowed.

ODI jumped 68.2 percent year-on-year to \$7.25 billion, the commerce ministry said, while for the first two months of the year it rose 51pc to \$17.4 billion.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) into China, meanwhile, rose 0.9pc year-on-year to \$8.56 billion in February, the ministry said. That marked a sharp slowdown from January's 29.4pc gain.

Both ODI and FDI exclude financial sectors.

China drew a total of \$119.6 billion of FDI in 2014, while ODI surged to \$102.9 billion, passing the \$100 billion mark for the first time as Chinese companies look for opportunities abroad while economic growth at home slows.

The surge in February's ODI was driven by a tenfold increase in investment in the European Union to \$3.36 billion, largely due to oil company PetroChina pumping \$2.89 billion into the Netherlands,

said ministry spokesperson Shen Danyang.

He gave no details of the transaction, which was not highlighted on China National Petroleum Corporation's website or in filings to the Hong Kong stock exchange by its listed subsidiary PetroChina.

PERCENT  
**68.2**

Size of year-on-year jump in China's overseas direct investment in February 2015

Investment in the United States soared by 64.8pc in the first two months of the year from the same period in 2014, Mr Shen said.

China has been actively acquiring foreign assets, particularly energy and resources, to power its economy, with firms encouraged to make overseas acquisitions to gain

market access and international experience.

Mr Shen said the euro's depreciation against the dollar and China's yuan currency may encourage more Chinese firms to buy up European assets.

"The continued slumps in the euro's value against the dollar has led the price of eurozone assets to fall, creating an opportunity for Chinese companies to invest and carry out mergers and acquisitions there," he told reporters.

But the government will "have to keep a close eye" on the trend as "price is just one of the considerations" when investing, he added.

The world's second-largest economy expanded 7.4pc last year, the slowest since 1990, as authorities try to transform the growth model to one in which consumer spending takes over as the key engine.

China's appeal as an investment destination has also been declining in recent years owing to rising labour and land costs and competition from Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam.

Officials have also blamed source country factors, such as

Washington's drive to move industrial production back to the United States.

Chinese authorities have mounted probes into alleged monopolistic practices, pricing and other activities by foreign firms in sectors ranging from auto manufacturing and pharmaceuticals to baby milk, but the commerce ministry has repeatedly denied that Beijing is targeting overseas companies.

In the January-February period, FDI declined 15.9pc from Japan, with which China is in bitter dispute over territory and wartime history.

From the United States it fell by 31.8pc year-on-year, which Mr Shen attributed to the upturn in the world's largest economy.

Investment from Saudi Arabia surged nearly tenfold and that from France and Germany rose by 366.7pc and 59pc respectively.

Mr Shen said the increase was led by cash injections by individual companies in new or existing projects in China, including German auto giant Daimler, French chemical firm Arkema and Saudi Basic Industries Corporation.

- AFP

BEIJING

# CNPC exec under graft suspicion

A TOP executive of China National Petroleum Corp, the country's biggest energy company, has been put under investigation, authorities said as the Communist Party's anti-corruption drive targets more state firms.

CNPC general manager Liao Yongyuan is being investigated by the ruling party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) for "severe violations of discipline and law", the watchdog said in a statement late on March 17.

It gave no details, but the phrasing is typically used to refer to official corruption.

Mr Liao was also vice chair and non-executive director for PetroChina, the listed unit of CNPC.

In a statement to the Hong Kong stock exchange, PetroChina said business was normal: "The company is in normal production and operation."

PetroChina shares were down 0.73 percent in Hong Kong trading late yesterday morning, but up 0.18pc in Shanghai, where it is also listed.

The announcement of the investigation is the second in two days involving a state-owned enterprise after the CCDI said on March 15 that the top executive of the country's third-biggest automaker, China FAW Group, was similarly also under investigation for violating the law.

The CCDI said early this year that it plans to investigate all major state-owned enterprises.

Chinese President Xi Jinping launched a much-publicised drive against corruption after he came to power two years ago, vowing to target both high-level "tigers" and low-ranking "flies".

Mr Liao's recent case is not the first involving the energy sector, with the highest-profile casualty so far fallen security chief Zhou Yongkang, himself a former head of CNPC.

In 2013, PetroChina said vice presidents Li Hualin and Ran Xinquan as well as chief geologist Wang Daofu were under investigation.

At the time, state media also said CNPC vice president Wang Yongchun was similarly under investigation from authorities.

The government has not publicly announced the results of those earlier investigations.

- AFP

SYDNEY

# BHP clarifies plans for South32 spin-off

THE world's biggest miner BHP Billiton said yesterday that its proposed spin-off South32 would start life with only modest net debt, allowing the new company room to expand and open additional mines.

BHP is recommending shareholders vote in favour of the move at meetings in Perth and London on May 6.

"The demerger will simplify BHP Billiton and has the potential to unlock shareholder value, while creating a new global diversified metals and mining company with a significant industry presence in each of its major commodities," chair Jac Nasser said.

The demerger is aimed at allowing BHP to focus on its core long-life operations - iron ore, copper,

petroleum, coal and potash - which generate most of its profit, separating them from smaller assets.

**'The demerger will simplify BHP Billiton and has the potential to unlock shareholder value.'**

Jac Nasser  
BHP Billiton chair

South32's operations will include aluminium, coal, nickel, man-

ganese, silver, lead and zinc with most of its mines in the southern hemisphere.

"South32's pro forma balance sheet as at 31 December 2014 includes net debt of US\$674 million, including finance leases," BHP said.

That would be just a fraction of the company's expected market value and will give South32 room to take on new debt and expand, said OptionsXpress market analyst Ben Le Brun.

"So, I think they'll actively pursue growth aspirations," he said.

The new entity, with gross assets worth \$26.7 billion, will be listed on markets in Sydney, London and Johannesburg.

Under the proposal, those eligible will retain their existing share-

holding in BHP Billiton and receive a new share in South32 for every BHP one they own.

If the deal goes ahead, the number of countries BHP will operate in will shrink from 13 to eight, and instead of being spread across six continents it will be present in only three.

In a presentation, it said the demerger would see a "modest reduction in net debt" for BHP Billiton, which at February's interim result was \$24.9 billion.

The total one-off costs of implementing the planned demerger are estimated to come to about \$738 million.

But BHP expects it will bring cost savings of some \$100 million a year.

- AFP

## Eni upgrades size of Indonesia field

Italian energy group Eni raised its estimate of the natural gas contained in a deep water well off Indonesia by 20 billion cubic metres (bcm), a 55 percent increase on initial projections.

The company said late March 15 the completion of post-drilling studies on the Merakes-1 well in the East Sepinggan Block off East Kalimantan in Borneo had led them to upgrade the forecast of its reserves from 36 bcm to 56 bcm (1.3 trillion cubic feet to 2.0 tcf). The well was drilled in October 2014. ENI said it was looking to fast-track development of the find so it can be exploited at the same time as the nearby Jangkrik field, which it also owns. - AFP



# World

WORLD EDITOR: Fiona MacGregor

## BANGKOK

## Scandal-hit Wat to return \$20 million in donations, but probe will continue

THAILAND'S justice minister has said the investigation into a major monastic corruption scandal must continue, even though the Buddhist temple at the centre of probe has agreed to return donations' worth around US\$20 million.

Paiboon Koomchaya insisted the into the criminal aspects of the Klongchan Credit Union Cooperative embezzlement scandal would go ahead, despite Wat Phra Dhammakaya having agreed to return most of the money it owes.

The minister made the comment after followers of the Wat on March 16 reached an out-of-court settlement to pay back 684 million baht (\$20.7 million) to the cooperative, in exchange for the dropping of lawsuits against the temple and its abbot Phra Dhammachayo.

The cooperative had filed civil suits against Wat Phra Dhammakaya and its abbot and demanded \$24.7 million, which the cooperative's ex-chair, Supachai Srisupa-aksorn, allegedly embezzled from the union and donated to the temple and abbot.

As part of the agreement between the two sides, civil and criminal suits will be dropped.

However, the embezzlement case has been accepted for investigation

by the Department of Special Investigation (DSI).

Prapassorn Pongpanpisa, secretary of the union's Rehabilitation Implementation Committee, and temple lawyer Samphan Sermcheep, reached the settlement on March 16 at Than-yaburi Provincial Court.

After the negotiations, Ms Prapassorn said the followers of Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Phra Dhammachayo agreed to return \$20.7 million through a special fund mobilised to help affected members of the credit union.

The payments will be made in monthly installments of the equivalent of around \$3 million each.

Ms Prapassorn said the credit union will write to inform the DSI and the Anti-Money Laundering Office of the repayment agreement in exchange for the dropping of criminal and civil cases against the temple and its abbot.

However, she said the credit union will continue to pursue a separate case seeking the repayment of another nearly \$4 million from Mr Supachai. The case will not be withdrawn until an agreement is reached on the money's return, Ms Prapassorn said.

She added the repayment of the \$20.7 million will be part of a plan to

rehabilitate the cooperative and help members.

Samphan Sermcheep, Wat Phra Dhammakaya's lawyer, said the temple's followers sympathised with the affected members of the cooperative and raised the funds to ease their plight.

Thapanawat Srasom, the credit union's lawyer, went to the DSI on March 16 to withdraw the civil and criminal lawsuits against Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Phra Dhammachayo.

But Somboon Sarasit, chief of the DSI's Criminal Case Division, said the embezzlement is a criminal case which cannot be dropped despite an agreement between the conflicting parties so the DSI will continue to pursue it. However, the agency's investigation would take the "intentions" of the involved parties into account.

DSI spokesperson Woranan Srilam said on March 16 the DSI will continue its probe to identify who was involved in the scandal.

Currently, the DSI has taken up three special cases relating to the Klongchan Credit Union Cooperative.

The scandal has outraged many in the Buddhist-majority nation in recent weeks, raising concerns over how temples raise donations and the commercialisation of Buddhism.

The case also shines a spotlight on the practice of encouraging devotees, who believe in reincarnation, to make donations proportional to the size of good fortune they hope to achieve in their next life and sparked calls for authorities to better regulate religious institutions.

Thai monks have been hit by a series of scandals in recent years including corruption as well as drug-taking, drinking, gambling and visiting prostitutes.

In September 2013 authorities said they had seized nearly \$800,000 worth of assets, including a Porsche and a Mercedes-Benz, from a monk who was disrobed for a controversial trip in a private jet.

— Bangkok Post/AFP



Buddhist monks walk with candles during a ceremony at the Dhammakaya Temple in Bangkok on March 4. Photo: AFP

## JAKARTA

## Visa requirements lifted for 30 nations – but not Australia

INDONESIA will soon allow tourists from an additional 30 countries to visit without a visa, a minister said, but neighbouring Australia was left off the list amid a row over looming executions.

The move comes as Jakarta seeks to boost a faltering economy, which is growing at five-year lows, and to attract more foreign income as the rupiah rapidly weakens.

The country currently only allows tourists from 15 countries, mostly in Southeast Asia, to visit without a visa. People from a number of other countries can buy a tourist visa on arrival.

The 30 countries added to the list are mainly European, but also include China and several others in Asia, the United States, and some nations in the Middle East and Africa, Tourism Min-

ister Arief Yahya said.

"People who want to travel to Indonesia won't need to worry about a visa anymore," Mr Yahya said on March 16, as he announced the changes.

"We hope that we can attract an additional 1 million foreign tourists," he added, saying the policy could bring in an extra US\$1 billion a year and he hoped it would come into effect next month.

Indonesia has long lagged behind its neighbours in attracting foreign visitors. In 2013, 8.8 million foreign visitors came to Indonesia, according to official figures, compared with 25.72 million in Malaysia and 26.55 million in Thailand.

Australia, which accounted for more than 10 percent of Indonesia's foreign visitors in 2013, was not

included in the list of countries whose citizens will no longer require a visa.

Ties between Indonesia and Australia have deteriorated in recent months as Jakarta prepares to execute two Australian drug traffickers on death row who were convicted of trying to smuggle heroin out of Bali.

Mr Yahya denied the row had played a role, suggesting that Australia was excluded from the list because its own policy required visiting Indonesians to have a visa.

Indonesia's economy has been hard hit as investors withdraw funds and redirect them back towards more developed markets, which have recently been showing signs of renewed strength. The economic woes have seen the rupiah sink to a 17-year low against the dollar in recent days. — AFP



## IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP

Pakistani Christians mourn over Thousands of Christians rioted of protest against twin Taliban

## PORT VILA

## Fears over food cyclone damage

VANUATU faces imminent food shortages it was warned yesterday as accounts emerged of huge damage to a large outer island, days after one of the fiercest cyclones on record pummeled the sprawling Pacific nation.

Relief agencies have stated that conditions are among the most challenging they have faced, with mounting concerns about disease, and the nation's President Baldwin Lonsdale has appealed for the world to help.

With 24 people so far confirmed dead, the scale of the disaster became clearer with the first team of aid workers reaching Tanna island, some 200 kilometres (125 miles) south of the capital Port Vila, itself badly damaged.

"The impression they got from their initial observations was that the damage is significantly worse than Port Vila," Tom Perry from CARE Australia said. He added that the hospital was functioning, but it had no roof.

Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said reconnaissance by the Australian military "confirmed significant damage in the southern islands and particularly Tanna island, where it appears that more than 80 percent of houses

and buildings have been partially or completely destroyed".

She added, "Not only buildings [have been] flattened, but palm plantations, trees. It's quite a devastating sight."

Communications to many of the other 80 islands in the sprawling archipelago were still down and Benjamin Shing, from Mr Lonsdale's office, said survivors would quickly run out of food.

"We are relying on the fact that the food crops and the gardens are still edible and they can be used for the first week, but after the first week we'll need to get some rations on the ground," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

With crops wiped out, Mr Shing feared the worst for a country that largely relies on subsistence farming.

"There will be extensive injuries if the people didn't go to higher ground and there might be a lot of fatalities," he said.

Mr Perry said of the 24 people confirmed dead, at least five were from Tanna and that CARE Australia was also worried about the lack of food. "Food running out is of great concern," he said.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian



Israeli voters turn out for crunch election

WORLD 16



A year on, Taiwan's student rebellion still affects politics

WORLD 19



the coffin of the victim of a suicide bomb attack on a church in Lahore on March 16. In the city, smashing property and vehicles as they clashed with police in a second day of suicide bombings of churches that killed 17 people.

## shortages as extent of the crisis begins to emerge

Affairs (OCHA) said in a situation report that "there are 24 confirmed fatalities" so far. Mr Lonsdale on March 16 said there were also some 30 injured.

In the capital Port Vila, access to water and electricity was partially restored after the storm brought down an estimated 80 percent of power lines and damaged most homes.

Stores also began reopening, but entire neighbourhoods remained without power as aid workers streamed in to help make sense of what many have said was one of the region's worst weather disasters.

In the capital, leaves and branches lined the streets while residents began clearing metal roof sheeting from the roads around their homes and using machetes to hack through fallen trees.

Personal belongings, household items, mattresses and clothes were spread out on the ground and hung on washing lines as people dried them out, with the cyclone slowly weakening.

Samuel Toara, 25, thought he was going to die when the storm barrelled ashore, sheltering in the pitch black with two other young men as the tempest roared past his

home.

"It was very hard. The cyclone sounded like a big plane flying very low," he said.

As heavy rain pounded his house, made of corrugated metal and timber, part of the roof blew off.

"The rain and wind was like white smoke and it flooded up to my knee. But I told the boys don't worry about the water," he said. "As

**'There will be extensive injuries if people didn't go to higher ground and there might be a lot of fatalities.'**

**Benjamin Shing**  
Presidential officer

long as we survive."

The United Nations said there were at least 3300 people sheltering in 37 evacuation centres around the country. Among them was Melissa Song, 22.

She was sharing a small guest room at a Port Vila resort turned into a makeshift evacuation centre with nine other family members, including three young children and a baby.

"We've had no sleep since Thursday [March 12]," Ms Song said. "We've just been eating tinned tuna, fish and pork."

UNICEF has estimated that 60,000 children have been affected by the cyclone and virtually all schools were closed, with the organisation attempting to restore some normality to their lives.

"We're working to set up temporary learning spaces so kids can start learning and playing again as soon as possible," said the organisation's emergency specialist Mioh Nemoto, who also expressed concern about they would be fed.

"Food security is likely to be a continual problem and we need to start thinking now about how children will stay well fed."

As aid flights continued landing, workers on the ground said there was no way to distribute supplies across the archipelago's islands, warning it would take days to reach remote villages flattened by the storm.

— AFP

KUALA LUMPUR

## Anwar's daughter bailed

THE eldest daughter of Malaysia's jailed opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim was freed on police bail yesterday after being held overnight for alleged sedition, as supporters and the United States condemned her detention.

Nurul Izzah, 34, a member of parliament and popular public figure, confirmed her release by phone to AFP.

Kuala Lumpur Criminal Investigation Department chief Zainuddin Ahmad said Ms Nurul was freed on bail at 12:30 pm after being held overnight in a police detention centre, where some 500 of her supporters held a candlelight vigil.

"I was kept alone in the lockup last night. Only this morning they questioned me for 20 minutes regarding the speech I made in parliament. I am sure they will charge me for sedition," she said.

Ms Nurul was arrested for sedition after she last week read out in parliament portions of a statement by Mr Anwar, now in prison, in which he questioned the independence of

Malaysia's judiciary.

The United States had said on March 16 that it was "deeply concerned" by the detention of Ms Nurul.

Ms Nurul, a mother of two children, became the latest nabbed in a sedition crackdown that has seen dozens investigated, charged or convicted over the past year, including several top opposition politicians.

Mr Anwar was convicted on February 10 of sodomising a former male aide in 2008 and sentenced to five years in jail.

Mr Anwar, who denies the charge, calls it a "political conspiracy" by the coalition in power since 1957, designed to thwart steady opposition gains in recent elections.

Prime Minister Najib Razak promised in 2012 to scrap the British colonial-era Sedition Act amid growing pressure for reform.

But after a 2013 election setback, government critics have increasingly been targeted by the law. In November Najib said the law would be retained and even strengthened. — AFP



Nurul Izzah, daughter of Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, gestures after being released on bail in Kuala Lumpur on March 17. Photo: AFP

SINGAPORE

## Concern as Singapore's founder health fails

THE health of Singapore's founding leader and ex-prime minister Lee Kuan Yew has "worsened" due to an infection, the government said yesterday.

Mr Lee, 91, has been hospitalised for severe pneumonia since February 5 at the Singapore General Hospital, where he is on life support at the intensive care unit.

"Mr Lee Kuan Yew's condition has worsened due to an infection. He is on antibiotics. The doctors are closely monitoring his condition," said a statement from the office of his son, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

In a statement on February 21, the government said Mr Lee was stable but breathing with the help of "mechanical ventilation" — commonly also known as life support.

The senior Mr Lee is widely credited with transforming Singapore from an economic backwater to one of Asia's wealthiest economies in just over three decades.

He served as prime minister from 1959, when Singapore gained self-rule from colonial ruler Britain, until he stepped down in 1990 in favour of his

deputy Goh Chok Tong, who in turn handed power to Lee Hsien Loong in 2004.

The People's Action Party, which was co-founded by the elder Mr Lee, has been returned to power in every election since 1959 and currently holds 80 of the 87 seats in parliament.

In a book published in 2013, the Asian statesman said he felt weaker by the day and wanted a quick death.

The longtime fitness buff has visibly slowed since his wife of 63 years Kwa Geok Choo died in 2010.

Mr Lee, a Cambridge-educated lawyer, is revered by large segments of Singapore's population, with many taking to social media in recent weeks to voice messages of support following news of his ill health.

On February 25 government officials and state-linked media were forced to come out on social media to quash late-night rumours that he had died.

In a Facebook post on March 13, Lee Hsien Loong said "my family and I are deeply touched" by Singaporeans' messages of support for his father. — AFP



## JERUSALEM

# Israel vote in key election for Middle East

ISRAELIS turned out yesterday to cast their votes in the country's close-fought election after Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ruled out a Palestinian state in a final appeal to the right.

The outcome of the race, in which opinion polls suggested Mr Netanyahu would win fewer seats than the centre-left Zionist Union, is likely to help determine the prospects for new Middle East peace talks and Israel's troubled relations with its US ally.

Around 6 million voters were eligible to take part in the election for Israel's 120 members of parliament.

Polls were due to close at 10pm (2000 GMT) with exit polls by Israel's main media outlets set to give the first indications of the likely outcome minutes afterward.

Mr Netanyahu brought the election on himself, calling the snap vote after firing centrist ministers from his fractious coalition just two years into its term.

It was Israel's third election since 2009 and the biggest challenge yet for the 65-year-old incumbent, who is seeking a third consecutive term.

Final opinion polls published on March 13 gave the Zionist Union of Labour leader Isaac Herzog a three-to-four seat lead over Mr Netanyahu's

Likud party.

But the surveys also suggested Mr Netanyahu would have an advantage when it comes to piecing together a coalition with smaller allies from the right.

As he cast his own ballot yesterday, Mr Netanyahu ruled out any alliance with Mr Herzog.

"There will not be a unity government with Labour. I will form a national [rightwing] government," he said.

Mr Netanyahu had warned a vote for the Zionist Union could endanger Israel's security and lead to the division of Jerusalem and the establishment of a Palestinian state in the annexed eastern sector.

On March 16 he was asked by the rightwing NRG website if it was true that there would be no Palestinian state established if he was reelected.

"Indeed," said Mr Netanyahu, who in 2009 had endorsed the idea of two states living side by side.

He later told public radio the two-state solution was now irrelevant, saying the "reality has changed" and "any territory which would be handed over would be taken over by radical Islamists".

Mr Netanyahu's opponents charge



Israeli Labour Party leader and co-leader of the Zionist Union list for yesterday's election, Isaac Herzog, is surrounded by supporters as he and his wife Michal leave after voting at a polling station in Tel Aviv on March 17. Photo: AFP

that he has played the politics of fear and endangered Israel's close relationship with the United States for the sake of ideological posturing.

Washington accused his government of undermining US-brokered peace talks with the Palestinians through its persistent expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

The Israeli premier then further infuriated US President Barack Obama by accepting an invitation from his Republican opponents to encourage Congressional opposition to his efforts for a historic nuclear deal with Iran.

"I hope for change, of course, but doubt things will change," Shulamit Laron, a woman in her fifties, said at a

polling station in Jerusalem's German Colony.

"I'd like to see Netanyahu disappear for many, many years. The most important issue is relations with the Palestinians," she said.

Gideon Yaacobi, 60, complained, "There is never any real change. They call it right, left; nothing changes on issues like the Palestinians."

The new premier will have to deal with daunting domestic and foreign policy challenges including Iran's nuclear program, repairing ties with the United States and maintaining economic growth.

And then there are the tricky issues of ties with the Palestinians following the collapse of peace talks last year, instability left over from the 2014 Gaza

war and a looming legal challenge at the International Criminal Court.

There are 25 lists battling it out for seats, in a reflection of Israel's diverse political map, but only 11 are forecast to enter the Knesset.

Under Israel's proportional representation system, any party can enter parliament if it receives more than 3.25 percent of the vote.

The task of forming a new government does not automatically fall to the party with the largest number of votes, but to the party leader with the best chance of forging a coalition with a parliamentary majority of 61.

Once the results are known, President Reuven Rivlin has seven days to entrust a party leader with the job of forming the next government. — AFP

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LOS ANGELES

# TV star tycoon on murder charge

AN eccentric US tycoon has been charged over the execution-style killing of a mobster's daughter and could face death if found guilty, in the latest installment of a TV murder mystery which has captivated America.

Robert Durst, 71, the scion of a New York real estate dynasty worth US\$4.4 billion, was charged in Los Angeles on March 16 with murder over the death, in 2000, of his close friend Susan Berman. He was arrested in New Orleans on March 14 and was yesterday awaiting extradition to California.



A booking photo released by the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office in New Orleans on March 14 shows murder suspect Robert Durst. Photo: AFP

he used the bathroom.

It was not clear if Mr Durst was sincerely confessing, but authorities in Los Angeles reportedly said the television documentary had played a role in their decision to seek the multimillionaire's arrest for Ms Berman's murder.

Mr Durst's attorney Dick DeGuerin said on March 16 that his client was innocent and ready to face trial in California.

"Bob Durst didn't kill Susan Berman. He's ready to end all of the rumour and speculation," DeGuerin said outside a courthouse in New Orleans after Mr Durst had waived his right to challenge extradition to the western US state.

"We're ready to go to California and have a trial," Mr DeGuerin added.

Mr Durst's extradition may be delayed however by the possibility of authorities in New Orleans filing

weapons charges against him.

In Los Angeles, Mr Durst was charged with the murder of Ms Berman, the District Attorney's Office said, citing special circumstances which make him eligible for the death penalty, although prosecutors will only decide on that later.

Ms Berman was shot in the back of her head at her home in Beverly Hills, a day before she was due to be questioned by police who had reopened an investigation into the 1982 disappearance of the tycoon's wife, Kathie Durst, in New York.

The HBO documentary uncovered evidence suggesting Ms Berman, whose father was an associate of notorious Las Vegas gangster Bugsy Siegel, had provided a false alibi for Mr Durst following his wife's mysterious disappearance, which occurred shortly after she signalled her intention to seek divorce.

However any attempts to link Mr Durst to the disappearance had foundered until the investigation was reopened in 2000, shortly before Ms Berman was killed.

A year later, Mr Durst was arrested in Texas after the dismembered body of an elderly neighbour was found floating in sacks in Galveston Bay.

Mr Durst was released after making bail but failed to attend subsequent court appearances and became a fugitive.

He was eventually arrested in November 2001 after stealing a chicken sandwich from a supermarket,

despite having \$500 cash in his pocket and more than \$37,000 stuffed into bags in the trunk of his car.

Despite the mountain of evidence against him Mr Durst was acquitted of murdering his neighbour after his lawyers successfully argued he had acted in self-defence.

*Jinx* director Andrew Jarecki told ABC television that he and his film crew were unaware of the apparent audiotape confession until discovering it while reviewing hours of recordings.

"I sat there in the edit room with my partners and we just sort of shook our heads and it took a while to really understand the impact of it. It was so chilling to hear it," Mr Jarecki said.

He told ABC that the incriminating statement, which came during their second and final interview of Mr Durst, led them to notify authorities.

FBI agents believe Mr Durst may have been planning to flee the United States because he registered under an alias at the New Orleans hotel where he was arrested, paid with cash and was found with fake documents, a source told ABC News.

In a statement to ABC, Douglas Durst, who runs the family real estate empire, said his brother should pay for his alleged crimes.

"We are relieved and also grateful to everyone who assisted in the arrest of Robert Durst," the statement said.

"We hope he will finally be held accountable for all he has done." - AFP

ISLAMABAD

# Ten executed in Pakistan

TEN convicted murderers were hung in Pakistan yesterday, the highest number to be executed in a single day after the government lifted a six-year-old moratorium on capital punishment, officials said.

Eight of the convicts were hanged in the populous Punjab province, while two others were hanged in the southern metropolis of Karachi, according to prison officials.

The latest hangings bring to 37 the number of convicts hanged since Pakistan resumed executions in December after Taliban militants gunned down 154 people, most of them children, at a school in the restive northwest.

The partial lifting of the moratorium, which began in 2008, only applied to those convicted of terrorism offences, but was last week extended to all capital offences.

Only one person was executed during the period of the moratorium - a soldier convicted by a court martial and hanged in 2012.

Human rights group Amnesty International estimates that Pakistan has more than 8000 prisoners on death row, most of whom have exhausted the appeals process.

Supporters of the death penalty in Pakistan argue that it is the only effective way to deal with the scourge of militancy.

But rights campaigners have been highly critical, citing problematic convictions in Pakistan's criminal justice system which they say is replete with rampant police torture and unfair trials. - AFP

**'What the hell did I do? Killed all of them of course.'**

**Robert Durst**  
Alleged murderer

Mr Durst appeared to make an unwitting confession to a catalogue of killings during filming of the final episode of the acclaimed six-part HBO documentary *The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst*.

In the finale, broadcast on March 15, Mr Durst is heard muttering to himself, "What the hell did I do? Killed them all, of course" - apparently unaware that a wireless microphone remained switched on while

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**DAMASCUS**

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (second from right) answers questions in Damascus in a handout picture released by the official Syrian Arab News Agency on March 16. Photo: AFP

# Assad will 'never be part' of peace deal: US

SYRIAN President Bashar al-Assad will never be part of peace negotiations to halt the brutal civil war, US officials have said, adding they were taking every step to bring an end to his rule.

Top US diplomat John Kerry appeared to suggest in a weekend interview that Washington would have to talk with Mr Assad eventually if peace was to be forged, but State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki moved to clarify that assertion.

"As we have long said, there always has been a need for representatives of the Assad regime to be a part of that process," Ms Psaki said on March 16.

"It would not be, and would never be - and it wasn't what Secretary Kerry was intending to imply - that that would be Assad himself."

Mr Kerry's comments had caused alarm both abroad and among the US-backed opposition as the war entered its fifth year having claimed some 215,000 lives and with no end in sight after two rounds of failed Geneva peace talks.

Mr Assad however said he was waiting to see whether there would be any concrete action by the United States.

"We are still listening to the comments and we have to wait for the actions and then we'll decide," the Syrian leader told Iranian television in remarks carried by state media.

Mr Assad has long accused Washington of "supporting terrorism" because of its backing for the Syrian opposition.

"We have no choice but to defend our country," he added.

Mr Assad spoke as Amnesty International said the Syrian government had killed more than 100 civilians, including 14 children, in a series of "ruthless air strikes" on a bastion of the Islamic State group last year.

In a new report on March 17 the London-based human rights group said some of the strikes launched by the regime in November 2014 on the city of Raqa gave "every indication of being war crimes".

Raqa city is the self-proclaimed

capital of IS in Syria, but Amnesty said there was no indication that militant positions were the target of the series of strikes.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius meanwhile rejected any role for Mr Assad in peace talks, saying it would be a "scandalous gift" to the militant group.

"The solution is a political transition which would preserve regime institutions, not Mr Bashar al-Assad," Mr Fabius insisted.

"Any other solution which would keep Mr Assad in the saddle would be an absolutely scandalous, gigantic gift to Daesh," Mr Fabius said, using another name for IS.

Turkey, which is hosting hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, insisted the war had been caused by the Assad regime.

"What is there to be negotiated with Assad?" Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu demanded, quoted by the Anatolia news agency.

**'Any other solution which would keep Mr Assad in the saddle would be an absolutely scandalous, gigantic gift to [IS]'**

**Laurent Fabius**  
French foreign minister

"You are going to have what negotiations with a regime that has killed over 200,000 people and has used chemical weapons?" he asked.

Ms Psaki stressed the US was being guided by the wishes of the moderate opposition, fighting to oust Mr Assad from power.

"There's no future for Assad in Syria ... We're taking every step we can to bring an end to his rule there," she said, adding peace talks

would be between the opposition and representatives of the regime.

The Syrian state press had boasted at the weekend that Mr Kerry's comments recognised Mr Assad's rightful role as the country's president, and suggested it could pave the way for American participation in talks on the conflict hosted by Russia next month.

Washington has not yet been invited to the Moscow talks, Ms Psaki said, adding that while the US was open to "any effort consistent with the Geneva process to bring both sides back to the table", it was uncertain whether that would be the outcome.

Mr Kerry said in an interview broadcast on March 15 that Washington could eventually negotiate with Assad.

"Well, we have to negotiate in the end," the US envoy said, when asked by CBS television if he would talk to Mr Assad, stressing any such talks would be part of the 2012 Geneva process, which calls for a political transition in Syria.

But the Syrian opposition slammed the remarks, with Samir Nashar, a member of the US-backed National Coalition, saying they had "blurred the American position".

"America used to say that Assad had to step down ... But now, Kerry has adopted this ambiguity that keeps Assad afloat in any political solution," he said.

An online Twitter campaign opposing negotiations with Mr Assad, using the hashtag #KerryNoNegotiateWithKiller, quickly gained ground.

"Mr. Kerry, if you want dialogue with the killer, you are a murderer's example," said Twitter user Adnan al-Zahrani.

But on the ground, activists said Mr Kerry's remarks were unsurprising.

"From the beginning, the Americans abandoned the revolution, and they prove it more each day," said Abu Adel, an activist in the rebel Jubar area outside Damascus.

"We cannot accept Assad staying on after the deaths of tens of thousands of martyrs."

- AFP

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TAIPEI

# Sunflower students have changed Taiwan

A YEAR after students occupied Taiwan's parliament in an audacious protest against trade links with China, the island's political landscape has shifted dramatically, with the ruling party routed in local polls and new caution over warming mainland ties.

Around 200 students and activists broke through security lines and seized the main parliamentary chamber on March 18 last year in what became known as the "Sunflower Movement", with thousands of supporters rallying on the streets of the capital Taipei.

The demonstrations were sparked by a service sector trade pact with China that protesters said had been agreed secretly.

Their anger reflected wider discontent over ties with China, which have improved under President Ma Ying-jeou, who came to power in 2008.

While the thaw has led to trade agreements and a tourist boom, some feel ordinary people have seen little benefit and there are growing fears over Beijing's influence.

China and Taiwan split in 1949 after a civil war, but Beijing still considers the self-ruled island part of its territory awaiting reunification and has not written off using force should Taipei declare independence.

By bringing those anxieties to the fore, the movement had a dramatic impact.

"The fast-paced exchanges between the two sides [China and Taiwan] in the past seven years have slowed and halted amid concerns over Taiwan's security, manifested by the movement," said Tung Chen-yuan, a political analyst at Taiwan's National Chengchi University.

"The Sunflower Movement was a turning point in the development of cross-strait ties."

It also encouraged people to express their wider frustrations with

the ruling Kuomintang party (KMT), says Wang Yeh-lih, a political science professor at the National Taiwan University.

"The KMT was concerned about issues such as the service trade pact and internationalisation, but the people cared about their pockets and housing prices ... Public discontent that had been accumulating was set off."

The Beijing-friendly KMT suffered its worst-ever local election defeat in November - a vote seen as a key barometer of the 2016 presidential race.

It has since been careful to couch its approach to mainland relations.

"The movement dealt a big blow to the KMT ... It triggered a domino effect against the government" over controversial policies, said Wu Yusheng, a KMT lawmaker.

Politicians now pay "more attention to the opinions of netizens, young people and civil groups in making policies. It is good for democracy", he said.

The traditionally China-sceptic opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) gained from the election result, but are keen not to be seen as complacent in the face of an empowered electorate.

"Public sentiments are against the KMT, but there are risks as well as opportunities for us" in the 2016 polls, said DPP spokesperson Cheng Yun-peng.

The DPP now has to tread a line between cross-strait trade, which could benefit Taiwan, and voters' wishes.

As the effects of the movement continue to echo through politics, protest leaders say they could never have predicted its impact.

"None of us had expected that we could actually seize the parliament," said Lin Fei-fan, a leading activist.

"We felt strongly that the service



Students occupy Taiwan's parliament in Taipei on March 18, 2014, in a protest against moves by the ruling party to ratify a contentious trade agreement with China. Photo: AFP

trade pact could hurt Taiwan's economy and impact our democracy. We decided to take the matter into our own hands."

Protesters adopted the sunflower saying it was symbolic of their wish to shine a light on the trade deal and their hopes of a bright future.

The 24-day occupation ended on April 10 after parliament speaker Wang Jin-pyng promised not to review the service trade pact until a law to monitor such agreements with China was introduced, a key demand of the protesters.

Taiwan has signed 21 trade and

other deals with China under Mr Ma.

"We think the Ma government is leaning too close to Beijing. We don't oppose trade exchanges, but Taiwan should not rely too much on China and put all its eggs in one basket," said activist Lai Ping-yu, spokesperson for Black Island Nation Youth Front, one of the civil groups behind the movement.

Campaigners say it is important to keep up the pressure. Rallies are planned to mark the anniversary of the occupation and renew calls for the passing of the oversight bill on cross-strait agreements.

"The 'Sunflower Movement' demonstrated the power of the people who were willing to stand up and support us," Ms Lin said.

"The movement is ongoing and we are pushing for more reforms."

Ms Lai hopes that young people will now turn their attention to 2016 when Mr Ma must step down after serving two terms.

"I think young people are no longer indifferent to politics and so many of them came out to vote in the November elections which affected the outcome. I think their votes will have some impact in 2016," she said. - AFP

LAGOS

## Key town taken from Boko Haram

NIGERIA'S military has cleared Boko Haram from the northeastern state of Yobe, while also claiming victory over the militants in the strategic town of Bama in neighbouring Borno state, according to officials.

"We announced the reclaiming of [the town of] Goniri today," defence spokesman Chris Olukolade said on his Twitter account on March 16. "That was the last stronghold of terrorists in Yobe... #YobeIsFree."

Mr Olukolade added in a later tweet that Nigerian troops had also ousted the insurgents from Bama, some 70 kilometres (45 miles) from the Borno state capital of Maiduguri.

"Nigerian troops have this afternoon routed terrorists from #Bama in #Borno state. Mopping up operation is ongoing," he said.

Boko Haram Islamists had seized Bama, the second-largest town in the troubled state, in early September during the rapid capture of several towns and villages in northeastern Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states.

The three states have been at the epicentre of the six-year-old Boko Haram conflict that has killed more than 13,000 and displaced 1.5 million people.

The states were placed under a state of emergency in May 2013 but the violence continued and even intensified, with Boko Haram widening its attacks into neighbouring Chad, Cameroon and Niger.

In response, a four-country joint offensive was launched that has

claimed a string of successes in rebel-held territory in recent weeks.

The military operation is part of efforts to secure and stabilise north-east Nigeria in time for general elections set for March 28.

As Nigerian troops inched closer to Bama at the weekend, locals said Boko Haram set fire to homes, forcing hundreds of residents to flee.

The soldiers entered the town at about 4pm local time on March 16 and fought the insurgents until they fled to neighbouring villages, residents said.

Some residents took advantage of the military offensive to escape to safety.

Among them was mother-of-four Jummai Mumini, who arrived in

Maiduguri on March 16.

"When I saw myself in Maiduguri, I thought I am in heaven because Bama was hell ... Bama was hell," she said.

In an official statement, defence spokesperson Mr Olukolade said the recapture of Bama had inflicted "massive" casualties on the militants.

"The Chadian partners in the Multinational Joint Task Force have been mandated to undertake a pursuit of the terrorists who are believed to be heading for the borders after being dislodged from Bama," the statement added.

With the apparent liberation of Yobe state, only a handful of towns and villages in Borno state now remain under Boko Haram control.

- AFP



Nigerian soldiers patrol a street in Goniri, Nigeria, in a hand out photo released by the Nigerian Army on March 16. Photo: AFP

SAMARRA

## Iraq's Tikrit advance stalled by IS bombs

IRAQ'S huge offensive to retake Tikrit from the Islamic State group is being stalled by bombs planted by the jihadists holding out in the city, a militia spokesperson said yesterday.

"The battle to retake Tikrit will be difficult because of the preparations [IS] made," said Jawwad al-Etlebawi, spokesperson for the Asaib Ahl al-Haq.

The organisation is a Shiite militia that is playing a major role in the operation alongside the regular army.

"They planted bombs on all the streets, buildings, bridges, everything," Mr Etlebawi said.

He added, "For this reason, our forces were stopped by these defensive preparations."

"We need forces trained in urban warfare to break in," he said, adding that the jihadists are surrounded, "but any besieged person fights fiercely".

The operation to recapture Tikrit, the capital of Salaheddin province, began on March 2.

While Iraqi forces succeeded in surrounding the city and retaking towns across the Tigris river to the east, gaining ground inside it has proved much more difficult.

Iraq army leaders have called for greater support from international forces.

Staff Lieutenant General Abdulwahab al-Saadi, the top army

commander for Salaheddin, said on March 15 that the forces attacking Tikrit needed air support from the US-led coalition.

Mr Saadi said that he had asked the defence ministry to make the request to the coalition, but that no air support had been forthcoming.

IS spearheaded a sweeping offensive that overran large areas north and west of Baghdad last June.

Iraqi forces backed by the US-led coalition and Iran are battling to push the militants back.

Meanwhile, the IS group posted pictures yesterday of the beheadings, apparently in Salaheddin, of four men it said were recruiters for pro-government militia fighting its militants in northern Iraq.

The images show four men dressed in black kneeling in an empty street with knife-wielding militants standing behind them, after which they are pictured being beheaded.

Text accompanying the photographs said the beheadings were carried out in Salaheddin.

The exact location where the photos were taken was unclear, and their authenticity could not be independently confirmed.

IS has carried out numerous atrocities in areas it controls ranging from public beheadings to enslavement to rape.

- AFP





# Paying

**I**t is a means of ascent, not an escape route. Kaw Dai, a community-based organisation dedicated to advancing the cause of the Shan (Dai) people, teaches them about their own language, culture and history, even as it exposes them to the outside world, both in Yangon and overseas.

"Before I came here, I didn't know anything about the history of my people," says Nang Shwe Yone. "I didn't know about what is happening outside my world."

Nang Shwe Yone is among the 16 students who last month made their first journey from the highlands of Shan State to Yangon to learn English and social sciences, while some prepare to enter foreign universities under the wing of Kaw Dai.

"These are the top students, but most importantly, they have a strong desire to give back to their community," says Nang Haeo Hseng who co-founded and heads Kaw Dai's Yangon-based Shan Intensive English program.

Every 10 weeks for eight months, volunteers from all over the world come to teach these students history, economics, politics and English literature, and to help them prepare for the TOEFL English test.

From its start in 2009, 100 volunteers from 12 countries have come to teach at the program.

After completing the Yangon-based program, the students are obliged to return to the organisation's headquarters in the remote town of Kali in southern Shan State for two years. Depending on their skills, some will teach the next batch of students or others in the community. Others will do social work in rural areas and those with good communication skills will be assigned to raise political awareness. Those with an interest in organic farming and sustainable livelihood will go on to farm for the community, as the organisation must produce much of its own food.

Kaw Dai is the brainchild of Sai Phong Khong, himself only a high-school graduate. It's not that he didn't want to pursue higher education. His first year at Lashio College in 1997 was cut short due to the 1988 student uprising in which the government violently put down the protestors.

He didn't return to university, but instead went to Chiang Mai, where he sold clothes at the night bazaar. But when he returned to central Shan State and heard about human rights violations, he was "shocked and numbed" and decided to stay in Shan State, where he founded Kaw Dai in 1999.

His parents, who supported resistance groups, have influenced his desire to pursue activism. He says his mother, now 80, is still actively involved in social and political movements, and is his role model.

Most of the students at Kaw Dai only recently learned to read, write and converse in Shan. Although the government lifted the ban on teaching the Shan language in 2010, a great deal of the language, literature and culture have been lost due to years of war and suppression, making it difficult for the older generation to pass on their skills.

Tzai Sae Pan Pha, who at 24 was the oldest member of his graduating class at the Intensive English program last year, was getting an English degree at a Myanmar university, but he left in his second year because he felt that his English wasn't improving. Then he saw a performance by a woman from Norway who sang in the Shan language. "It made me think. I can't speak and write my own language," he recalls, and that's when he decided to come to Kaw Dai.

Opportunities for education are very limited in Shan State, especially in conflict areas. Most students at Kaw Dai have had access to education.

YUKO MASKAY



Photo: Yuko Maskay



Photo: Supplied



Photo: Supplied



# it forward

In 2006, Kaw Dai opened a “national school” in Kali, although the school is not recognised by the government. Graduates can join the Kaw Dai programs and pass on their knowledge to others, or even learn English well enough to enter university. Kaw Dai has helped 25 students to get admitted to universities abroad.

A graduate of the 2011 batch, Hseng Leng recently got accepted into Green Mountain College in Vermont, USA. She wants to major in Environmental Studies because there are many environmental problems facing Shan State. “Logging companies from China are cutting down trees. The people there cannot grow crops. The dry landscape affects the animals,” says Hseng Leng, who hopes for a scholarship.

Decades of conflict have left myriad problems in Shan State: malnutrition, illiteracy, lack of livelihood skills, drugs, erosion of culture, loss of language and forced relocation, among others.

With the country opening up, Kaw Dai recently printed a 31-page report called *A Voice for the War Victims* for circulation to human rights organisations.

“Drugs, migration and war create a lot of vacancies in families, and only the old are left,” says founder Sai Phong Kong.

Some Kaw Dai students have been directly affected by conflict. Last month, Tzai Dung Kham, a former student, reported clashes between the government and the SSPP (a resistance group) near his village of Ban Nar in northern Shan State. “I couldn’t contact my family,” he says, “I feel so sad when I hear about these things. I don’t want war.”

Another student, who wished not to be named, remembers the Tatmadaw splitting his family apart when he was only a year old. He says that in 1996, the army threatened to kill his grandfather, the village headman of his township, when he was accused of being a rebel spy. His grandfather, fearing for his family, had them flee, while he remained.

“Our parent’s experiences taught us to be afraid of the government. There are a lot of things happening in Shan State that people outside don’t know about,” says the student, who wants to become a reporter.

Dissemination of information is an issue in Shan State. Most residents cannot read or write the Myanmar language. There is only one bi-weekly journal published in Shan and one monthly.

Another major issue is drugs, mainly due to opium farming. During the conflict, lowland farmers were forced to relocate to higher ground, where the only viable cash crop was opium.

Sai Phong Khong says about 15 percent of students who join their programs are affected by drugs in one way or the other. “A lot of young people stop studying and flee to neighbouring countries,” says Sai Phong Khong.

Volunteer teachers are an integral part of the Intensive English program. Nang Haeo Hseng says it would be much easier if the program were based in Kali because the community support there would allow them to greatly reduce their overhead costs, but it’s very difficult for foreigners to get access into Shan State because of government restrictions.

Although Kaw Dai is partially funded by EBO, an NGO that supports ethnic groups in Myanmar, salaries are low compared to other NGOs. As part of the fundraising efforts, the students make jewellery from paper to sell, and seek grants every year.

Nang Haeo Hseng says Kaw Dai hopes to continue developing more programs for youth empowerment, education, civil society, livelihood and sustainability so that more people will come to know about what is really happening in Shan State, with the hope of restoring the community.

“We want to fight for justice for the victims affected by the civil war. We need to maintain our culture. We want our identity back,” she says.

Opportunities for education are limited in Shan State, but one organisation is offering students the chance to learn in return for giving back to their communities



Photo: Supplied



Photo: Yuko Maskay



## HONG KONG

# French street artist seeks human connection with portraits

**H**E started out as a teenager spraying graffiti on walls in Paris – but French street artist JR now communicates through giant photographic portraits plastered from Brazil to Hong Kong, a bid to reach what he feels is a disconnected world.

The 32-year-old who describes himself as a “photographeur” – a mix of photographer and graffiti artist – has mounted enormous black-and-white photos of local residents on dilapidated bridges and slum walls in a bid to get his message across.

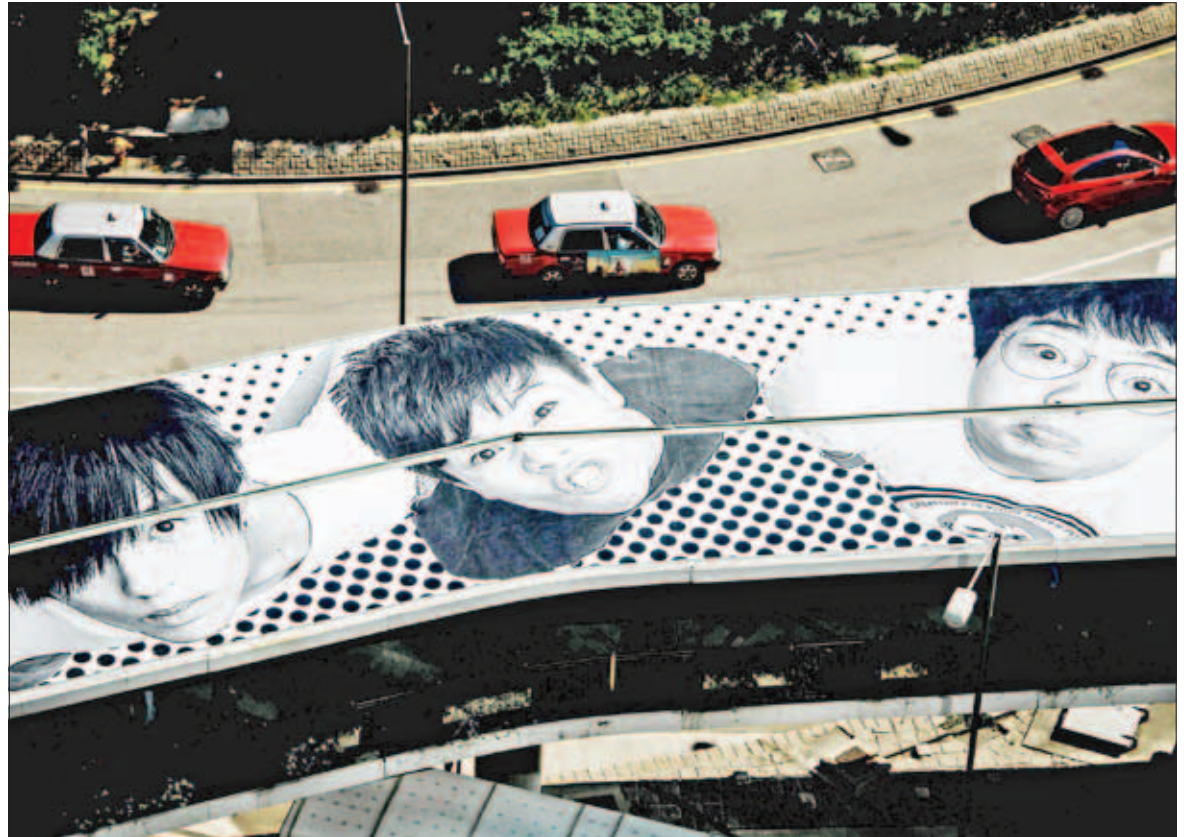
“We’ve come to a point in our society where we’re so connected to other media and technology that it’s

taking away the basic essence of real human being connection,” he says.

“The whole power of this art was to gather people and reconnect people, especially in a world where we’re disconnecting more and more.”

Wearing his trademark fedora and dark glasses JR – who keeps his name and identity a secret – is in Hong Kong to present two exhibitions of his work, coinciding with the annual Art Basel show, Asia’s largest art fair, which runs until March 24.

One exhibition is a retrospective of his works, while the other shows images of his recent Ellis Island project in New York, where he plastered archive photographs on



JR started out as a teenager spraying graffiti on walls in Paris but now communicates through giant photographic portraits plastered from the Middle East to Brazil to Hong Kong. Photo: AFP/Philippe Lopez

the walls and windows of the island’s abandoned hospital.

JR has already used the city sprawl of Hong Kong as a canvas – in 2012 he posted large black-and-white portraits of Hong Kongers on the roof of a pedestrian walkway as part of a global art project where people contributed portraits and stories.

“I love involving people ... I have a lot of volunteers who come and experience the pasting of little parts of a giant photo, then they become part of the bigger adventure,” he says.

“Sometimes the whole adventure of making [the art] is more interesting than the final piece itself.”

In 2007, JR put up oversize portraits on both sides of a security wall in territory disputed by Palestine and Israel, adorning it with faces of people from either side of the divide – most of them pulling comic expressions – in a bid to bring humour to the situation.

“We want, at last, everyone to laugh and to think by seeing the portrait of the other and his own

portrait,” his official website said of that project, billing it as the “largest illegal photography exhibition ever”.

JR began spraying graffiti in the streets of Paris in his early teens, but after finding a camera in the city’s Metro at the age of 17, he started taking pictures of his street artist friends.

“There was no social media at the time, so I pasted them on the streets ... It was just the best gallery in the world you could imagine,” he said.

Since then his work has become highly collectible – with pieces fetching tens of thousands of dollars – and he has been compared with anonymous British graffiti artist Banksy.

The market in Hong Kong has reflected the increasing demand for street art – two pieces by another French street artist, Invader, recently set new sales records for the artist at auction in the city.

But JR says he is wary of commercialisation. He works with a close-knit group of friends from his

teenage years and says he finances his projects with the sales of a limited number of original artworks.

“I’ve always been really careful – that’s why I don’t work with brands or work with any commission, companies. I do everything independently because I want to protect my art and the way it gets to the people, so it’s not powered by Coca-Cola or whoever.”

The commercial high end of the art world is at the fore at Art Basel, with gallerists, collectors and celebrities descending on Hong Kong.

But there is also a strong grassroots creativity in the city, highlighted during last year’s pro-democracy protests.

Rally camps were transformed into open art spaces displaying everything from caricatures of the city’s politicians to sculptures and gardens.

“[Art] has really strong power at those kinds of moments because it speaks to the audience about what the people feel inside.” – AFP



JR has been compared to British graffiti artist Banksy. Photo: AFP/Philippe Lopez

## British artist combines old and new with Yangon exhibition

**NANDAR AUNG**  
nandaraung.mcm@gmail.com

AN exhibition of black and white photo etchings by British artist Emma Harrison are to go on display in Yangon March 21 and 22. The artworks feature many of the city’s colonial buildings, including the famous Secretariat building.

“I’m interested in old and derelict buildings, and this has become a theme that runs through much of my work in the UK too,” said 27-year-old Harrison, whose work has been exhibited in over a dozen exhibitions in the UK.

This is the first time works of this kind have been exhibited in Myanmar. Twenty of Harrison’s monochrome etchings, priced at between US\$220 and \$500, will be on display at a private home in downtown Yangon’s 34<sup>th</sup> Street, as part of the Yangon Art and Heritage Festival’s “La Casa: contemporary art in domestic spaces” project.

Photo etching, explained Harrison, is a traditional printing technique which emerged in 1950s. An image is applied to a metal plate through a light-sensitive coating which is then exposed to UV light to transfer the

image by etching the plate in acid. The plate is then inked and the relief of the image can be used to create a print when exposed to the high pressure of a printing press.

Harrison, a graduate of London’s Chelsea College of Art and Design, uses a traditional manually powered press, housed in her London studio, to create the artworks.

“Each image is hand printed,” she said. “I’m interested in using traditional techniques even in this modern digital age. I feel the resulting prints have a story to accompany the images.”

Harrison, who has been photographing the Secretariat building, as well as Bagan, since last year, said her style of art is new, despite using traditional processes.

“These etchings are much more experimental. I know it is not a new process, as it is a very old and rarely used technique. But it seems to me that reinventing it is in itself something new.”

Emma Harrison’s photo etchings will be on display at 111 34<sup>th</sup> Street (middle block, behind City Hall) from March 21 to 22, 4-6pm.



Emma Harrison uses a traditional printing press to create her artwork in her London-based studio. Photo: Supplied





  
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## 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
YH 836	1,7	11:00	14:45
YH 832	4,6	11:00	14:45
YH 827	3	11:00	14:45
W9 252	2,5	15:45	19:40

### Domestic Airlines

**Air Bagan (W9)**  
Tel: 513322, 513422, 504888. Fax: 515102

**Air KBZ (K7)**  
Tel: 372977-80, 533030-39 (airport), 373766 (hotline). Fax: 372983

**Asian Wings (YJ)**  
Tel: 515261-264, 512140, 512473, 512640  
Fax: 5



## 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



## BASEBALL

# Shamed legend Pete Rose asks for reinstatement

PETE Rose, Major League Baseball's all-time hits leader banned for life in 1989 for betting on games while playing and managing, wants new major league commissioner Rob Manfred to reinstate him.

Manfred, who took over from Bud Selig in January, said March 16 that he has received a request from Rose to lift the life ban and is "prepared to deal with it on the merits," according to a posting on Major League Baseball's website.

"I do have a formal request from Pete and I intend to communicate with his representatives to talk about how to handle [a review process]," Manfred said.

Rose, who turns 74 next month, had a record 4256 career hits in a 23-year playing career that included three World Series titles, two with the Cincinnati Reds and another with the Philadelphia Phillies, before ending in 1986.

Rose managed the Reds from 1984 to 1989 but was nagged by allegations of betting on major league games. One of the first acts by incoming commissioner Bart Giamatti in 1989 was to have attorney John Dowd conduct a probe into the claims.

Dowd's report documented bets in 1987 on 52 games involving the Reds and in August of 1989, Rose accepted a life ban while Major League Baseball made no formal finding regarding the gambling allegations. Giamatti died of a heart attack eight days after Rose's life ban was announced.

A consideration was whether or not Rose bet for or against his club, with the report saying no evidence was found that Rose bet against the Reds while managing them.



Jay Bruce of the Cincinnati Reds hits the ball in this year's spring training. Pete Rose hit 4256 hits in his career and won three World Series, including two with the Reds. Photo: AFP

"I want to understand details of the Dowd report and Giamatti's decision and hear what Pete has to say and make a decision once I've done that," Manfred said.

Players on the life ban list are ineligible for consideration to the Baseball Hall of Fame, a likely reward otherwise for any holder of one of baseball's most prized records.

Rose had also sought reinstatement from past commissioners Fay

Vincent and Selig but neither moved to lift the ban.

Rose made a one-moment return in 1999, a brief lifting of his ban allowing him to appear as a member of Major League Baseball's All-Century Team at a pre-game ceremony in Atlanta during the 1999 World Series.

In 2004, Rose admitted betting on baseball games and other sports events while playing and managing the Reds. - AFP

## FOOTBALL

# Major League Soccer seeks Twin Cities expansion

MAJOR League Soccer is in advanced talks with a Minnesota group seeking an expansion club and will evaluate growing beyond its planned 24 teams, including David Beckham's conditional Miami club.

MLS commissioner Don Garber said March 15 that the league, which opened its 20th season 10 days ago with 20 teams, plans to announce a new expansion team by the end of April.

"We remain on track to announce the next MLS expansion market in the next 30-45 days, though no specific date for an announcement has been set," Garber said.

"Over the course of 2015, we plan to evaluate potential expansion beyond 24 clubs."

That decision could help bring development time for the Miami MLS franchise of Beckham, the former England midfielder who starred for Manchester United and Real Madrid and helped the Los Angeles Galaxy win the 2011 and 2012 MLS crowns.

In February of last year, MLS announced it would award an MLS expansion club to Beckham's investment group provided stadium financing and a location could be agreed upon, Garber saying he hoped the team would join Atlanta in taking the field for the 2017 season.

But two stadium sites desired by Beckham's group were rejected by elected officials last July. Officials earlier this month offered Beckham's group a site near the Major League Baseball home ballpark of the Miami Marlins for a new stadium in hopes of making a deal.

If MLS sticks with a 24-team maximum and Beckham's group cannot complete a stadium deal, the conditional nature of the group's expansion team could become an issue with several other cities interested in MLS teams.

In addition to Miami and Atlanta, MLS hopes to welcome Los Angeles FC - a replacement team

for the folded Chivas USA - in 2017 to boost the league to 23 teams, one less than what had been planned to be the maximum.

Minnesota has the inside track to the 24th team, according to Garber.

"We are in advanced discussions with Bill McGuire and his partners in Minnesota to bring a Major League Soccer expansion club to the Twin Cities and are particularly excited about their plans for a new soccer-specific stadium that will serve as the club's home," Garber said.

MLS is also considering Sacramento in its latest expansion and has talked with hopeful groups in St Louis and San Antonio.

**'We remain on track to announce the next MLS expansion market in the next 30-45 days.'**

**Don Garber**  
MLS commissioner

## AMERICAN FOOTBALL

# NFL star retires over health worries

CHRIS Borland, a 24-year-old linebacker for the San Francisco 49ers, told ESPN on March 15 he is retiring from the National Football League over health concerns due to repeated head injuries.

"I just honestly want to do what's best for my health," Borland told ESPN. "From what I have researched and what I've experienced, I don't think it's worth the risk."

He becomes the most prominent NFL player to turn his back on a rich contract, a four-year deal worth just under US\$3 million in Borland's case, over concerns about brain injuries.

Such a condemnation of the

dangers and safety worries in the world's richest sports league comes after seasons of concern for NFL players over the long-term impact of repeated blows to the head, including studies linking the NFL to neurodegenerative diseases.

In his rookie NFL season last year, Borland made 108 tackles, a quarterback sack and two interceptions over 14 games before an ankle injury in December ended his season.

But the third-round NFL Draft choice told ESPN that he notified the 49ers last week of his decision to leave the sport, saying he was being "proactive" despite feeling "as sharp as I've

ever been."

"I'm concerned that if you wait till you have symptoms, it's too late," Borland said. "There are a lot of unknowns. I can't claim that X will happen. I just want to live a long healthy life, and I don't want to have any neurological diseases, or die younger than I would otherwise."

The 49ers lost linebacker Patrick Willis last week. He announced his retirement at age 30 after playing only six games last season due to a toe injury. Borland said the decision by Willis played no role in his decision, which includes plans to return to college and study sports management. - AFP

## BASKETBALL

# Adidas to pull out of NBA

ADIDAS, the German maker of sportswear and equipment, confirmed March 16 they will not renew their contract with the American Basketball Association when it expires at the end of the 2016-2017 season.

The German giants have had a deal with the NBA since 2006 when they took over the contract held by Reebok which Adidas purchased for US\$3.18 billion euros.

But Adidas has seen its share of the US market continually shrink and they are now third behind Nike and Under Armour.

"We have decided to not renew our partnership as official outfitter of the NBA after our current contract expires following the 16-17 season," Adidas

said in a statement.

"We are reshaping our business and have evolved our strategy to look at new, cutting-edge ways to drive our brand and support our business over the long term.

"We will invest more in telling stories that matter to our consumer, building category-disrupting innovative products, reinvigorating youth basketball with our new Next Generation programs and doubling our roster of professional athletes to authenticate our brand on-court."

As part of a strategic repositioning, details of which will be unveiled next week, Adidas have indicated they want to individually sponsor 500 new athletes in sports such as basketball, football and baseball. - AFP



## IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP

New York City FC pose before their inaugural game against the New England Revolution at Yankee Stadium on March 15. The team is owned by the Yankees and the Anglo-Arabic City Football Group, a holding company that operates Manchester City.



## FOOTBALL

# Le Pen says Ibrahimovic should leave France over outburst

**C**ALLS mounted on March 16 for action against Paris Saint-Germain's temperamental star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic over comments he made about his host country which one French minister called "insulting".

Far-right National Front leader Marine Le Pen said that Ibrahimovic, who apologised within hours of his outburst after Paris lost 3-2 at Bordeaux, should leave France.

The Swedish striker, who was controversially sent off in the Champions League game against Chelsea last week, had twice scored, both times to level the game.

But he stormed off the pitch and said in front of television cameras, "In 15 years, I have never seen such a referee. In this shit country, this country does not deserve PSG. We are too good for this country."

"Those who consider that France is a shit country can leave it," Le Pen told the France Info radio station.

The 33-year-old Swedish international backed down in a statement and in a video for the Paris Saint-Germain website after France's Sports Minister Patrick Kanner called the remarks "insulting".

"I would like to apologise if anyone felt offended. I want to make it clear that my remarks were not directed at France or the French. I was talking about football. I lost the match and I accept that but I don't accept when the referee does not follow the rules." Ibrahimovic said in a statement.



PSG striker and Swedish international Zlatan Ibrahimovic has courted controversy on numerous occasions. Photo: AFP

"I was angry in the heat of the moment. If they thought my comments were against them or if they misinterpreted them, I apologise sincerely," the 33-year-old said in the video.

"People have always welcomed me. I am happy, I respect people who respect me. Every day of my adventure

at PSG is fantastic," he added.

"Don't twist things. Let's talk about football, let's not talk about anything but football because football is the most important thing for me."

But the apologies were not sufficient to calm the stormy waters.

The sports minister welcomed the

apology and said it was the statement of "a great champion" but the apology did not calm the controversy.

"If a personality as important as Zlatan Ibrahimovic makes such comments, we should not be surprised that there are such difficulties in stadiums," added Kanner.

Jerome Guedj, a leading Socialist party politician, called the remarks "unacceptable": "Let him play football and shut up, or at least be respectful of this country, the football supporters who were also insulted."

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls told Canal Plus he advises Ibrahimovic to improve his behaviour.

"I am shocked by the remarks in equal measure about the refereeing as about France," he said.

"I would urge him to behave in an exemplary manner all the time."

Ibrahimovic, who has just returned from one two-match suspension and will be suspended for the Champions League quarter final for his sending off last week is likely to face sanctions from the French league.

They will study the Swedish player's latest outburst at a meeting on March 19 and a source close to the dossier said he could face up to a four-match ban.

However, the punishment would not be imposed on that day as they would decide then whether or not to summon him to a hearing over the incident and that would be within three weeks, although PSG could demand that he be heard earlier.

The French referees' union, SAFE, hit out at what it called "a new torrent of hate and verbal violence" by Ibrahimovic.

"There are limits that cannot be and must not be crossed," the union said, highlighting the "growing violence" at football matches even at local level. - AFP

## FOOTBALL

## Kalou against the Berlin wall

IVORY Coast striker Salomon Kalou could be fined up to 10,000 euros (US\$10,535) for appearing to use a hammer and chisel on the Berlin Wall, which is under a protection order.

The ex-Chelsea star, who now plays for Hertha Berlin, was being filmed by a Berlin TV station as part of a report on their 2-2 Bundesliga draw with Schalke on March 14.

He mimicked breaking off a piece of the wall with the tools at the tourist attraction, the Eastside Gallery in an

attempt to compare the task with his intentions to breakdown the Schalke defence.

But what remains of the Berlin Wall, which divided Germany's capital from 1961-89, has been under a protection order since 1991.

Anyone defacing it can be heavily fined with the authorities set to investigate whether any damage was done.

"I nearly fell off the sofa when I saw the footage," Kani Alavi, the chairman of the Eastside Gallery, told the *Berliner Kurier* newspaper.

*liner Kurier* newspaper.

"Here we have a well-paid celebrity increasing his market value at the expense of a national monument. Without respect. And with the clear backing of television.

"Just because there is no security patrolling the Gallery doesn't mean you can go around doing what you want.

"If he had done that at the Brandenburg Gate, the player would probably have been arrested." - AFP

## GOLF

## McIlroy replaces Tiger as face of video game

RORY McIlroy, who has replaced Tiger Woods as golf's world number one, will also supplant the 14-time major champion on EA Sports' PGA Tour video game.

EA announced March 16 that the game, to be released in June, will be called "Rory McIlroy PGA Tour" and feature the 25-year-old from Northern Ireland on its cover.

It will mark the first time since 1998, the year after Woods won his first major crown at the Masters, that Woods has not been featured on the cover. A Woods-EA contract expired in 2013.

"I'm very proud and humbled to see my face and name on EA Sports Rory McIlroy PGA Tour," McIlroy said in a statement.

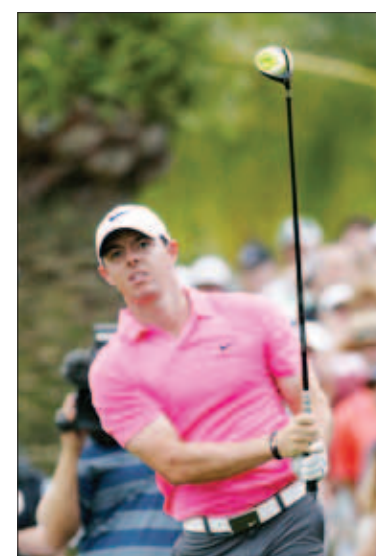
"This is a great honour and something I couldn't even dream of growing up playing the sport. I really hope people enjoy the game and I'm very glad I can be a part of it."

EA figures to seek a new group of young gamers and golf fans with the switch, using the hashtag #NextGen-Golf with a Twitter posting announcing McIlroy's new status.

"New name. New cover. Looking good @McIlroyRory!" the video game maker tweeted.

McIlroy will try to complete a career Grand Slam by winning his first Masters title next month at Augusta National. He will also be trying for his third major title in a row after wins at last year's British Open and PGA Championship.

In all, McIlroy has won four majors,



Rory McIlroy follows-through at last week's World Golf Championships-Cadillac Championship. Photo: AFP

his first coming at the 2011 US Open at Congressional and his second coming at the 2012 PGA Championship at Kiawah Island.

Woods, 39, is chasing the record 18 career major titles won by Jack Nicklaus but has not won a major crown since the 2008 US Open.

In recent years he has been nagged by leg and back injuries and is currently struggling with his game. His participation in doubt for the Masters, on a course where he has won four times - but not since 2005. - AFP

## IN BRIEF

### Athletics Triple-jump Tamgho returns from doping ban

World champion triple jumper Teddy Tamgho is to return to competition on March 21 after serving a one-year ban for a doping offence, his agent said on March 16.

The 25-year-old Frenchman last competed in August 2013, when he won the world title in Moscow with a superb leap of over 18 metres.

He then sustained a fracture of his left tibia during a training session in November of that year and was hit with a one-year ban in March of last year after missing three dope test assignments.

His agent Ludovic Olierie said that Tamgho would compete in a meeting at Ermont-Eaubonne, near Paris, after completing a training camp in Spain.

His main aim for this year will be to defend his world title in Beijing in August. - AFP

## FOOTBALL

## FIFA postpone Pakistan World Cup qualifier

WORLD football's governing body FIFA have taken the decision to postpone the 2018 World Cup qualifier between Pakistan and Yemen due to be played on March 17, a FIFA spokesperson told AFP.

"Due to safety and security reasons and in coordination with AFC [Asian Football Confederation], FIFA has decided to postpone the 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifier match between Pakistan and Yemen which was due to be played on Tuesday, March 17, in Lahore," the spokesperson said.

"Further details on the date of the match, which will take place in a neutral venue, will follow in due time."

The decision comes a day after 14 people were killed and more than 70 injured when two Taliban suicide bombers attacked churches in Lahore, sparking mob violence in which two other suspected militants died.

The bombings occurred during prayers at two churches located around half a kilometre apart in the city's Youhanabad neighbourhood, which is home to more than 100,000 Christians, officials said.

The Pakistani Taliban's Jamaat-ul-Ahrar faction described the blasts as suicide attacks and vowed to continue their campaign for the enforcement of Sharia Islamic law, in a statement emailed to the media. - AFP



# Sport

## Ibrahimovic should leave France, says Le Pen

SPORT 27



### SEA GAMES

# Myanmar sets sights on 50 Singapore SEA Games golds

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**M**YANMAR will target 50 gold medals in this year's 28<sup>th</sup> SEA Games that will open on June 5 in Singapore.

The target was compiled by the Union Sports Ministry during a two-day meeting with the country's sports governing bodies held at Thuwunna Indoor Stadium on March 16 and 17.

The target sits halfway between the 86 gold medals won at the 2013 SEA Games that were hosted in Myanmar and the 16 golds secured at Indonesia 2011.

"In the 2013 Games, we had many victories and won many gold medals but this year is not the same," said deputy minister for sport U Thuang Htike.

"Then as host nation, we had home advantage and we were able to introduce to the games our traditional sports and other events that we were strong in. In the coming SEA Games it will be more difficult to win gold, we will need to increase our effort," he added.

The leeway provided by allowing a host country to pick and choose sports has led to great controversy and accusations of gerrymandering the medal count. The inclusion of Myanmar's traditional sport of chinlone in the 2013 Games was a particularly controversial decision but was by no means an isolated incident.

The Singapore Games will see 7000 athletes from the 11 ASEAN nations compete for medals across 36 sports.

"We will send around 300 athletes to compete for Myanmar in 31 sports," said U Thuang Htike, "I believe our athletes will try their best."

"Tennis, bowling, and gymnastics events were not included in the last SEA Games but will feature on this occasion," he added.



Myanmar athletes celebrate one of 86 gold medals won at the 2013 SEA Games held predominantly in Nay Pyi Taw. Photo: AFP

He also said that Myanmar will for the first time enter teams in the squash, triathlon and netball competitions, all of which return after a lengthier absence from the Games.

Last week the Myanmar squash team returned from the Singapore hosted Southeast Asian Squash Cup having been whitewashed in every match they played.

One sport more confident of success is rowing. The rowing federation also represents those competing in canoeing and traditional boat race - also known as dragon boat racing - events.

Myanmar made 17 gold medals available at the 2013 SEA Games for traditional boat racing - an event they had dominated by winning nine of the 10 golds available in 2011 -

and won 14 of them.

"We collected 20 gold medals at the last SEA Games but this year Singapore have included their stronger events. We will struggle to compete as well as we did in some of the events but we are still targeting 17 golds from Singapore," U Phay Win, an official from the Myanmar Rowing Federation, told *The Myanmar Times*.

Other federations showing confidence of success during the meeting were archery, boxing, chinlone, shooting, judo, taekwondo, gymnastics, sepak takraw, wushu and sailing, all professing gold medal targets.

Among those who were more circumspect were the Myanmar Football Federation, who said they are not targeting gold on this occasion.

"It's too early to tell but our U23 team is a new one that has only recently been pulled together. We will also face stiff competition from Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia, who all have very strong squads. It will not be easy but our first target will be reaching the semi-finals," U Tin Aung, vice president of the MFF, told the meeting.

The women's football tournament will be missing this year, making way for netball, a female-only sport that is popular within Commonwealth countries such as Singapore and Malaysia. Myanmar's netball team will be formed by women's basketball players adapting to the sport.

It means the Myanmar women's football team, who so confidently came through the first round of Olympic qualifying at the weekend with 16-0 and 7-0 victories over Sri Lanka and India respectively, will be denied their opportunity to improve on their bronze medal in 2013.

The country came to a near standstill as people crowded around tea-shops to watch their epic 9-8 semi-final loss on penalties to neighbours Thailand.

Myanmar was again runner-up to Thailand in the overall medal count. The hosts won 86 gold, 62 silver and 85 bronze medals, compared to the Thais' 107 gold, 94 silver and 81 bronze.

Singapore has previously hosted the SEA Games in 1973, 1983 and 1993. The 2015 Games are to be staged as part of the city-state's celebrations of 50 years of independence. Tickets are on sale now.

### FOOTBALL

# Coach eyes Mandalay AFC Cup 'must-win' match-up

### MATT ROEBUCK

TODAY'S AFC Cup match between Yadanarbon FC and the Philippines' Global FC is a do-or-die clash for the Mandalay-based hosts, and head coach Kyi Lin recognised as much in his pre-match press conference held at the Mandalay Thiri Stadium on March 17.

Last year's Myanmar National League champions, who trail in fourth position this year will host their islander rivals - the first ever representatives Philippines have sent to the AFC Cup - with a 3:30pm kick-off.

"We must win this game; six points in the AFC Cup have already gone by the wayside, so for this game we must target three points to stay in contention for qualifying from this group," said Kyi Lin.

Yadanarbon suffered a 3-2 last-minute loss to Malaysian club Pahang FA in their first home game of the competition and that was followed by last week's 3-1 away defeat to Group G favourites South China of Hong Kong.

"If we win then we can focus on the next match and contend in this competition but for now we must focus on the game ahead."

The coach said his squad would be boosted by the return of a number of his squad who had been away on international duty for the South China trip.

Those players will help bolster the defence that looked disorganised at times during the Pahang FA game and suffered from the absence of Nigerian centre-back Happiness Okpechi. The return of the big Okpechi last week also gave the team an added threat at set-plays.

"I know Global are a quick and strong team," said Kyi Lin, "For tomorrow's game we must concentrate on preparing our back row to be ready."

Global FC coach Dan Padernal made it clear that his team had come to Myanmar looking for three points.

"This is our second international away game in as many weeks and we are tired from the flights so we know Yadanarbon will have a home advantage but we are confident we can compete. We left Pahang FA with a valuable away point, so tomorrow we will target a win."

Despite a heavy 6-1 defeat at home to South China, Global FC bounced back on the road by securing a 1-1 draw away to the Malaysian side and will see a victory as putting them in pole position for the second qualification spot to the knock-out stages of the competition.

"As the first club from the Philippines to compete in the AFC Cup we may face a difficult task but it is important for our country that do our best to go down in history."

"Even though we are away from home, if our players play intelligently and employ the tactics we have discussed in practice then we can come away with a good result."

In Group G's other game Pahang FA will host South China at the Darul Makmur Stadium, Kuantan.

Myanmar's other representatives to Asia's second-tier continental competition, Ayeyawady United are in the Maldives preparing to face New Radiant

"The Maldives is even hotter and more humid than Myanmar," said Ayeyawady boss Marjan Sekulovski as he looked forward to the game in

the post-match conference after last week's 1-1 home draw with Persib Bandung of Indonesia.

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

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

Ayeyawady currently sit third in Group H behind leaders Persib and New Radiant who beat the Group's other team Lao Toyota 2-1 in the Maldives last week. Ayeyawady took a point from their away game against the Lao side after throwing away a two-goal lead.