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EDITORIAL

Pay rises can wait

ON March 20, the deputy minister for finance discussed the government's proposal to increase salaries in parliament. He revealed that the government's annual expense on the salaries of 1.4 million civilian and defense service personnel was almost K2.4 trillion (US\$2.3 billion) in 2014-15. The deputy minister released this information in response to proposals for a salary increase for all government employees in the new fiscal year, which begins on April 1.

Any salary increase would no doubt be welcomed by service personnel. Undoubtedly many are severely underpaid. But previous experience suggests that a pay rise accompanied by inflation will have little impact. The fundamental point of a salary is to cover the cost of living, the basic necessities. Higher pay that brings higher consumer prices will do more harm than good.

In February, the International Monetary Fund described the proposed pay increases, which could add another \$500 million to the budget deficit, as a "fiscal risk", warning that spending money on public sector wages "could crowd out the much needed increases in health, education and infrastructure that are essential for increasing Myanmar's growth potential".

The government has never clarified where its pay rises would come from. Taxpayers will inevitably have to bear the brunt. But there are also concerns it will result in the printing of more money, which could contribute to growing inflation that some have tipped to rise above 8 percent.

If the government can increase salaries without resorting to printing money or cutting important spending in other areas, then we support increases. Unfortunately, such a plan has never been articulated.

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PHOTO: PHYO WAI KYAW

Volunteers pour pots of molten bronze into a mould to make a 11,111-viss (18.14-tonne) bell at a workshop in Mandalay's Tampawady ward in the early hours of March 20. Over the next month, the K300 million bell will cool underground before it can be shipped to a pagoda in Tanintharyi Region capital Dawei.

Peace teams plan final meet

With the draft ceasefire agonisingly close to completion, government and ethnic negotiators yesterday agreed to break for a week before making a final push on the long-awaited accord, which will pave the way for political dialogue. **NEWS 3**

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THE INSIDER: The local lowdown & best of the web

Don't feed the trolls

Minister for Information U Ye Htut took to Facebook last week to make a plaintive post about a modern blight: "End online humiliation or Cyberbullying," he wrote, linking to a BBC article about Monica Lewinsky and a TED talk she gave on the harassment she's faced over the years. Some of his followers inadvertently highlighted the importance of U Ye Htut's message when they immediately responded by cyberbullying him. "End your brutality to citizen and students as well. You guys are bullying us physically," said one keyboard warrior. Another posted an image of a policeman walloping a cowering student protester.

Boomtimes in Northern Shan

In a release from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism published in the *Global New Light of Myanmar* last week, it was declared that Northern Shan State is undergoing a major boom – and not the kind anyone who follows the news would assume. Yes, tourism. Apparently it's going gangbusters. One of the hottest up-and-coming Northern Shan destinations is the Goteik viaduct, where tourists can enjoy the spectacular scenery from the safety of the train – but folks would probably be directed to avoid the stretch of road between Kyaukme and trekking hotspot Hsipaw, where "renegades" attacked a Tatmadaw convoy last month.

UmbrellaGate continues

Observers have applauded the inter-

national media for an uptick on its coverage of serious issues in Myanmar, after the disappearing umbrella fiasco made the leap to publications worldwide including the *Daily Mail*. While wire coverage of the tragic mass drowning of ferry passengers in Rakhine State did receive some international attention by virtue of the extremely high death toll, and while other outlets are gradually starting to grasp the fact that allegations of Myanmar accidentally bombing China in pursuit of Kokang rebels is actually quite serious, it really was the Photoshop incident that captured the imaginations of website editors the world over. "I can't recall a story that has drawn so much attention to Myanmar since... well, since that hooah over Mae Myat Noe's boob job. It's really heartening to see," said Human Rights Watch's Dave Mathieson. "I've made the umbrella picture the background on my iPad. See?"

Hummer bumper: a PSA

A word of warning for anyone looking to enjoy a casual evening at Yangon's hangout du jour for the whatdothey-evendoforwork Fedora diaspora, Hummingbird – apparently wearing shorts and flip-flops on the premises is frowned upon. A foreign NGO worker, after enjoying what he said was good food and service, was quietly told to step up his dress next time. I'm not sure exactly what that means for monsoon season when you pretty well have to wade through the foetid waters that overwhelm the city's ancient sewage systems, because that sort

of thing can really ruin one's brogues. Presumably there's a distinction made on the basis of what the flip-flops in question are made of, given they're worn in parliament (velvet: okay; rubber: no way). And if I darken their door, it'll be in capris and Crocs.

Discipline flourishing democracy

Speaking with the BBC's Jonah Fisher last week, President U Thein Sein reiterated his belief in the importance of the army's ongoing role as the country meanders along the path to becoming a thriving democracy, saying that it will reduce its grip as time goes by. Addressing the matter of constitutional change, U Thein Sein said that he personally has no problem with the idea but that it would obviously be up to the parliament and, if passed, it would then go to a referendum.

"The Tatmadaw [Burmese army] does not get involved with political parties and is only concerned with the national interest," he said. Which is a refreshing statement, until one remembers that holding the constitutionally enshrined veto power does mean the Tatmadaw's role is inextricably linked with the composition of the parliament and party politics, and ensures its role as the sole barrier to breaking the breathtakingly circuitous framework upon which the 2008 constitution is founded.

In brief:

Expat betting ring opens odds based on Bertil Lintner's belief there's a 75-25 split chance of the elections going ahead as scheduled

Household registration law makes it "really hard to hide effectively", says student, whispering from cupboard

Solar Impulse 2 pilots "looking forward to" but "slightly nervous" about onward flight from Mandalay to Chongqing, planning to clearly mark aircraft with stickers of "big suns, peace signs and smiley faces"

Law to limit women to one child every three years "should do the trick", say authorities, dismissing the notion that there is any need to focus on education, health services or empowerment initiatives. "We don't really have enough money for food as it is, let alone birth control," said one IDP woman, "But we'll figure it out. The law's the law. But [this] is really going to impede the Caliphate."

Next week:

House and Garden special liftout: Razor wire or glass-topped fence: Which

Once was Burma...

Archival material courtesy of Pansodan Gallery

First floor, 286 Pansodan, upper block, Kyauktada township



O Wai magazine, February 15, 1972

aggressive security measure is best for your Golden Valley mansion?

Booze ban likely to make foreign workers more productive, could backfire, says study

Journalist in coma after participating in drinking game that involves surreptitiously taking a shot every time someone mentions "backsliding"

at press conference

Number crunch:

9000: Estimated number of new MDR-TB infections per year.

1537: Approximate number of people in Myanmar who received treatment for MDRTB in 2014.

Source: MSF



"After Umbrellagate, experts voice suspicions that the Ministry of Information's 'pisspooor doctoring of images could be more widespread than previously thought" Photo: Mol WebPortal

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Negotiators seek to break impasse on military affairs

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WRANGLING over key military issues has long threatened to block a nationwide ceasefire agreement with Myanmar's various ethnic groups, a key plank of the government's reform program. But negotiators on both sides at the latest round of peace talks this week showed signs of flexibility that could lead to breaking the impasse.

The government, military and negotiators for armed ethnic groups resumed a seventh round of talks in Yangon on March 17 after a series of informal meetings in Chiang Mai.

Even as intense fighting continued in northern Shan State's Kokang region, leaders on both sides spoke of a remarkable opportunity to conclude a ceasefire agreement with the aim of bringing down the curtain on more than six decades of ethnic conflict. But with the country heading to the polls in November, time is running out for President U Thein Sein and ethnic minority leaders to ensure they are the most inclusive elections since independence in 1948.

An official reception held at the end of the opening day of talks saw rebel commanders and senior Tatmadaw officers singing and dancing together on stage, with foreign ambassadors and international peace envoys looking on, somewhat surprised but approvingly.

A draft agreement collapsed at the last round of talks held six months ago due to military issues. "Now we are very cautious not to have a repeat of the September talks," said Salai Lian Hmung, a member of the Nationwide Ceasefire Negotiating Team (NCCT), which is negotiating on behalf of 16 armed groups.

The draft consists of seven chapters that have been discussed since talks began in November 2013



Myanmar Peace Center official U Hla Maung Shwe (left) speaks at a press conference with ethnic negotiators following the conclusion of talks in Yangon yesterday. Photo: Thiri Lu

between the NCCT and the Union Peace-making Work Committee.

During previous rounds, the NCCT insisted that key military issues – such as codes of conduct, troop repositioning and border demarcation – be hammered out and included in a nationwide ceasefire agreement to ensure peace would hold. However, some others, including the Shan State Army-South and its political wing, suggested that, rather than hold up a deal, such issues be deferred to the post-ceasefire stage of political dialogue.

U Hla Maung Shwe, a senior official of the Myanmar Peace Center, confirmed that the Tatmadaw and the NCCT had agreed not to discuss military issues in detail but to leave them for later debate after signing a ceasefire agreement. The government also agreed to let ethnic armed groups keep their weapons until a political agreement was reached that would include issues of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration.

"They agreed to discuss detailed points of security sector reform and the federal union army at the political dialogue," said U Hla Maung Shwe.

Naing Han Thar, lead negotiator for the ethnic groups, said that unlike last September the latest round had achieved positive results. The NCCT has consistently called for the creation of a federal union army but at this round of talks moderated its approach. "Today we said we accept there must be only one army, but there are several parts in the formation of the Tatmadaw. For example, there must be an army in individual states and these armies should be part of the Tatmadaw," he said.

Naing Han Thar said the ethnic forces were unlikely to disarm unilaterally because of a lack of trust between the two sides.

"Right now it is impossible to disarm because we are fighting for 60 years. So we need to build trust first. However, we have planned that ethnic armies have to take responsibility for protecting their respective territory under the Tatmadaw as security forces. We are going to discuss future cooperation in the political dialogue," he said.

Both sides understand that a ceasefire agreement alone cannot guarantee peace. Political dialogue

must begin with 90 days of signing the ceasefire, and the government and armed groups have reached agreement on forming committees to discuss the framework for dialogue and setting out military codes of conduct. No details were given as to who would be involved in the committees.

Salai Lian Hmung said the NCCT itself did not have the authority to sign a national ceasefire agreement. This was up to the ethnic groups' leaders, who would call a conference of the armed groups to decide. He did not say when that would happen.

Observers said the continued reluctance to commit to the ceasefire showed a lack of trust, particularly on the side of the ethnic groups.

"It seems that ethnic armed groups are taking their time to decide, because [the government] talks peace on the table and fights on the ground," said U Aye Maung, chair of the Rakhine National Party.

"If the Tatmadaw declared it wouldn't make any military offensives for maybe one month or two or three weeks and invited all ethnics for political dialogue, then I believe that all would ... certainly join the dialogue."

Pay hike plan delays budget bill approval

PARLIAMENTARIANS have ordered the government to submit a more detailed proposal for civil servant salary increases by today if it wants them to be included in this year's budget bill.

The demand was made on March 20, after the government said it would only reveal exact increases after the budget bill is approved.

The dispute could result in the bill not being approved by the start of the financial year on April 1.

The government has proposed a significant increase to civil servant salaries in 2015-16 that would take its total wage bill above K3 trillion.

But U Saw Hla Tun, secretary of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Bill Committee, said MPs would not approve the proposal without more detail on how much extra each rank would receive.

Until that happens, the bill will not be discussed in parliament, he said.

"Only if we have a detailed list of salary increase rates can the bill committee submit a proposal to parliament to discuss the Union government's budget bill," he said.

He made the comments after Deputy Minister for Finance and Revenue U Lin Aung promised to reveal the salary increase rates "at the right time".

"The Union government will determine the salary increase in accord with the Union Government Law at the right time – after parliament approves the [budget] bill," the deputy minister said.

However, U Maung Toe, secretary of the Joint Public Accounts Committee, said there was no reason to keep the increases under wraps.

"We can't accept keeping civil servant salary rates a secret. If parliament approves the budget bill without exact rates, it will set a dangerous precedent," he said.

U Lin Aung said the government currently spends K2.3 trillion on the wages of 1.4 million employees, including the military, as well as K500 billion a year on pensions for more than 800,000 retired civil servants. – *Htoo Thant, translation by Zar Zar Soe*

Peace teams agree to break as clashes reported in Kachin, Shan

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AFTER six days of chipping away differences over the elusive nationwide ceasefire agreement draft, government and armed ethnic group negotiators yesterday decided to take a breather until the end of the month when they will seek to tie up remaining loose ends.

"We have reached agreements on almost all points, but we will take a break to end the [negotiations] compactly," said U Khum Okkar, a member of Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT).

The Union Peace-making Working Committee (UPWC) and the NCCT held six days of meetings in Yangon from March 17 to 22 to resume the peace draft after talks initially broke down last September. Talks were rebooted amid clashes in Shan State and Kachin State.

Both sides have agreed to all but one of the seven chapters of the NCA draft, with a remaining point of contention focused on a "program for the transitional period," according to U Khum Okkar.

"The main problem is how to deploy our troops during the period before

starting political dialogue and during political dialogue. Both sides have proposed how to post troops, but there are slightly different ideas," he said.

Negotiators also called for the break due to exhaustion from long days of entrenched discussions that ideally will wrap up soon, said NCCT member Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win.

"We don't want to hold an eighth round of talks. That's why both sides decided to conclude on May 30," said Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win.

However, the upbeat mood in Yangon came as the Kachin Independence Army reported heavy fighting with the Tatmadaw in Kachin and northern Shan states last night, including the use of air strikes.

'Jet fighters attacked with guns and dropped at least five bombs at about 3pm.'

La Nan
Kachin Independence Army

La Nan, a spokesperson for the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), told *The Myanmar Times* last night that there had been heavy fighting in Mansi township in Kachin State and Namkham township in northern Shan State on March 21 and 22.

He said the fighting had broken out after the Tatmadaw began deploying troops to areas controlled by the KIA's Brigade 3 on March 17.

"Jet fighters attacked with guns and dropped at least five bombs at about 3pm [on March 22], and then another came back and attacked again at 4pm," he said.

He said shelling of the KIA front lines had begun at 6pm and was continuing through the evening.

Neither the government nor the Tatmadaw had released information about the air strikes or shelling when *The Myanmar Times* went to press.

U Min Zaw Oo, director of the Myanmar Peace Center's conflict negotiation team, said that the KIA and the Tatmadaw had discussed the fighting on March 21, during peace negotiations in Yangon, and agreed to halt the clashes.

"I have heard that senior officers from both sides have been killed in the fighting," he said.



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Ferry death toll increases as parliament demands inquiry



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AS volunteer searchers found the bodies of six more victims of the *Aung Tikon 3* ferry disaster over the weekend, the Amyotha Hluttaw agreed to set up a Union-level inquiry into the sinking.

The death toll now stands at 69, though searchers believe many more bodies are still trapped in the sunken vessel off the coast of Rakhine State.

Members of the Duwunkyel philanthropic organisation, based in Kyaukpyu township, Rakhine State, began their search on March 14, the day after the ferry sank. On March 20 they found the body of a child, and five more bodies on March 22, and buried them all.

Duwunkyel announced yesterday that they would pay a K200,000 reward for the discovery of further remains.

"None of the six we found most recently were claimed by families. Some bodies have been washed up on the beaches of Kyaukpyu township," said

Ko Tun Kyi, secretary of Duwunkyel. He added that he had not seen any government officials searching.

The regional authorities said they had postponed the search because of bad weather.

Although the Rakhine State government has announced that it would pay compensation to the families of the deceased and to the survivors, the recovery teams claimed that the government had taken no responsibility for the disposition of the remains.

A survivor of the disaster, Ko Tun Win, said he believed many more bodies could be under the water. "Most people shut themselves in their cabins while the boat was sinking," he said.

The exact number of passengers is not known, but those who were on board the vessel when it sank say it could be up to 400. Rescuers plucked 169 people from the water after the ferry went down, but the manifest showed only 214 passengers and crew.

Rakhine State Chief Minister U Maung Maung Ohn extended the deadline for the regional government's initial inquiry from March 18 to March 21. However, the investigation commission had not issued a statement at deadline.

On March 19, Rakhine State

representative U Ohn Tin proposed in Amyotha Hluttaw the formation of a Union-level investigation commission, a proposal adopted with support from 126 representatives.

U Ohn Tin told *The Myanmar Times* after the vote that the Union government has a responsibility to investigate the accident as it is responsible for transport. He added that the commission should also decide on compensation for the victims of the disaster.

'The crew should have inspected the vessel before sailing.'

U Ohn Tin
Rakhine State MP

"There is a point on the Kyaukpyu-Myebon route called Naung Taw Gyi, where the waves are often big. The ferry capsized at that point because of a breach in the hull. The crew should have inspected the vessel before

sailing," he said.

Initial claims that bad weather caused the accident were rejected in many quarters, including Parliamentary Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann, who denounced the "lying" explanation. Eyewitnesses say the boat was heavily overloaded.

The water transport office of Toun-gup township, Rakhine State, has reported that the ship was carrying 94.92 tonnes of cargo. But Amyotha Hluttaw representatives heard during the debate on the commission of inquiry that the vessel was actually carrying 134.53 tonnes, based on information from eight goods transportation agents.

U Khin Maung Latt, MP for constituency 6 of Rakhine State, who seconded the proposal for an inquiry, said the Rakhine State commission lacked the funding and the equipment to reach a conclusion in a short time. "That's why I want the Union government to form an investigation commission because they can carry out a broader investigation with adequate funding and technology."

He said the inquiry should focus on reducing demand on the ferry network for passenger transportation.

- Translation by Zar Zar Soe



IN PICTURES

PHOTO: AUNG HTAY HLAING

Activists gather on Inya Bank in Yangon to call for the release of those arrested by police at Letpadan in Bago Region on March 10. Participants held signs with the names of those detained at Tharyarwady Prison and placed lit candles in the shape of a fighting peacock, a symbol of the student movement.

Parliament to begin debate on education law changes

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CHANGES to the controversial national education law that has sparked student protests are to move to the upper house of parliament for debate, with MPs given until late today to register their participation.

Minister for Education Daw Khin San Yee proposed on March 20 that the bill move to debate in the Amyotha Hluttaw following eight sessions of hearings during which politicians, experts and some student activists presented their views on the law passed last September.

U Khin Maung Yee, chair of the bill committee of the upper house, said that the committee's work in reviewing the legislation "mainly" took into consideration a set of 11 demands set out by student representatives of the Action Committee for Democratic Education.

Students had set out their demands while staging a protest march which started in Mandalay in January, with Yangon planned as its final destination.

In an attempt to defuse a growing focus of opposition, the government held consultations with student representatives in February and agreed to their 11 demands.

However, it then angered students by submitting two sets of draft changes to parliament: one put forward by the students, and another drafted by the Ministry of Education.

Students persisted with their protests to maintain pressure on the government until police blocked them outside a monastery in Letpadan, some 90 miles (140 kilometres) north of Yangon, before violently breaking up the rally on March 10, arresting 127 people, including a number of leaders of the hardline All Burma Federation of Student Unions.

In the wake of the crackdown, students from the more moderate

University Students' Union returned to the negotiating table, meeting parliamentarians on March 16. The following day, representatives of the National Network for Education Reform, which helped the students draft the amendments, held talks with MPs.

The 11 demands included involving student and teacher representatives in the legislative process; freedom for students' and teachers' unions; more autonomy in education and self-management for schools; use of mother tongues as language of instruction; free compulsory education up to middle school; and 20 percent of the state budget being allocated for education.

IN BRIEF

Rally condemns police crackdown

More than 400 people took part in a rally in Mandalay on March 21 to condemn the government's crackdown on student protesters at Letpadan in Bago Region.

Led by lawyers and civil society groups, the protest kicked off at 9am. Residents of Sagaing, Mandalay and Kyaukse took part.

"We are demonstrating to denounce the government's violent crackdown, which breached the agreement made with the students. The government must keep the promises they have made," said U Soe Lin, a student activist.

Journalists also took part in the protest, donning black armbands and black brooches to condemn the beating and arrest of reporters by police at Letpadan on March 10.

Among the protesters was the head of Yadanarpon University's student union, Ko Naing Ye Wai, who was detained at Letpadan and later released from Tharyarwady Prison. He called for the release of all those still behind bars.

"Why did the government violently attack student protesters who are only demanding education reform? I wonder whether the government ... is worried what will happen if its people become educated," he said.

- Mg Zaw, translation by Zar Zar Soe

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IN BRIEF

Ethnic media reps seek community broadcasting support

Participants at an ethnic media conference have called on the government to ensure new broadcast regulations support the development of community radio and television.

The statement was released on March 20, at the end of the three-day conference in Haka, Chin State, and was directed at national and regional governments, the Myanmar Press Council (Interim) and international donors.

U Zin Linn, managing director of Burma News International (BNI), which organised the event, said national and regional governments had a responsibility to support ethnic media development.

"We are asking and pushing them for what we want and need, but whether they help or neglect us depends on their dignity," he said.

BNI board member U Naing Kasot Mon said the need for community radio and television in ethnic minority areas had dominated discussions. Participants also focused on the need to broadcast in minority languages, he added.

"The government has not issued a [broadcast] law yet," he said. "But I think community radio will soon be allowed in ethnic areas with the understanding of state governments."

Altogether 150 people attended the conference, including members of the Kachin, Pa-O, Shan, Kayan, Mon, Kayah, Rakhine and Red Shan ethnic groups.

- Nyein Ei Ei Htwe

Ethnic parties raise concerns over general election logistics

Participants in a workshop on March 21-22 expressed fears that limitations to information flow, legal barriers and security and transportation problems could affect the general election scheduled for November.

One speaker at the Bayada Institute organised discussions, U Ko Ni, a member of the National League for Democracy lawyers' network, said the root of the problem lies in the fact that the head of the Union Election Commission, U Tin Aye, is a former member of the ruling USDP party, and was appointed by president U Thein Sein.

"The Commission has full administrative and juridical powers," he said, suggesting bias in favour of the ruling party.

U Myo Yan Naung Thein, director of the Bayada Institute, emphasised the role of observers.

"We will cooperate with the political parties in providing detailed information on voters' lists, and work on monitoring and reporting," he said. - Wa Lone



U Ngai Sak from the Chin League for Democracy (CLD) signs a cooperation agreement on March 21. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

Chin parties to unite against political 'giants'



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NINE of 10 Chin political parties have agreed to cooperate in this year's election to improve their chances of winning seats - and to deprive "giant political parties" of victory.

Following a two-day meeting to discuss their election strategies in Yangon on March 20 and 21, the parties said they would seek to avoid fielding candidates against each other.

Eight parties that attended the meeting signed the agreement, while the Mro/Khami National Solidarity Party agreeing in principle to the proposal. The Zomi Congress for Democracy was the only Chin party that did not attend the talks.

Following the talks, the parties released a statement promising to "cooperate" in the election and to continue their dialogue. They also urged the Union Election Commission (UEC) to

ensure the election, scheduled for November, is free and fair.

The cooperation is being driven by concern - not only in Chin State, but also many other ethnic regions - that having too many candidates from local parties competing against each other will open the door for the National League for Democracy or the Union Solidarity and Development Party to win seats, due to Myanmar's first-past-the-post voting system.

However, participants in the meeting said it would be difficult to negotiate a solution due to the large number of Chin parties. Most other ethnic minority areas feature just two or three local parties.

"There will be friction between [Chin] parties. They need to adjust their policies and build inter-party mutual trust. Now we have agreed in general to cooperate in the election," said U Ngai Sak of the Chin League for Democracy (CLD).

"Not all 10 of the parties will run in all constituencies in Chin State. Some of them may run in just three places," he said, adding that there were still "major challenges" to putting into

practice the in-principle agreement.

Salai Isaac Khen from Gender and Development Initiative (GDI), who moderated the discussion, said participants agreed to meet again in the first week of May to discuss their election plans in more detail.

"It is time for us to cooperate and prevent the reign of giant political parties," he said.

U Zo Zam, chair of the Chin National Democratic Party, said he was concerned at attempts by larger, non-Chin parties to win votes in Chin State.

Referring to a member of his party who recently quit to join the NLD, U Zo Zam said, "We cannot give chances to those adopted sons and daughters of Father Chin."

"We, the real Chin parties, need to dominate the election in order to form a Chin State government. The only way to achieving this is through inter-parties cooperation between us, the Chin parties," said U Zo Zam.

The high number of Chin parties may only be a temporary issue. U Ngai Sak said he expected consolidation in the coming years, leaving a few large parties to fight it out.

Workshop promotes voting for disabled

POLITICAL party members practised voting while confined to wheelchairs or blindfolded on March 19 in a workshop organised by advocates for the rights of disabled people. The aim of the exercise was to demonstrate the practical difficulties many disabled people face when trying to exercise their right to vote.

Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI) official Daw Yu Ya Thu said they wanted electoral authorities to relax or adjust rules that effectively hampered people with disabilities in voting.

"We requested those present to sit in wheelchairs or blindfolded them, so they would know what it felt like to be disabled people trying to vote," she said.

Union Election Commission chair U Tin Aye told reporters in Yangon last month that the UEC would cooperate with local organisations in education and advocacy for the rights of disabled people.

"We will list the names of disabled voters and arrange facilities for them to be able to vote. The UEC will work closely with civil society organisations and community-based organisations to promote disabled people's rights to vote," said U Tin Aye.

During the workshop, attended by the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society, the Karen National Party, the NLD, the USDP and other parties, MILI presented what it is doing to promote the rights for disabled people.

"In other countries, they use Braille lettering for the blind. That's fine for them as most blind people in Western countries are literate," said Daw Yu Ya Thu. "But here, since there are only a few schools teaching blind people, most of them cannot read Braille."

"We have suggested to UEC that blind people can be accompanied by a trusted person who can help them vote," she said.

"Deaf people may have difficulty understanding oral instructions on how to check candidates' lists and where to vote. Pictures should be displayed on the walls of polling booths to help them."

U Kyaw Soe Lin, a central committee member of NLD who attended the workshop, said disabled people should be helped to vote by political parties and the government. "They have the right to vote." - Lun Min Mang

Tatmadaw puts forward surprise resource-sharing motion

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TWO senior military MPs have called for a fairer division of energy resources among the Union government and the states and regions. They said the proposal, submitted as a matter of urgency to Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on March 20, would result in the sharing of electrical power, natural resources and revenue among regions, states and self-administered regions.

The proposal was put forward by Brigadier General Tint San and seconded by Brig Gen Maung Maung. Brig Gen Tint San said the right to

legislate and collect taxes conferred on states and regions by the constitution had not yet been effectively adopted. Regional and state governments had the right to set the amount of agricultural loans, the rate of interest and the repayment period. A regional government with insufficient funds could request a loan from the Union government, but this had not occurred, he said.

For the energy, electricity, mining and forestry sectors, regional governments had to have the right to enact laws governing the grant or revocation of licences and the collection of taxes, but had not done so.

"It is necessary to reduce central control and to adopt power sharing, resource sharing and revenue shar-

'I don't object to the proposal ... but [it] does not contain sufficient facts to justify its urgency.'

U Win Myint
NLD representative

ing with the regional governments," he said, adding that changes in the law could help regions, states and self-administered regions become more developed.

Brig Gen Maung Maung, seconding, said, "It is necessary to reduce central control, by enacting new laws if necessary."

The proposal was approved without objection, but a number of MPs questioned the motivations of the military MPs.

"I don't object to the proposal to divide power and revenues with regional governments. I have agreed to share them. But the proposal does not contain sufficient facts to

justify its urgency," said U Win Myint, the National League for Democracy representative for Patheingyi.

Rakhine National Party leader U Aye Maung called the proposal "superficial", adding, "Power sharing cannot occur without amending section 261 of the constitution. Our country can build peace if we solve this problem after seeking solutions through the negotiation process."

Daw Nan Say Hwa, the MP for Hpa-an township, Kayah State, said regions and states faced substantial losses because regional chief ministers were not locally elected, but appointed by the president.

- Translated by Thiri Min Htun



Volunteers pour molten bronze into the bell's mould inside a pit. Photo: Phyo Wai Kyaw

Volunteers work deep into the night to cast giant bell replica

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MORE than 300 volunteers and artisans worked through the night in Mandalay's Tampawaddy ward on March 19 and 20 to cast a giant bronze bell destined for a pagoda in Tanintharyi Region.

The bronze bell, weighing an auspicious 11,111 viss (18.14 tonnes; 1 viss equals 1.633 kilograms), was cast at 1am on March 20 at the Aung Than Maw bronze workshop in Tampawaddy, which is home to many of the city's traditional craft industries.

"It takes about five hours to cast. We needed many people to help to relay pots of molten bronze [to the mould] so we invited volunteers," U Aung Than Maw said.

"We have to cast the bell at 1am, otherwise we won't be able to stand

the heat. If we do it during the daytime the combination of the sun's heat and the molten metal would be too fierce," he said.

The bell's estimated K300 million price tag was covered by donors to Shwe Taung Sar Pagoda in Dawei to mark the pagoda's 250th anniversary.

He said it would be left in a pit for about a month to ensure

'We have to cast the bell at 1am, otherwise we won't be able to stand the heat.'

U Aung Than Maw
Bell crafter

it is a "perfect" shape. It will then be transported to Dawei by road.

U Aung Than Maw, who has been producing bronze and copper objects for 30 years, said it was the largest bell he had cast, although he had helped his teacher cast another 11,111-viss specimen for a pagoda in Mumbai, India.

In 2011, he cast a bell weighing 5000 viss for a pagoda at Kamarwet village, between Mawlamyine and Thanbyuzayat in Mon State.

"I am so pleased that I could cast this now, before I get too old. I was able to do it because of the training I received from my teachers in the past," he said.

The bell, named *Maha Wizaya Khay Ma Thithala Nate Buta Gaw Ta*, will measure 17 feet in height including its hook, and is a replica of King Tharyarwady's bell, which hangs at Shwedagon Pagoda's Tuesday corner.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun

Draft law to ease organ donor rules



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PROPOSED reform of the Myanmar Body Organ Law could dramatically increase the chances of patients in need of an organ transplant finding a donor, a proponent of the changes said yesterday.

The existing law does not allow a patient to receive an organ from a donor outside their immediate family. The proposed changes, which are being considered by the Pyithu Hluttaw Health Upgrading Committee, would potentially enable anyone to donate - provided they receive no payment.

"The new law will allow ... organ donation without money changing hands," Dr Khin Maung Htay, head of the Department of Nephrology at Yangon General Hospital, told *The Myanmar Times* yesterday at an event in Yangon to mark World Kidney Day.

"Often, patients don't have the same blood type [as their relatives], or [their family member] cannot pass the medical exam," he said.

Under the new rules, proposed donors must be over 18, meet health requirements and be donating of their own free will.

To stop the development of an organ donor market, Dr Khin Maung Htay said a committee would "check and examine" all proposed transplants meet legal requirements before giving approval for an operation.

The current law stipulates a penalty of up to three years' imprisonment and an unspecified fine for anyone caught selling or buying organs or assisting someone to do so.

The relaxation of rules on transplants will mostly affect those in need of kidneys, as few other transplants can be conducted in Yangon. A kidney transplant is required when a person loses their kidney function or when they experience end-stage chronic kidney disease.

Myanmar's kidney transplant program was launched in 1997. By the end of 2014, 56 transplant operations had been performed. Only two hospitals perform kidney transplants - Yangon General Hospital and Mingalardon Military Hospital - and lack of experienced staff limits the number of operations they can undertake, Dr Khin Maung Htay said.

As a result, wealthier Myanmar in need of a transplant often head overseas, where organs can be purchased at private hospitals.

Efforts to reform the law were initiated in 2013. Several leading doctors and medical experts, including Dr Khin Maung Htay, have been outspoken about the need to amend the law, particularly in regard to kidney transplants.

US\$

6800

Current upper limit cost of a kidney transplant in Myanmar, a fee barring many from affording the procedure

Dr Khin Maung Htay said the changes could result in more people receiving transplants in Myanmar, instead of heading overseas.

Cost is likely to remain an issue, however. In Myanmar, people with kidney problems can die not only because finding a donor is difficult but also because transplants are expensive. In Myanmar, the cost ranges from K4-6 million (US\$4500-6800).

At yesterday's event, Dr Khin Maung Htay said the government would in future conduct the operations for free but patients would still be required to cover the cost of post-operative support.

IN BRIEF

Oriental ballooning eyes Rakhine State liftoff

Tourists could have the chance to enjoy balloon trips at Ngapali Beach and Mrauk Oo starting October if aviation authorities give the green light. Rising visitor numbers prompted Oriental Ballooning to expand to new locations.

Oriental has eight balloons, including six in Bagan and one each in Mandalay and Inle Lake, which can carry from four to eight people.

Flights cost US\$380 per person in Bagan and Mandalay and \$420 at Inle Lake. The cost of flights from Ngapali and Mrauk Oo have yet to be established.

"We did test flights in January both at Ngapali and Mrauk Oo. The view is spectacular," Ma Ni Ni Khaing said, adding that the lure of balloon flights could attract more tourists to Rakhine.

Oriental Ballooning was founded in 2013 by Amata Group. It flies British-made balloons and has hired experienced British pilots holding UK commercial balloon pilot licences, said Ma Ni Ni Khaing. - Zaw Win Than



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'People can challenge the mechanisms of oppression'

Democratic Voice of Burma, or DVB, began in 1992 when exiles in Norway began transmitting news and information back home by radio and shortwave into Myanmar. DVB is now based in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from which **U Khin Maung Soe** spoke to *Myanmar Times* senior reporter Nyan Lynn Aung about why media has been one of the most successful areas of reform – and why there is still so far to go

What do you think of the national reconciliation and peace process the Myanmar government has implemented?

I think the national reconciliation process stalled at the phase at which Daw Aung San Suu Kyi reached parliament. It is at a level now where they are still building trust. With the Tatmadaw the main stakeholder in the national reconciliation process, the situation is just about all sides meeting each other. It's the first step of building trust. The process is progressing slowly. I think it is impossible to build trust between the opposition and the Tatmadaw during this presidential tenure.

The National League for Democracy is putting their efforts into trying to amend the constitution. But the Tatmadaw believe that protecting the constitution is their main duty. It is not an easy matter to negotiate. I think tensions will rise higher soon because a referendum will be held in May to amend the constitution.

As for peace process, the situation is the same. It can't go forward. I see the government hasn't yet presented an agreement to ethnic groups that is believable. As for ethnic groups themselves, they seem to believe that they will suffer if they trust the government. In this situation even the nationwide ceasefire agreement can't be signed.

'Media ownership is overwhelmed by those who are familiar with, or related to, those in government.'

I trust the word of one stakeholder in the peace process, who said, "It will be lucky if we can make peace in the next 20 years, given this situation."

If Myanmar's reconciliation and peace processes are so far unsuccessful, what are the determining factors that have been holding them back?

From my point of view, these processes can't be successful. At least we must say we haven't seen any significant result. If these processes succeed, fairly significant results will appear in Myanmar. Hopes will come true in politics, economics, education and so on. But currently there is no hope in any sector.

Examining whether to go forward or step back reveals that the future is not certain. Why this has happened this way is the inability to settle conflicts of interest, I think.

All groups need to make sacrifices, to different degrees. It is not easy for all parties to relinquish their benefits. The ruling government especially, who have gained the most benefits among them, need to dare to sacrifice more. So long as the government dares not give up its benefits, the reconciliation and peace processes can't be



Photojournalists lay down their cameras as part of a silent media protest outside the Myanmar Peace Center on the occasion of a visit by President U Thein Sein on July 12, 2014. The demonstration was held to protest the 10-year jail sentences handed down to 5 *Unity* journalists two days earlier. Photo: AFP

successful.

Let's turn to media reform specifically. How does it look from your perspective? Do you think Myanmar's media sector has really changed or not?

The most significant reforms have come in the media sector. It is good for the public that foreign media are allowed to open offices and collect news in Myanmar. Allowing information to flow freely is essential for a democratic country.

But it is worrying that the government monopolises the media. Moreover, media ownership is overwhelmed by those who are familiar with, or related to, those in government. To develop the sector, the government needs to aid private media, and also needs to not compete in the market itself. For example, it needs to offer aid for the difficult process of setting up a private newspaper. The government can help, from printing to distribution. It is not appropriate that the government is just watching the situation when private newspapers are losing.

It also shouldn't compete in the market with *The Global New Light of Myanmar* and *The Mirror*. They should not snatch up the advertising market. A newspaper publishing with public money should not earn income by printing advertisements of private companies. The state-owned newspapers should not carry

private business ads at all, apart from some ads that are good for the interest of the people.

In the television sector, there is market competition too. I believe there is a drive to lose the private media. I doubt that the government does it intentionally. But there won't be free media if the situation can't be amended.

If there is free media, [government involvement] can't be strong. It is a dangerous situation for establishing a democratic country. So the most suitable thing to do is that the government should transfer its newspapers to the private sector. They shouldn't remain as public-service newspapers.

And if television channels are changed to being public-service, the government should not earn income by running commercial ads. It should operate as public-service only, with separate budgets and separate revenue. If the state-owned television channels accept commercial ads, independent TV channels will face losses. Government-owned media should not do business.

Are you satisfied with the reforms on media since 2011? If not, which sector do you want to point to as needing change?

It goes without saying that the media sector is very important to the country. As I said before, the government has opened up media,

while also seeking to lose independent media. They seem worried that they can't control the media. I have heard that government officials have said media is more powerful than other three estates. The government should not forget the fact that the estates with power can be controlled if media is more powerful than others in a democratic nation.

The media sector can be developed only when a law is enacted which can support independent long-standing media. Currently the future of media is worrisome. If media can't stand strong, the establishment of democracy will fall into disarray.

What surprising or unexpected results of the transition have you seen?

The good thing is that social media is powerful. Because of communication technology and new gadgets, people can access information easily. If we can use this systematically, the country's steps toward democracy will gain momentum, I think. People can challenge the mechanisms of oppression by which dictators hold their power. Social media can help bring to light government mismanagement, corruption, lack of rule of law and mistakes of hlttaw in enacting laws. The people's will can be expressed and public awareness of issues can be increased. Social media can play a significant role in democracy.

– Translation by Thiri Min Htun



Teacher who requested anonymity Falam, Chin State

Over the past four years we have gained some more freedom to express ourselves publicly. A little bit – not full freedom. Our bosses [in the Ministry of Education] now offer a chance for dialects and native languages to be taught in school. This is actually a big change from before.

I can't say there have been big surprises. But four years ago I only expected there would only be a little bit of change. There's certainly more [infrastructure] development and communications [in Chin State].

I want to see a lot more changes in future. The first one is the education system. In Myanmar formal education, we use a "learn by heart" system. Our students can't form their own ideas: They have no chance to be creative because we give them "learn by heart" only.

This is a big problem for our country. The youth are our country's future leaders. They will become older, and they will not be able to stand on their own.

– Bill O'Toole



Daw Ohnmar Sewing shop owner, Thingangyun township

This whole thing kind of happened suddenly. In just a few years, cars filled up the roads following the steep drop in prices. And now you can see phones everywhere. It is very surprising to see everyone having phones whenever I ride buses.

Personally I feel freer in talking about politics. In the past, we never really discussed politics, even in our homes. There is this word *swe si khan ya mal*, which literally translates into "will be harassed", which was often said as a warning to someone who was commenting on political affairs.

The other impact on our family was the accessibility of phones which are a useful tool for communication. My eldest son has now been working in Malaysia for almost six years. We can now talk to him frequently and ask him how he is doing.

One surprising change was the religious conflicts. As I learned, the majority population of this country had a bad impression of Muslims in past. But I never anticipated these killings and riots.

– Nay Zaw Aung Win



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

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

Since then, an unprecedented era of

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

Over the past four years, the joy of freedom has brought impatience for more; at the same time, new challenges have arisen over where to go from here. Some hurdles have been handled

well; others not so well. Held back by endemic poverty, ongoing conflicts and numerous other limitations, Myanmar democracy remains, at best, a work in progress.

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

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

– Staff

‘Five years ago, people were afraid of politics’

In a frank and wide-ranging interview, **Sai Aik Paung** – chair of the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (also known as Kyar-Phyu, or White Tiger) – talks to *Myanmar Times* reporter Lun Min Mang about how arms continue to exert pressure on how politics is done in the state, how minority parties have banded together to contest 50 seats at the national level, what’s needed for the national ceasefire to be signed and why ethnic people aren’t getting their fair share of profits from economic development in their areas

How is the SNDP preparing for the coming general election this November?

We are going to run in 64 constituencies: nine townships in Kachin State, five in Sagaing Region, three in Mandalay Region, three townships in Kayah State and 43 townships in Shan State. Also, with recently added extra constituencies, the total number may be between 60 and 70. But we will not run in the two townships of Kokang area [Laukkai and Kon-kyan]. We will run in one township of Wa region and three townships in Pa-O areas, as many Shan live in these areas.

In previous interviews with media, you have claimed your party will be able to form the State government by winning the majority of seats in the election. But there are also other large parties contesting in Shan State, like the USDP, the NLD and the SNLD. Why do you feel the SNDP has the edge?

Let me tell you. There were only about 1000 SNDP members in 2010. Today our the party members have increased to numbering 400,000 or more. During my recent visit to Linkhay and Loi Leng districts, thousands of my supporters welcomed me. I’m certain we will win 100 percent in the coming election.

Five years ago, people were afraid of politics. But the conditions have changed. Kyar-Phyu is the popular party now in Shan State. There are 107 seats in Shan State parliament. Even if we win 54 seats, we can form the State government.

Do you mean you don’t need to worry about those parties? Do you mean they are weak?

The USDP? They are weak. The NLD? Maybe a few [seats] in Taunggyi and Kalaw. In the 2012 by-election, NLD only lost to us. They ran in 44 seats

and won 43 seats. The only one seat they lost was to us.

Vice President U Sai Mauk Kham went to Lashio on April 1, 2012. He was campaigning there. Then Daw Suu went there, too, and to Theinni township. She was also persuading the public to vote for her party. I went there on March 28. The NLD beat the USDP by 11 votes. But our party dominated them both by 1700 votes.

The failure to unify the two best-known Shan parties [the SNDP and the SNLD] was a major concern for Shan people, and attempts to merge the two parties into one continue to be unsuccessful. What do your supporters think of the issue? Do they want separation or unification?

We have thousands of supporters. Our party is able to do so many things for people. While the SNDP is inside the parliament and even in the government body, the other party [the SNLD] has only a few supporters. That big difference is one problem that prevents us from uniting.

But they also have connections with the SSPP [Shan State Progressive Party, or Wan Hai] – they are allies. So, the armed party forced SNDP supporters in Maing Shue, Tang Yan, Mon Yang and Namtu not to support us. They even forced some representatives from our party to get out of the SNDP. Members are afraid because they have arms. We have strong evidence of this.

Will Shan people suffer or pay the price from the two Shan parties failing to unite?

I don’t think so. We ran in previous elections and we are a working party. They [SNLD] may have some representatives who left us and joined them in some townships ruled by the SSPP. But in the rest of the areas, they do not have coverage, and Shan people need suffer nothing.



Photo: Lun Min Mang

Has the SNDP formed campaign committees? Have the committees prepared candidate lists?

We have chosen on the basis of townships. Here we have chosen five candidates per township. Some townships have sent more than five names, but they will be filtered down and only the best-suited will be nominated by our party.

In the selection process, we will choose only those who want to serve people. At the same time, we are doing a lot of leadership training for the candidates.

How many members have left the SNDP? Has this harmed the party?

About 10 representative moved to the SNLD, but it hasn’t harmed the SNDP. And the parliamentary term is gradually coming to an end. Even Shan State parliament calls its regular meetings only once every three months.

Does the party have any plans to run at the national level? If you do, how many constituencies will you run in?

Yes – we have the Federal Union Party (FUP). That’s us. There are 21

parties in the National Brotherhood Federation (NBF). Of these, a Central Executive Committee (CEC) member from each party is selected to the FUP. The FUP will run at the national level. I think the FUP will run in nearly 50 constituencies.

The SNDP is a member of the CSSU (Committee for Shan State Union). What is the purpose of being a member of this group? Have you received any warning from the Union Election Commission (UEC) due to the fact that the CSSU includes some armed ethnic groups, such as the Restoration Council of Shan State-Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) and the Shan State Progressive Party-Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA)?

Our involvement in the CSSU is to participate in post-peace political dialogue. Even the president and leaders from some armed ethnic groups signed the Deed of Commitment for National Reconciliation on Union Day last February 12. Political dialogue needs a wide variety of ideas and input. That’s why we are part of the CSSU. Even the RCSS has signed a ceasefire

with with the government.

Ethnic armed groups want some guarantees of post-peace political dialogue in the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) before they will sign it. How do you think this should be handled?

At this time, signing the NCA is not yet certain. But conditions are unpredictable. Politics can change at any time. If the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) signs the NCA, then other groups like the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) will follow it. If so, the NCA can be signed and then political dialogue can be continued successfully.

The government and developer companies are planning to build a very large dam on the Thanlwin (Salween) River near Mongton. There was strong reaction when people heard that the share allocation would be 45 percent each for Thailand and China, and just 10pc for Myanmar. What are your thoughts?

The companies came to us beforehand – the Thailand, Chinese, Myanmar and EIA/SIA [environmental and social impact assessment] consultancy companies. I asked, “What percentage of your deal is with the Union government for share allocation?” They answered 10pc. Then I asked, “How much for Shan State?” They had no answer. I told them to review this.

We have examples in Shan State. Some townships and villages directly affected by projects still have not received satisfactory compensation.

Look at Kayah State. They have the Lawpita dam. But Loikaw does not have regular electricity.

Ethnic people have kept these things in mind since the previous regime government. From now on, we cannot let this happen. It is time for them to review their plans.



Photo: Supplied

Ko Phyo Thit Lu
LGBT rights educator, Color Rainbow

Our organisation was first based on Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. Two years ago the organisation came to Yangon. During these years, it is true that the situation of rights for LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender – people has improved.

During the past two years, we have been able to transparently hold instructional classes for the LGBT group, as well as occasions like the &Proud LGBT Film Festival. We’ve even conducted programs about sex education and related issues for the general public. Presently, the public sees us and tolerates us. Along these lines, we can generally act openly in public.

But our nation itself hasn’t changed unexpectedly. For example, we can only

organise and stimulate discussion among the public. We haven’t seen any discussion or debate within government organisations or hluttaw. I haven’t seen much of an enormous development for LGBT people. We don’t have any form of participation in the national policy sector or among the decision-makers.

Personally, my situation used to be that I didn’t dare speak to my parents about the fact that I am interested in men. But within this transition period during the past two years, those like me have gained a lot of understanding and couples now dare to walk in public holding hands together. Even I am able to speak out openly to my family that I am a gay and I like a man.

– Nandar Aung



When words are hard to say, actions may speak louder

In this exclusively translated extract from his book *Pyan-Le-Yin-Gyar-Sait-Ye Hnit Myanma Naing Ngan Ye Atway Amyin* (Reconciliation and political views), Min Ba Htoo – a retired Union minister writing under a pen name – ponders the mechanisms of reconciliation

HOW many unresolved conflicts have arisen in Myanmar? How long have they lasted? How much have we had to strive just for ceasefires, which are only a small step in the process of solving armed conflict? Why have unplanned-for obstacles and hindrances appeared? Why has the democratic transformation process not received as much popular support as it deserves?

There is only one answer: because all relationships are not yet founded on cooperation. That's why reconciliation is needed.

Some short-sighted people say a national ceasefire would be a milestone of national reconciliation. But the peace process and the reconciliation process are not one and the same. Reconciliation may be included in a peace process, but cannot be replaced by it. Similarly, the national peace process can support reconciliation, but can't bring it about by itself.

Reconciliation is related to the past, present and future. When societies have been wounded severely in the past, it is good for them to enjoy peace under a ceasefire. But it is not a guarantee for the future. The people's support can only be won when pains from the past are healed and guarantees can be given that their injuries will never happen again.

There is no step-by-step method for reconciliation. It must be achieved moment-to-moment, guided by the general conception of reconciliation this column has already discussed. Letting out feelings may hurt, like cleaning old wounds. But medicine is effective



Photo: Thiri Lu

only when we can tolerate the pain of healing. That means forming a new relationship between past enemies.

Internationally, choosing a way forward that is suitable for a transformation in a specific set of circumstances is called using an individual mechanism. The mechanism includes grieving, apologising, forgiving, dedicating, allowing development of opposing opinions, empathising with opposing opinions, accepting, recognising, cooperating and other mental struggles.

Each individual mechanism recognises the importance of victims opening up about their stories. Speaking out about suffering to prove it happened helps diminish ongoing suffering. It can also help lead people toward appropriate treatment as necessary.

The process also has a

cumulative effect: one person or society which confronts past pain will spur and reassure others who have undergone similar experiences. The expression of a victim is considered an expression of a whole society.

Of course, apologising, forgiving and dedicating are difficult to do. Direct apologies may be more difficult. There are other ways to proceed if the truth and reconciliation commission wishes.

There are also ways of expressing feelings through physical gestures, ways of behaviour appropriate to particular cultures and belief systems. Expressing forgiveness through physical gestures is easier for former enemies and easier to accept as sincere than spoken equivalents.

Not to say that physical gestures are more important than words or

letters. Rather, physical gestures can be substituted effectively if other ways prove too difficult.

For instance, the friendly close greeting offered by the president recently to ethnic armed leaders helps set the appropriate tone of reconciliation.

Still, caution and self-awareness are necessary. Particularly delicate are differences of power and economic status: Weaker groups may demand a larger share of power and economic resources. If stronger groups are not willing to allow that, attempts at reconciliation could have the opposite effect, driving the parties further apart.

Most important is the enthusiasm, determination and good intentions of the truth and reconciliation commission, which can work to reasonably resolve such worrying situations.

– Translation by Kyawt Daryl Lin



When to say you're sorry

Min Ba Htoo looks at power imbalances and the delicate matter of timing

Frictions between those of different races, beliefs and backgrounds have escalated into extreme cruelty and much spilled blood in many parts of the world, including Cambodia, Rwanda and Yugoslavia. In those areas, after the violence subsided, the wounded nations turned to truth and reconciliation commissions as a mechanism to prevent a cycle of revenge violence. Seeking forgiveness between all parties, they worked to build their countries anew, healing their psychological trauma.

Is this possible in Myanmar? Or would the road to forgiveness touch too sensitive a nerve?

We have to be aware that forgiveness can change the balance of the power. Israeli psychologist Rafael Moses once said that Israel rejected the call of the Palestine people to recognise and accept their suffering because that might become not only an invitation for more such claims, but also impact the official existence of Israel.

Those who committed an injustice are supposed to have the upper hand in conflict-solving, when begging for forgiveness. Whether or not they have the upper hand currently, they did when the offences were committed. And if those apologising only do so when they are reduced to having no power whatsoever, no one will likely value the apology very much.

When an apology is made is therefore as important as how it is made.

When reconciliations are conducted between societies, the leader of the society which committed a mistake is normally responsible for imploring the other side for forgiveness. However, those injured could deny the apologise the authority to speak for the whole society.

Or, if the leader appears to be apologising out of necessity or self-interest, the apology may be perceived as not coming from real regret or sorrow, and it may be rejected as mere pretence.

Indeed, it is often difficult to know if requests for forgiveness are expressions of real regret or of political stratagem. For instance, if discussions are held for reconciliation, peace and apology-seeking are held only when elections are in the near future, the honesty of the person giving the apology could come under question.

Even if an apology is given right after some mistake was committed, it could be misunderstood as a way to prevent more severe retaliation or reaction. If so, pain, not fully healed, might fester and grow, to be handed down through generations. Though it is possible in some cases, time does not in fact heal all wounds. If a case is not severe, forgiveness could be asked of children or descendants of the aggrieved person. But in severe cases the opposite is usually true: The first generation suffers inconsolably, then, when the next generation learns about the past, they tend to decry and blame the oppressors more severely for the violent cruelties done to their parents. In some countries, subsequent generations have to face the ethical question of whether they have the right to forgive wrongdoing on their parents' behalf, given that they themselves have not suffered directly.

– Translation by Kyawt Daryl Lin

Book Review

Myanma-Naing-Ngan-Yay Let-Shi Achay-Anay hnit Kyun-Dawt Amyin (The Way I See It: Myanmar and its evolving global role)

Author: Colonel Hla Min (retired)
Published: December 2014 (sixth edition)
Publisher: Ywet Sane Publishing House

TWO librarians from Tun Foundation Library in Yangon recommended this book to me as a must-read: They said the author had served in Military Intelligence under former Senior General Than Shwe, but that the book was quite balanced in reporting the events of that tumultuous period. I found the same: In fact, this 194-page Myanmar-language book was engaging and tough to put down.

Detained in 2004 together with his MI colleagues after then-prime minister General Khin Nyunt was purged and put under house arrest, Colonel Hla Min was released in October 2011 after seven years in prison.

The book's 42 chapters cover a variety of topics, ranging from "Why U Khun Sa suddenly relinquished the drug trade and chose to give in to his arch enemy without pre-conditions" to "human rights problems and democracy" to the meaning of the word "Rohingya".

On the latter subject, the author refers to two articles – by former ambassador Derek Tonkin, and by Rick Heizman – which describe the etymology of the controversial term in detail. The findings – also mentioned in the government report published in the aftermath of 2012 violence in Rakhine – state that, for Bengalis living in the south of Chittagong,

Bangladesh, during the colonial period, Rakhine State was called "Rohin Maloke", with "Rohin" meaning "Rakhine" and "Maloke" meaning "country". "Gya" meant "going to



live". The word "Rohingya", the book states, therefore referred to those "going to live in Rakhine country", meaning workers who crossed the border only for seasonal work. It is a geographic or employment description, the author says, not an ethnicity.

Another chapter of interest is the author's response to those outside the country who accuse Myanmar of discriminating on the basis of religion. Of Myanmar's nearly 52 million people, 89 percent are Buddhist, 6pc are Christian, 4pc are Muslim and 1 percent are Hindu. Citing data collected in 2002, the author states that Myanmar has 50,000 monasteries, 3265 churches, 2266 mosques and 618 Hindu temples. This means one monastery for every 1000 Buddhists, one church for every 75 Christians, one mosque for every 150 Muslims and one temple for every 30 Hindus. He argues these ratios indicate that no such discrimination is at work.

The book also includes a number of historic and rare photographs, from atrocities in the aftermath of the 1988 general strikes to child soldiers serving with ethnic armed groups.

It's a recommended read for those interested in the history and political affairs of Myanmar.

– Myo Lwin



The party line

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

Shan Nationalities Democratic Party

Formed: 2010

Hluttaw seats: **Amyotha 4, Pyithu 18**

U Ye Tun, Pyithu Hluttaw representative for Hsipaw

NATIONAL reconciliation means reconciling national ethnic groups with military leaders following the conflicts which resulted from the former dictatorial regime's forbidding of democracy and human rights.

The ex-military government members who are important leaders in each hluttaw and the Union Solidarity and Development Party represent the side of the Tatmadaw. On the side of the national ethnic people are the national ethnic political parties, the major opposition party the National League of Democracy and other democratic parties.

Thus, as soon as the Tatmadaw relinquishes their dictatorial regime and the ruling system can be truly changed with elected representatives, that will be already a step on the right path to solving the problem of national reconciliation. But that is just a step and won't solve all problems of reconciliation.

As long as the reasons for the problems of disunity which have been happening in Myanmar politics are not understood, reconciliation will remain difficult to solve. In fact the disunity started in 1962, not 1988. The Tatmadaw answered the question

“why did the Tatmadaw take over the country?” by saying it was to prevent the disunity of the Union or “to prevent the use of the federal system”. After 1962, the role of the Tatmadaw grew and grew because of the civil war, and that is the best reason ever not to hand over power.

Thus, the following procedures are necessary, and must be performed step by step according to current data if we are to achieve complete national reconciliation.

- 1) To hold free and fair multi-party system elections.
- 2) To amend the constitution by the government, the Tatmadaw and the hluttaw to make national ethnic groups have long-term trustworthy unity and permanent peace and be able to build a true federal union system. Ceasefires with armed ethnic groups should continue alongside the amendment process.
- 3) For the Tatmadaw to leave parliament when permanent peace is gained and there is nothing to be worried about anymore.

In other words, to remove prescriptions about the Tatmadaw occupying leading political roles, which is not in harmony with democracy, and to amend section 436. The call to amend 436 has raised tensions between the Tatmadaw representatives and others, and even with Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann. That's why it has been suggested that national reconciliation should not begin with amending 436, because tensions between the Tatmadaw representatives and other elected representatives rose for proposals to amend 436 were made.

In the democracy transition, free and fair elections are major. It is important that the hluttaws are formed with representatives of the people, whether or not democratic practices are used to form the government, the legislation and the opposition government.

The 2010 election were held only by changing policy, not by changing participants. Not including the opposition was not fair.

The 2012 by-elections were considered fair though. Inside

parliament, Speaker U Shwe Mann of the Pyithu Hluttaw urged everyone to collaborate or oppose together, as necessary for the sake of the nation and the citizens, and not to hold to patriotism, nationalism, localism or partyism.

Also in practice, he arranged for representatives not from the USDP to be able to propose and discuss initiatives in the hluttaw. This fact is an important step in the hluttaw leading to the national reconciliation.

There was a time in parliament when the Tatmadaw representatives could discuss and propose their own opinions regarding amendments or legislation. But currently the Tatmadaw representatives are in a situation of unfriendliness toward other representatives, because they only discuss matters approved by the president's views, and they are replaced and changed often.

Although there are reasons to point out that the government's suppression of the student protests with severe beatings and destroying vehicles by police and civilians wearing red armbands is not legal, there are also reasons to suggest breaking up the crowd was not

wrong. Demonstrating without requesting a permit is breaking the law, and the law is what everyone must follow. If a law is not fair and not necessary for the people, that must be changed in parliament. In a democratic system it is inappropriate as such to say, “This law cannot be followed because it is not fair.” The rule of law is essential for democracy.

National reconciliation is everyone's duty. However, leaders of the transition have to discuss systematically with all stakeholders to make them understand what should be done. It is necessary to put the priority on the nation rather than any individual, and for all involved to be honest.

In the coming 2015 election, the NLD party has the potential to win nationwide. However, they may not win by such a large margin as in the 1990 election and the 2012 by-elections. If the result comes via a free and fair election as the people expect, the government accepting the result with open-mindedness would be an important part in national reconciliation.

— Wa Lone, translation by Kyawt Darly Lin

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Business



A worker transports a bag of SCG cement. Photo: Boothee

SCG to open Yangon showroom in May



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LARGE Thai firm Siam Cement Group (SCG) will open its first Myanmar showroom at 10 Mile in May, according to its country director Chana Poomee.

It aims to showcase products to its partners and dealers, while architects, developers and home owners will be able to explore a variety of building materials, he said at a press conference last week.

SCG is also developing a training program to educate dealers

on product use and construction technology, while the company's local authorised dealers will also receive improved product booths.

"SCG is committed to enhance the expertise of the dealer network and empower them for long-term competitiveness," he said.

MILLION US\$

385

Estimated cost of SCG's Mon State cement plant

The firm has also branched beyond cement by selling products for walls, roof and partitions in the country.

SCG has bet heavily on Myanmar, with construction of its first cement plant in the country now under way.

Chana Poomee said the plant in Mon State is 30 percent complete, with total expenditures coming to 12.4 billion baht (US\$385 million). It is expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2016.

He also highlighted the firm's work in a variety of CSR activities such as public health, educational support to students and community-building activities, including a facelift of the world's largest reclining Buddha at Win Sein Taw Ya monastery in Mon State.

Early days for debt market as budget looks for finance

AYE THIDAR KYAW
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THE growing budget deficit will require more domestic loans to the government over the next few years, increasing strain on local debt markets, according to experts.

While authorities are attempting to boost tax collection efforts in a bid to cut the deficit, which may grow to over 5 percent of GDP this year, it is likely that debt financing will continue to be required to meet budget needs.

The Central Bank of Myanmar restarted auctions of government bonds this year for the first time in the civilian government era, though had previously conducted debt sales.

Finance Minister U Win Shein said the ministry routinely rounds out the government budget with use of loans from domestic sources.

The government owed domestic loans worth K10.8 trillion (US\$10.4 billion) as of September last year, an increase on K9.94 billion in 2011-12. Foreign debt is currently worth about \$9.4 billion, according to statistics from the Ministry of Finance.

"We need to control both foreign and domestic loans, generating more revenue, increase income from state economic enterprises, and be cautious about using this effectively," he said last week, according to state-owned media.

U Win Shein added the government plans to reduce some spending by ministries and also try to receive more concessional loans to fund government debt, rather than relying on loans on commercial terms.

The main hope, however, rests on tax receipts, which the Ministry of Finance says should be the major method of meeting the budget deficit.

Kanbawza bank senior adviser and presidential economic adviser U Than Lwin said there are many ways to cut a budget deficit, such as reducing spending, increasing earnings, foreign loans or printing more money.

"These methods should be used correctly and adjusted to the time and situation of the country," he said.

U Than Lwin said there is a lag from generating more revenue through increasing tax collection or selling bonds, particularly as tax avoiders tender to be harder-to-track small enterprises and border traders.

Over-reliance on printing money had created problems in the past, and it is important there are checks and balances on the money supply.

"The Central Bank should have authority to obstruct the budget deficit to some extent," he said.

The Central Bank is also in charge of developing the domestic bond market, though interest has been slow to develop, partly due to the difficulty of offering high-enough yields.

"The interest rates haven't been attractive for banks, but on the other hand the government would owe a lot of money to the public if they change to an attractive rate," he said. U Than Lwin added there should be some changes to help develop the capital markets.

Other experts say they are optimistic about the growth of capital markets in the coming years.

While Myanmar's markets lag most international markets, plans for new rules and the start of a stock exchange in 2015 ought to help the markets grow, said economist U Hla Maung.

"We hope these new functions will be a solution to avoid printing money, which has been the difficulty for the government for many years."

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Dated. 23 March 2015

BG and Woodside to invest more than \$1 billion after PSC



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UK-BASED BG Group and Australia's Woodside Energy have committed to investing more than US\$1 billion in four offshore blocks.

The two firms and their local partner signed Production Sharing Contracts with Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise last week, allowing the companies to begin exploration and eventually production at the blocks, which they won in a 2013 tender.

The two international oil companies will invest US\$545.5 million in the two shallow water blocks and \$535.1 million in the two deepwater blocks.

They will also pay \$82.4 million in signature bonus and \$3.7 million as a data fee for the four blocks in

the offshore Rakhine basin, according to a statement from the Ministry of Energy.

"The Rakhine basin is an emerging oil and gas province that fits very well with Woodside's proven capabilities in deepwater exploration and development," said the firm's vice president of global exploration Phillip Loader in a press release.

"We have planned to commence an active program of exploration in the region in 2015 and beyond."

Woodside holds 55 percent and 45pc respectively of AD-5 and A-7, with non-operational interests held by BG and local partners Myanmar Petroleum Exploration and Production (MPEP).

BG is the operator in two other blocks, AD-2 and A-4, in which Woodside holds a stake.

The two foreign firms have partnered with MPEP, which is affiliated with MPRL, one of Myanmar's best-known oil and gas firms, owned and helmed by Myanmar national U

Moe Myint.

"MPEP looks forward to the establishment of knowledge transfer opportunities for our national staff to further enhance their capabilities concerning offshore exploration," he said.

With the Production Sharing Contracts now signed, the companies must carry out environmental and social impact assessments, as well as carrying out 3D seismic acquisition campaigns.

The blocks are located near Rakhine State. A-4 covers 2200 square kilometres (849 square miles), A-7 covers 8200 square km, AD-2 some 8000 square km, and AD-5 over 10,000 square km.

The signing of offshore Production Sharing Contracts between Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise and the international and local firms that won the rights to them have been under way since December. A total of 12 of the 20 Production Sharing Contracts have been inked to date.

Solar Impulse 2 makes its Mandalay landing

BUSINESS 14



Merkel and Tsipras to face off in Berlin talks on Greece's future

BUSINESS 17

Exchange Rates (March 22 close)

Currency	Buying	Selling
Euro	K1135	K1140
Malaysia Ringgit	K278	K281
Singapore Dollar	K772	K775
Thai Baht	K31.3	K31.4
US Dollar	K1075	K1080



Some members of the public and government officials have expressed concern that nearby development could crowd out views of Shwedagon Pagoda. Photo: Boothee

Changes to five projects mulled by YCDC

Myanmar Investment Commission and Myanmar Engineering Society have weighed in on possible changes for 5 large construction projects that have been paused in Dagon township, and it is now up to Yangon City Development Committee to produce a master plan on the situation



MYAT NYEIN AYE

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YANGON City Development Committee is now putting together a master plan on five paused construction projects after two other official bodies weighed in with recommendations, according to government officials.

The five were initially suspended in late January following concern from some members of the public and government officials that the height of the projects may block the view or affect the foundations of Shwedagon Pagoda, which is about 500 metres (1640 feet) to 1.5 kilometres away from most of the five sites.

Authorities have since been inspecting project sites – first Myanmar Engineering Society, which is an industry group of professionals, which then passed its recommendations on to Myanmar Investment Commission and now to Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC).

Although the five projects are at different stages of development, some of them have previously received approvals from Myanmar Investment Commission and other government bodies, meaning in some instances the checks amount to re-examinations of their plans which have been approved.

Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) secretary U Aung Naing Oo said the commission has already received suggestions from Myanmar

Engineering Society, with the main point that piling should not be conducted too deeply.

“The suggestion after the technical inspection was that piling should not be too deep at the five large project areas,” he said. “In general, without piling deeply, it is difficult to build tall buildings.”

U Aung Naing Oo said there was no discussion about the height of the buildings, and he added that so far the developers have responded positively to the suggestions from the experts.

MIC has now transferred its suggestions to YCDC, which must give final approval for the projects.

“We will work together with YCDC to analyse these projects, so we are working on drawing up a master plan,” he said.

The five projects include Dagon City 1 by Marga Landmark, Dagon City 2 by Thu Kha Yadanar, a Shwe Taung project, Shwe Taung Hyday project and Adventure Myanmar.

Representatives from Marga Landmark said it respects the due diligence undertaken by MIC and Myanmar Engineering Society (MES), adding the firm has been compliant with the requirements initiated by MES.

“We are confident that MIC has also found the plans of Dagon City 1 consistent with what has been approved and in accordance with the current laws and regulations,” it said in a statement to *The Myanmar Times*. “So far, Dagon City 1 has not been required by MIC or MES to make revisions or changes to the master plan previously approved by the relevant authorities including YCDC.”

“We firmly believe that we will

satisfactorily comply with the recommendations contained in the MES report,” it added.

The firm had previously cleared several regulatory hurdles, and submitted its Phase 1 plans to YCDC on September 22, 2014.

“All works and preparations have been conducted in accordance with the approved plans,” it said.

Plans for Dagon City 1 call for the project to be under 190 feet, or about 12 storeys. Past that limit, separate approval is required as the project is classified as a high rise.

Some of the other four projects may be asked to make adjustments based on MES recommendations.

U Thoug Htike Min, chair of Thu Kha Yadanar, the company behind Dagon City 2, said the MES has asked his project to move back somewhat from Shwedagon Pagoda, a request which he said he will comply with.

The firm has also been given the go-ahead to start work on the property's boundary to facilitate water flow, which would be a bigger problem if left until rainy season.

“We will start construction of the boundary lines for the projects very soon to facilitate water flow,” he said.

With MES and MIC having made their recommendations, the ball is now in YCDC's court.

U Than Htay, head of the Department of Engineering (Buildings) at YCDC, said analysis of the situation will continue. He added that while YCDC has not set a firm date to finish its analysis and put together its master plan, it should be carried out quickly – though a developer

said the report is expected in four weeks.

“We are continuing with our study and we will try to quickly give suggestions to the regional government so they can decide. The developers have leased the land from the government so they have already paid quite a bit for the leased land,” said U Than Htay. “If our analysis takes too long, it can affect their business.”

Since a final decision rests with higher authorities than YCDC, the committee can only pass on its recommendations following the analysis.

‘We will work together with YCDC to analyse these projects, so we are working on drawing up a master plan.’

U Aung Naing Oo
Myanmar Investment Commission

“We haven't given a permit for these projects to build high. All projects have just been allowed based on their general proposal,” said U Than Htay.

He added that customers who bought certain units in some of the projects should be concerned.

“Now they have a worry,” he said. “The developers should sell units

only on the lower levels before they receive a permit.”

Deputy department director U Nay Win said the projects are still paused, adding they will continue to be halted until a solution comes out.

“YCDC already has rules and regulations for the Shwedagon Pagoda area,” he said. “Projects need to be inspected to ensure they are complying with the YCDC rules.”

Marga Landmark said in a statement it has been responsive to the requirements of YCDC, and will work with relevant departments on detailed executive of the plans of Dagon City 1 according to recommendations contained in the MES report as well as current laws and regulations.

“Marga Group has faith in Myanmar's legal system and the government's efficiency and consistency in implementing policies, being one of the main factors that support Marga's decision of investing in Myanmar. We also have faith in MIC and YCDC in respecting the legal rights of foreign investors and in supporting and facilitating their execution and operation,” it said.

It added it has abided by the law and calls for all individuals and organisations to respect its legal rights.

“We welcome an open dialogue in order to bring a sustainable mixed-use development of world-class standards to Myanmar and to continue to promote the economic development of this country,” it said.

– Additional reporting by
Jeremy Mullins

Solar Impulse 2

Solar plane drops in on world tour



CATHERINE TRAUTWEIN

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SOLAR Impulse 2 landed in Mandalay late on March 19, greeted by hundreds – including President U Thein Sein and dancers in an elephant costume – out to take a look at the first solar plane to fly around the world.

The aircraft depends entirely on solar power and requires no fuel, and initially left Abu Dhabi on March 9. It finished the 13-hour journey to Mandalay from the Indian holy city Varanasi on March 19, and is to take a few days' break before travelling on to Chongqing in China – though being solar-powered, this is weather-permitting.

Its stopover in Myanmar's second-largest city has generated buzz around renewable energies in the country, where electrification rates hover around 34 percent, according to recent government estimates.

The plane had travelled from Varanasi, India, piloted by Solar Impulse chair and initiator Bertrand Piccard. He told *The Myanmar Times* during the 13.5-hour flight that the Mandalay landing held special significance for him. Seventeen years prior the pilot had come down into the country on a failed attempt at circling the earth by balloon.

Solar Impulse 2's journey to Myanmar started when President U Thein Sein and other officials visited Switzerland last August, and culminated in an evening landing at Mandalay International Airport. The plane's pilots are advocates for green energy. Having said renewables can lead to social cohesion, peace and prosperity

Attendees at a March 20 press event in Mandalay spoke about the impact the flight could have on spurring greener living.

"I firmly believe that this Solar Impulse 2 flight will mobilise public enthusiasm in favour of technologies that will reduce dependence on fossil fuel and oil," said deputy transport minister U Zin Yaw. "I can say that this Solar Impulse 2 visit can be regarded as one of the milestones signifying Myanmar's re-entry in the international community."

Swiss ambassador to Myanmar Christoph Burgener said the plane's landing made him feel as if he had been "beamed into the future", and represented its flight over Myanmar landmarks like Bagan as a symbolic picture of the past meeting the future. He also spoke about young people in Myanmar being responsible for carrying the clean technology mantle, as the pilots would meet with about 800 students from three universities during their time in Mandalay.

'I firmly believe that this Solar Impulse 2 flight will mobilise public enthusiasm in favour of technologies that will reduce dependence on fossil fuel and oil.'

U Zin Yaw

Deputy energy minister

"You will be talking with the generation that has grown from important challenges and has to realise the vision of this country: national reconciliation, equity, and sustainable and

Solar Impulse pilot Bertrand Piccard (centre) gestures as he walks with President U Thein Sein. Photo: AFP



Solar Impulse 2 on tour

World tour to promote alternative energy



Solar Impulse 2 at rest in a purpose-made hangar in Mandalay airport.

Photo: Catherine Trautwein

environmentally friendly prosperity for all," he said. "Solar energy in particular is a democratic resource. The sun shines for everyone."

While Myanmar has made significant reforms since 2011, it faces continuous challenges around quality of life, especially for the majority of people living in rural areas, who often live without access to electricity.

Mr Piccard said the last and best adventures today attempt to improve people's quality of life – something renewable energies can do in spades.

"Renewable energy stands for social cohesion, peace and development. This is what makes us fly around the world all day and night," he said. "It is so important to inspire a lot of people everywhere to give access to solar energy, to energy-efficient technologies, in order not only to save the environment but also to create jobs, to make profit on industry, to sustain growth, to develop quality of life that human beings are entitled to."

During his flight, Mr Piccard made more energy than he consumed, according to Solar Impulse co-pilot, co-founder and CEO André Borschberg.

While the team has chosen flying in a solar-powered plane as a way to promote awareness around renewable energies, their aim has not been to work toward a commercial

airliner that runs only on the sun. On achievability of solar-powered commercial flight, Mr Piccard said he would be "crazy to say yes and stupid to say no".

But Solar Impulse 2's technology doesn't just apply to the sky.

"If we can do it in the air, of course we can do it on the ground," he said, listing housing insulation and lighting systems as potential uses.

Mr Piccard also said trading polluting technology for clean counterparts today could cut the world's energy consumption in half.

Mr Borschberg called renewable energies a shortcut to the future. "You don't need to link villages to the grid," he said.

Two organisations that have teamed with Solar Impulse, local partner First Myanmar Investment Company Limited and ABB, have announced renewable energy project launches aimed at underserved areas of Myanmar.

Together with FMI and Philips Lighting, JJ-Pun will provide lighting access to people in Upper Myanmar via "Community Lighting Centres" (CLCs) – lit-up areas the size of a football pitch that utilise solar-powered LED lighting, the company said in a press release. The first, to be finished in October of this year, will debut in Ngar Zinyine village, Tada-U township.

Meanwhile, Chevron Oil and ABB have provided funding for two projects

associated with renewable energy from Pact Myanmar, an organisation that hopes to deliver 1 million people solar power inside of five years.

The first, a women's empowerment group that facilitates community-led women's savings funds, covers about 60,000 women, said Richard Harrison, Pact Myanmar country director.

The second involves a fund called "Alainn" – "light" in Myanmar language – whose capital value will be applied to multiple villages in the dry zone, he said.

Mr Piccard expressed his support for Pact's project.

"They are proving that Solar Impulse is not only a dream, because what we promote with our airplane is the real application and implementation in the world, on the ground, in practical life," he said.

Solar Impulse has also outlined its plans past its round-the-world flight: a new initiative called "Future is Clean", a platform for advocating renewable energies globally.

For now, Myanmar is basking in the limelight that accompanies the plane's record-breaking flight. Mr Piccard and Mr Borschberg chatted with the president as they made their way out to the Mandalay airport tarmac, where the plane sat inside a white, bubble-like structure.

"It's an adventure," Mr Piccard said.

SHANGHAI

Chinese shoppers flood Chanel with price cut

CHINESE shoppers are mobbing Chanel stores and counting their savings after the French fashion house slashed handbag prices in the world's biggest luxury market due to the slumping euro.

Long lines formed at Chanel stores in commercial hub Shanghai and shopping mecca Hong Kong, a special administrative region of China, last week as word spread of deep discounts, according to media reports.

China is widely considered the world's biggest luxury market as a rising middle class and corrupt officials drive a shopping frenzy, but domestic prices are high due to hefty import taxes and huge retail mark-ups.

At one branch of Chanel in Shanghai, dozens waited anxiously in line for their turn, fearing the shelves might be stripped bare before a shop assistant could escort each person one-by-one into the tightly guarded store.

Miao Sijia, a well-dressed woman in her 20s who said she does not work, rushed 50 kilometres (31 miles) from a nearby city to buy a limited-edition, gold-coloured 2.55 bag for a discounted 19,700 yuan (US\$3200).



A line of people queuing outside a Chanel store in downtown Shanghai last week. Photo: AFP

"I rushed from Kunshan to buy a Chanel bag after a store clerk told me they were making a special price adjustment," said Ms Miao, a VIP customer of the store.

Chanel said it was harmonising the prices of its products around the world, including the 2.55, 11.12 and Boy bag collections, but did

not specify the size of the discounts in China, or price rises in the eurozone. According to China-based luxury publisher the Hurun Report, Chanel is considered the second-best brand for gifting to women, behind Apple but ahead of French fashion compatriot Louis Vuitton.

— AFP

WASHINGTON

Emerging economies weigh the internet

PEOPLE in emerging economies see the internet as a good thing for education and the economy, but worry about its impact on morality, a global survey showed last week.

The Pew Research Center survey showed a median of 64 percent of respondents in 32 emerging and developing nations say the internet is a positive for education.

A majority also see the internet as a good influence on personal relationships and the economy, but offer a mixed view on other impacts, the Pew Global Attitudes survey showed.

Asked about the internet's impact on politics, 36pc said the internet is good, but 30pc said it was negative.

Meanwhile, 42pc said the Web is a bad influence on morality, with 29pc saying it is positive.

The survey highlights ambivalence toward the internet in countries with varying numbers of people online - from just 8pc in Pakistan to 76pc in Chile.

Pew researchers noted that internet use is growing fast in these countries, largely due to increased use of smartphones accessing the mobile Web.

"Once online, internet users in

emerging and developing nations have embraced socialising as their most preferred type of digital activity," the report said.

"Majorities of internet users in all countries surveyed with large-enough sample sizes to analyse say they stay in touch with friends and family online through social networking sites. Many also use cyberspace for getting information about politics, healthcare and government services." The survey found people who have internet access are generally more positive about its influence on society. And the more highly educated people also were more likely to see the internet as beneficial.

Among the 32 countries surveyed, the median percentage of people online was 44pc.

"Internet use is highest in the wealthiest of the emerging nations, particularly in Chile and Russia, where more than seven in 10 have internet access," the report said, noting that these rates are still behind the US percentage of 87pc.

"The lowest internet rates are in some of the poorest countries surveyed. Just 8pc of Pakistanis and 11pc of Bangladeshis either say they access the internet at least occasionally or own a smartphone." — AFP

SHANGHAI

Yahoo logs off in China

US internet company Yahoo is shutting down its presence in China, it said, with reports saying at least 200 people will be laid off.

The closure of the research centre in Beijing office will eliminate 200 to 300 jobs, Bloomberg reported last week, quoting a person familiar with the matter.

The California-based firm's move contrasts with other internet companies, which are courting the world's biggest online population despite authorities blocking their products.

Twitter opened an office in Hong Kong this month, while Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg addressed a Beijing university audience in Chinese last year.

Yahoo confirmed the closure in a statement, but did not specify how many employees would be affected.

"We are constantly making changes to align resources and to foster better collaboration and innovation across our business," the statement said. "We will be consolidating certain functions into fewer offices, including to our headquarters in Sunnyvale, California."

The decision follows Yahoo's announcement in January that it will spin off its stake in Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba, which last year listed on the New York Stock Exchange in a record offer.

Analysts say cutting the cord with Alibaba leaves Yahoo with a core of assets but no clear path or mission.

In 2005, Yahoo bought a 40-percent stake in Alibaba for US\$1 billion. The US company ceded its China operations to Alibaba as a result.

Yahoo shut down its China email service in 2013. It was earlier embroiled in controversy when it handed authorities details of a Chinese journalist who was sentenced to 10 years in prison. — AFP

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MANILA

Philippines touts early success in attempt to be gambling hub

PHILIPPINE mega-casino reported its first annual profit on the back of half a billion dollars in revenues, strengthening the Southeast Asian nation's bid to become one of the world's biggest gambling hubs.

Bloomerry Resorts, which operates the Solaire Resort and Casino, said late last week it posted a 4.072 billion peso (US\$91-million) net profit in 2014, compared with a loss of 1.315 billion pesos in the previous year.

Revenues doubled to 24.122 billion pesos from 2013.

Solaire, owned by Filipino billionaire and port magnate Enrique Razon, opened in March 2013, the first of four billion-dollar casinos planned on a glittering strip fronting Manila Bay dubbed Entertainment City.

US\$ BILLION

7

Philippine's target for gambling revenue by 2020



Employees of Solaire Manila Resorts and Casino simulate gaming during media day inside the casino in Manila ahead of its opening in 2013. Photo: AFP

"There's nowhere to go but up, considering the attractiveness of this sunrise industry ... we've just started to attract the high rollers," said First Grade Holdings managing director Astro del Castillo.

A second mammoth casino called City of Dreams, a joint venture between Australian billionaire James Packer and Lawrence Ho, son of Macau gambling mogul Stanley Ho, opened at Entertainment City in February.

Japanese billionaire Kazuo Okada has targeted a 2016 open-

ing for his casino, while Filipino tycoon Andrew Tan and Malaysian billionaire Lim Kok Thay will open theirs in 2018.

The largest American casino operator, Caesars Entertainment, said in October that it was seeking a licence to build a fifth mega-casino in the Philippines.

Gaming revenue in the Philippines reached \$2.5 billion last year, according to the nation's industry regulator. The Philippines is targeting \$7 billion dollars, roughly the levels of Singapore

and Las Vegas, by 2020, according to Cristino Naguiat, who chairs the country's gaming board.

Mr Razon, the Philippines' third richest man according to *Forbes Magazine*, said in a statement that he was "elated" by the results and would work to surpass the numbers. He announced this week he had struck deals to open casinos in South Korea, his first overseas gaming venture.

Bloomerry shares closed 2.96 percent higher at 10.44 pesos on March 19. — AFP

DUBLIN

Ryanair plans cause confusion

CONFUSION reigned on March 20 over transatlantic flights envisaged by low-cost airline Ryanair, which last week announced its board had approved the plans but then said it had not done so.

The Irish airline on March 16 unveiled plans to link several European cities to destinations in the United States including New York, Boston and Washington with tickets starting at £10 (\$15, 14 euros).

"The board of Ryanair has approved the business plans for future growth, including transatlantic," the carrier said in a statement.

But in another statement on March 19, the company said, "The board of Ryanair Holdings Plc [public limited company] wishes to clarify that it has not considered or approved any transatlantic project and does not intend to do so."

A source close to the matter said the company was still intending to launch transatlantic flights but said that the confusion arose because the plans would have to be approved not by the Ryanair board but by the board of a separate future brand.

"The board of Ryanair would not have seen or signed off these plans because it would be a different company that would have to do that," the source said.

Ryanair is "very much still pushing ahead with these plans," the source said, adding that the airline would first have to buy long-haul planes.

Stephen Furlong, aviation analyst with Davy Stockbrokers, said, "It's certainly a public relations mess."

"It's not a U-turn. It's just the board had never formally approved transatlantic plans," he said.

"I think the confusion came about over what they might do under Ryanair PLC rather than some other company that hasn't even been set up yet," he added. — AFP

TAIPEI

Foxconn manager pleads guilty in huge smartphone theft

A SENIOR manager at Taiwan's technology giant Foxconn has admitted stealing thousands of smartphones, prosecutors said on March 20, in a racket that reportedly made over US\$700,000.

Foxconn is the world's largest contract electronics maker and assembles products for international tech brands such as Apple, Sony and Nokia.

It employs about 1 million workers at its factories across mainland China.

The Taiwanese deputy sales manager worked at the company's factory in the Chinese city of Zhengzhou, which assembles products such as Apple's iPhone 6.

Prosecutors said "thousands" of phones were stolen in the scam, which they believe involved a network of accomplices.

Local media reported that 4000 smartphones including the iPhone 6 had gone missing and were sold on in China for around Tw\$24 million (US\$760,000).

"He admitted to stealing smartphones from a Foxconn factory in China last year during questioning

[on March 19]," prosecutors said on March 20.

"We suspect that he has accomplices in China and may request judicial assistance from Chinese authorities for further investigation," a spokesperson for the New Taipei district prosecutor's office said.

Foxconn reported the case to the authorities following an internal audit, she added.

Last year, five former Foxconn employees were charged with breach of trust in Taiwan for allegedly soliciting Tw\$160 million in kickbacks from suppliers in exchange for clearing quality checks and buying their equipment.

Foxconn said at the time that it planned to seek compensation from the suppliers involved in the case and called for the accused to be "severely punished according to the law".

The company has also come under the international spotlight over labour unrest, a spate of employee suicides and the use of underage interns at its Chinese plants in recent years.

— AFP

BEIJING

OECD chief welcomes European participation in China's bank

THE head of the OECD welcomed major European countries' participation in a new China-backed infrastructure bank, saying it would ensure the institution was run under existing global standards.

Britain, Germany, France and Italy have announced their intention to sign up for the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, to the consternation of the United States and Japan, which lead the World Bank and the Manila-based Asian Development Bank respectively.

Angel Gurría, secretary-general of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, said, "The fact that some of the European countries are now associating with the project makes me even more convinced that it is going to be run in a very professional, transparent way."

"I don't see that these countries would be joining an institution that would be run otherwise."

"I don't think anybody's going around with a chequebook just giving cheques," he added. "This is not foreign policy, this is a bank."

China has welcomed the European eagerness to participate in the new body, with state media claiming that the US risks being sidelined.

Beijing touts the US\$50 billion

institution as a tool to help meet gaps in financing needs for regional development in Asia.

There was "a very important deficit in medium- and long-term investment for infrastructure in particular," Mr Gurría said. "Any mechanism that is set up in order to cover the shortfall, of course, is welcome."

'I don't think anybody's going with a chequebook just giving cheques. This is not foreign policy, this is a bank.'

Angel Gurría
OECD secretary-general

Details on the AIIB's financing and participation remain to be worked out, but Mr Gurría said, "The severity, the rigour, the analytical detail and the feasibility of both the projects and

the policies are going to be very much comparable to those of the other development banks."

Mr Gurría was speaking to reporters ahead of the launch of the OECD's latest economic survey for China, in which it forecast that the world's second-largest economy will grow 7 percent this year, in line with the government's own target announced earlier this month.

China's economy has embarked on what its leaders have taken to calling the "new normal", meaning that the growth trajectory is slowing, with more sustainable expansion based on a growing consumer class, as in other major countries.

"We like the 'new normal'," he said. "We think 7pc is more sustainable," he added, calling it "cruising speed" that can "avoid distortions and bubbles".

The OECD, a policy analysis body made up of 34 countries with advanced economies, sees growth of 6.9pc in China next year.

Speaking in Shanghai, the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Christine Lagarde also said China should pursue more sustainable economic growth while pushing reforms.

— AFP

BERLIN

Greek and German leaders to come face-to-face in Berlin

THE leaders of debt-racked Greece and economic powerhouse Germany meet in Berlin today after weeks of bad blood over Athens' debt woes, bitter wartime memories and an offensive hand gesture.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel will receive Greece's radical left-wing Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, who has blamed her insistence on tough austerity for his country's "humanitarian crisis" of poverty and mass unemployment.

Ms Merkel, for her part, maintains that if cash-strapped Greece wants more international bailout loans, of which Germany stumps up the biggest share, it must accept the bitter medicine of cuts and reforms.

"In this meeting two worlds will collide," said Hajo Funke, political scientist with Berlin's Free University.

"There is the political world of Greece, where a left-wing government faces a society in collapse, [of] societal decay ... as grave as anything we have seen in western Europe since 1945," he said.

"The other world is a content country that is dominant in Europe, Germany, which worries about maintaining its economic happiness, and which is now being asked to help the other, under conditions it doesn't fully understand."

As tensions have flared, bitter historical memories have resurfaced, as Mr Tsipras' government revived reparation claims for the brutal Nazi occupation of Greece in World War II - an issue which Berlin considers settled.

When Mr Tsipras took power in January he lost no time before laying flowers at a memorial near Athens for dozens of Greek leftists executed by German occupation troops in 1944.

The two months since have seen a



From left, Italy's prime minister Matteo Renzi, Greece's Prime minister Alexis Tsipras, European Parliament President Martin Schulz and Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel talk at an European Council summit. Photo: AFP

war of words escalate between Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis and Germany's Wolfgang Schaueble, who has been caricatured in Nazi garb in a Greek newspaper.

This month the Greek embassy launched a formal complaint about disparaging comments it said Mr Schaueble had made about Mr Varoufakis. The latest flare-up was sparked by a video clip ostensibly showing Mr Varoufakis in 2013 making the middle-finger gesture to Germany in footage he has vehemently labelled a fake.

Seeking to overcome the tensions, Ms Merkel said last week she was looking forward to in-depth talks with Mr Tsipras, who would be

received with military honours.

"We will have some time to talk in detail, and perhaps even argue," she said last week, while quashing expectations that a solution to the Greek debt crisis would be found quickly. She reiterated her opposition to a "Grexit" of Greece leaving the currency union, saying, "if the euro fails, Europe fails," and insisting a solution could only be reached at the European level.

To pave the way for the summit, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier met with his Greek counterpart Nikos Kotzias yesterday.

Greece's creditors agreed in February to extend its 240 billion euro (US\$255 billion) bailout by four

months in exchange for promises of further reforms.

At an EU summit last week, Greece lobbied Brussels to release vital funds to help it make payments to creditors in coming days, and avoid bankruptcy and a possible exit from the euro.

The ongoing negotiations have fuelled popular opposition in Germany to the new Greek government, as many voters fear public funds are disappearing into a bottomless well.

Some German lawmakers have openly mused about how the eurozone could survive a "Grexit" - an outcome that more than half of Germans would welcome, according to a recent poll. - AFP

NEW YORK

Oil price collapse takes US financial toll

THE oil price crash is taking a growing financial toll on companies throughout the industry, forcing some into bankruptcy and others to issue expensive junk bonds to stay afloat.

On March 17, shale producer Quicksilver Resources filed for bankruptcy protection for its US operations after missing a bond payment.

Earlier bankruptcies include a March 3 filing by Cal Dive International, which installs offshore pipelines and platforms.

And energy firms are now the top issuers, by a wide margin, of junk bonds, which require them to pay much higher yields than conventional bonds.

On March 5, US Gulf Coast producer Energy XXI issued US\$1.45 billion in bonds that pay a steep 11 percent, planning to use the money in part to pay other lenders.

Energy XXI had previously warned it would not be able to make payments if commodity prices stay low.

The par value of high-yield energy company bonds on the market surged by about \$30 billion in the first two months of the year, representing both new issues and downgrades.

That was far more than any other sector, according to Fitch Ratings.

The rise in junk bonds and bankruptcies are the latest sign of stress in the petroleum sector as US crude



Excess advertising signs are left in a field next to a passing oil train in Lincoln, Nebraska. Photo: AFP

prices linger around \$45 a barrel, down nearly 60pc since June.

Low prices depress profits and pinch balance sheets, especially for smaller companies, which can be heavily leveraged.

That is forcing more and more of them to go to capital markets to stay afloat. "It is definitely a challenging environment all around for a smaller [lower-rated] name to get a deal done," said Mark Sadeghian, a senior director for energy at Fitch.

"They definitely have to pay up quite a bit."

The number of companies closing

their doors is still limited. But the climate will get tougher still if the downturn in the crude price lasts years.

"You need oil prices to be lower for longer before you see a tidal wave of bankruptcies," said David Pursell, managing director at Tudor, Pickering Holt, an energy investment bank in Houston.

One wrinkle is that to continue to win financing, companies have to keep producing and selling oil, which keeps downward pressure on crude prices.

The International Energy Agency last week warned that, despite the sharp fall in crude prices, US

supply "so far shows precious little sign of slowing down".

Some companies are seeking fresh financing to meet existing loan and bond payments. In other cases, companies are trying to be proactive and keep liquidity high in case the market gets worse.

"You're buying yourself the ability to live to fight another day," said Mr Pursell.

Some energy companies have turned to new equity offerings for funds, a move that dilutes the shareholder base and comes as stock valuations are already low.

Carrizo Oil & Gas, a shale producer in Texas and Pennsylvania, raised about \$205 million from the sale of 4.5 million shares at \$45.50, about two-thirds the price the stock fetched last June.

Other companies raising funds include Oasis Petroleum, which raised \$410 million in equity, and Newfield Exploration, which sold \$700 million in bonds.

But PetroQuest Energy, which has shale assets in Oklahoma and offshore properties in the Gulf of Mexico, on March 11 pulled the plug on a plan to sell 10 million new shares after concluding it "was not in the best interests of its stockholders".

Fitch said that it expects oil output to fall off in the second half of the year, slowly pushing up prices.

- AFP

IN BRIEF

The New York Times launches Chinese-language monthly

The New York Times is launching a monthly Chinese-language print publication for Hong Kong and Macau that will include global news as well as local content.

The US newspaper group said the "Chinese Monthly" would launch on May 1 with a print run of 50,000 copies, to be available in hotels, airline lounges, residential complexes, and on newsstands in Hong Kong and Macau.

The 24-page publication will include "news, opinion and lifestyle content from The New York Times in simplified Chinese for Chinese audiences," a Times statement said last week.

"In addition, approximately 20 percent of the content will be devoted to local news and events in Hong Kong and Macau."

Solid but unspectacular growth seen for New Zealand

New Zealand's economy grew 0.8 percent in the final three months of 2014, expanding across the board in a "solid" and sustainable performance, Finance Minister Bill English said last week.

The quarterly data, which came in slightly higher than market expectations of a 0.75pc expansion, took growth for calendar 2014 to 3.3pc, Statistics New Zealand (SNZ) said.

SNZ said the retail and accommodation sectors were standout performers in the December quarter, driven by higher spending from international visitors. "Retail and accommodation increased 2.3 percent in the December 2014 quarter, buoyed by a 15pc increase in international tourist spending," it said.

Cement giants pave over problem

Lafarge and Holcim said that they had repaired cracks that had threatened to cause the collapse of their merger to create the world's biggest cement company.

"The Boards of Directors of Holcim and Lafarge are pleased to announce that they have reached an agreement on revised terms for the merger of equals between both companies," they said in a joint statement.

Last year the two companies announced plans to create a cement titan - a major event in the global construction industry. But with the sharp rise in the Swiss franc having driven up Holcim's value since the merger was agreed last year, the Swiss company said yesterday that the terms of one Holcim share for one Lafarge share were no longer appropriate.

Land Rover recalled in China

Jaguar Land Rover is recalling more than 36,000 cars from China, it said, after it was criticised by state television over allegedly faulty gearboxes.

The company, which is owned by India's Tata Motors, also apologised to Chinese consumers in the online statement, posted late March 18, which followed it being targeted in a China Central Television (CCTV) program at the weekend.

The program alleged owners of the Range Rover Evoque sport-utility vehicles had experienced problems with gearboxes.

Crimea to get own airline

Authorities in Crimea said on March 21 they plan to set up an airline to facilitate connections with Russia and encourage tourism in the picturesque Black Sea peninsula, a year after the Ukrainian territory was annexed by Moscow.

It requires a fleet of six aircraft and 40 pilots to serve 14 destinations initially, later rising to 36, according to a statement on the Crimean government website.

"For this project, we need 1.45 billion rubles [US\$24 million]", Sergei Tourik, an official with Russian manufacturer United Aircraft Company, said in a meeting with Crimea's prime minister Sergei Aksyonov, according to the statement. - AFP

World

WORLD EDITOR: Fiona MacGregor

BANGKOK

Elderly man jailed for royal graffiti

A 67-year-old Thai man has been jailed by a military court for scrawling, in a shopping mall toilet, graffiti critical of the country's junta leaders and its revered king.

Thailand's monarch Bhumibol Adulyadej, 87, is protected by one of the world's toughest royal defamation rules under which anyone convicted of insulting the king, queen, heir or regent faces up to 15 years in prison on each count.

Ophas Chansuksei, a pin-badge vendor, received a year-and-a-half sentence on March 20 for writing anti-monarchy and anti-government messages in an eastern Bangkok mall last October.

The judge described the comments as "false" and said they "lowered the value of the king". His sentence was cut from three years because he pleaded guilty, the judge added.

An AFP reporter inside the military court said Mr Ophas, grey-haired and dressed in rose coloured

prison clothes, remained impassive as the sentence was read out.

But his wife struggled to hold back her tears.

Speaking after sentencing, Mr Ophas said he was relieved that the sentence had been reduced for his guilty plea.

"Soldiers told me when I was detained that if I didn't like someone I should keep it in my heart. I shouldn't have done it," he said.

During the brief hearing the judge read out what the market vendor had written on the wall. The majority of his comments were critical of Thailand's junta chief Prayut Chan-O-Cha, who imposed martial law and then seized power in a coup last May.

But one sentence made reference to the king.

Reporting lese majeste cases is fraught with difficulty and media must heavily self-censor. Even repeating details of the charges could mean breaking the law.

Rights groups say basic freedoms

have fallen off a cliff since the military took over last May following the ousting of former premier Yingluck Shinawatra's democratically elected government.

They argue that draconian lese majeste legislation is increasingly being used as a tool to stifle political opposition.

Under martial law, political gatherings of more than five people are banned, criticism of the junta is outlawed and civilians can be tried in military courts for national security or lese majeste offences.

In a separate hearing on March 20, two brothers and a close relative of former princess Srirasmee were also jailed on charges including lese majeste, extortion and false imprisonment.

They are the latest close relatives of Ms Srirasmee, who was until recently married to Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn, to face legal proceedings after a corruption scandal involving her family erupted late last year.

The scandal centred around now-jailed relative Pongpat Chayapun, the former head of Thailand's elite Central Investigation Bureau, who was accused of running a sprawling criminal network that included illegal gambling dens, oil smuggling and extortion rackets.

Most of those caught up in the scandal have been accused of using the Crown Prince's name as a shield to commit crimes.

The prince divorced Ms Srirasmee and she renounced her royal title following the scandal, which has gripped a public unused to seeing palace intrigue play out in the open.

Earlier this month her elderly parents were also imprisoned on lese majeste charges. At least eight of Ms Srirasmee's family have now been convicted and jailed for lese majeste.

- AFP



Ophas Chansuksei, 67, (centre) is escorted by prison guards as he arrives at military court in Bangkok on March 20. Photo: AFP

SEOUL

Furious N Korea vows to blow up balloons carrying 'Interview' DVDs

NORTH Korea's military yesterday threatened to blow up balloons that South Korean activists plan to send over the heavily-militarised border carrying 10,000 DVDs of the satirical Hollywood film *The Interview*.

Activists plan to launch copies of the film - a comedy about a fictional CIA plot to assassinate North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un - as well as 500,000 propaganda leaflets across the border on or around March 26.

Pyongyang has long condemned such balloon launches and threatened retaliation, and local residents have complained the activists are putting their lives at risk by making them potential targets.

"All the firepower strike means of the frontline units of the [Korean People's Army] will launch without prior warning ... to blow up balloons," the North's frontline military units said in a notice to the South.

It said the launch would constitute "the gravest politically motivated provocation" against North Korea and "a de facto declaration of a war", according to Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency.

The move is aimed at "deliberately escalating tension on the Korean peninsula where the situation has reached the brink of a war due to ... joint war rehearsals" by South Korea and the United States, it said.

The South's military said it would retaliate if the North opens fire on its territory.

'[Launching the balloons] would be a de facto act of war.'

Korean Central News Agency

But the North's notice warned that any challenge to its "just physical countermeasures" will trigger "merciless retaliatory strikes".

South Koreans living near the border are "recommended to evacuate in advance for their safety" if the balloons are launched, it said.

The launch will mark the five-year anniversary of the sinking of a South Korean warship in 2010, with the loss of 46 sailors. The South pinned the blame on the North and effectively froze trade and investment ties.

The warning came even after South Korea's Unification Ministry on March 20 vowed to take steps preventing the launch in order to protect local residents, saying there is a "limit" to freedom of expression.

Seoul insists the activists have a democratic right to carry out such launches, but has appealed for restraint to avoid overly provoking the North.

South Korean police have occasionally prevented the launches at times of high cross-border tensions, citing the possible dangers posed to local residents.

The activists remained tight-lipped about the exact location and time for the launch.

In October last year North Korean soldiers attempted to shoot down some balloons, triggering a brief exchange of heavy machine-gun fire across the border. - AFP



IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP

A migrant labourer carries lives in the Dwarka sector Water Day yesterday warn the problem of groundwater for water is increasing ex

SEOUL

China, Japan, S summit at the 'e

THE foreign ministers of South Korea, China and Japan pledged to set up a trilateral leadership summit at the "earliest" opportunity as they met in Seoul at the weekend for the first time in nearly three years.

The talks on March 21 were an effort to calm regional tensions stoked by territorial disputes and historical rows with roots in Japan's colonisation of the Korean peninsula and occupation of parts of China before and during World War II.

In a joint statement, South Korean Foreign Minister Yoon Byung-Se and his Chinese and Japanese counterparts, Wang Yi and Fumio Kishida, said they had agreed to work toward a three-way summit of their respective leaders "at the earliest convenient time".

They also declared their "firm opposition" to the development of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula - a clear reference to North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Briefing journalists afterward, Mr Yoon said the joint statement carried "special significance" and was the product of "deep discussions" on a wide range of cooperative issues.

Started in 2007 as an annual event, the ministerial talks were last held in April 2012 before being suspended as relations went into a tailspin.

Their resumption marked a thaw of sorts that would be further underscored if a leadership summit were to take place later this year.

The last such summit was held in May 2012, and all three countries have appointed new leaders since then.

Lingering animosities, fuelled by ongoing sovereignty rows over island territories, have seen Beijing and Seoul maintain a frosty distance from Tokyo in recent years, hindering co-operation between the three Asian powers who collectively

US pulls staff out of Yemen after attacks

WORLD 21



Photo tours of Cambodia's poor spark controversy

WORLD 22



a bottle of water he filled from a water tanker on March 18 at the camp where he of New Delhi. A new UN report launched in New Delhi on March 20 ahead of World of an urgent need to manage the world's water more sustainably and highlight ter over-extraction, particularly in India and China. The report says global demand ponentially, driven largely by population growth.

Korea to seek leadership 'earliest' opportunity

account for roughly 20 percent of global GDP.

South Korean President Park Geun-Hye and Chinese President Xi Jinping have already held two fruitful bilateral summits.

But Ms Park has refused to sit down one-on-one with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, while Mr Xi has only managed a brief meeting with Mr Abe on the sidelines of an APEC gathering in Beijing last year.

China and South Korea, whose ties are strong, feel Japan has failed to express sufficient remorse for its wartime past.

Both reacted furiously when, in December 2103, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited a Tokyo shrine that honours Japan's war dead, including a number of senior war criminals.

In an apparent effort to create some momentum from the March 21 meeting, the joint statement made only a glancing reference to those

tensions, saying the three countries had agreed to strengthen cooperation "in the spirit of facing history squarely".

According to a South Korean government official, the Chinese side, while agreeing to a leadership summit in principle, had insisted that "certain political conditions" be met and cited Tokyo's attitude on historical issues.

The talks had been closely watched by the United States and the wider international community which has called on the Northeast Asian neighbours to find a way to bury their historical hatchets.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon recently described their lack of reconciliation as a "missing link" for peace and stability in East Asia.

And Washington is troubled by what it calls the "strategic liability" posed by the rift between South Korea and Japan – its two main military allies in Asia – and would prefer

they focus on forming a united front against an increasingly assertive China.

The March 21 gathering kicked off with bilateral meetings on a range of issues, including the new Chinese-backed multinational lender – the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) – that the United States perceives as a threat to the Washington-led World Bank.

Seoul is said to be "positively" considering joining the AIIB, while Japan's stance has been decidedly cautious.

There was apparently no discussion on the US-backed ballistic missile defence system that Washington wants to deploy in South Korea as a deterrent to military provocation by North Korea.

China is strongly opposed to the deployment of the system, known as THAAD, warning that it would undermine regional peace and stability. – AFP

MANILA

Philippine IDPs to return home after fighting eases

SOME of the 120,000 people displaced by the Philippine army's offensive against Muslim insurgents will soon be allowed to return home now that violence has eased, a military spokesperson said yesterday.

"We will determine which areas will be safe for evacuees to go back, areas already cleared of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)," said Captain Joan Petinglay.

The military in the troubled southern province of Maguindanao on Mindanao island in February launched an all-out operation against the BIFF, a small insurgent group fighting to set up an Islamic state in the south of the largely Christian Philippines.

It rejects a peace pact signed by the much larger Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from which the BIFF split.

The UN refugee agency has warned that more than 120,000 people have fled their homes in the south due to the fighting. The government has housed many of them in schools, hampering educational activities.

Since the operation began, the BIFF – which originally numbered about 300 – has lost an estimated 140

of its fighters although the military has only recovered five of their bodies, Petinglay said. Six soldiers have also been killed, she added.

There has been no new fighting since March 16, possibly indicating the BIFF has been weakened by its losses, Ms Petinglay said.

Ms Petinglay said the government and private relief organisations had enough supplies for displaced people, but some of them would soon be allowed to return home now that the situation was stabilising.

Islamic separatist insurgencies in the south have claimed tens of thousands of lives since the 1970s.

Although the MILF has signed an initial peace deal, a bungled police raid has left the peace process in jeopardy. A total of 44 police commandos hunting some of the country's most wanted extremists were killed on January 25 when they entered a Maguindanao stronghold of the BIFF and other Muslim armed groups.

The incident has become an embarrassment to President Benigno Aquino, who has been blamed for poor leadership and coordination of the operation. – AFP

SINGAPORE

Lee's health worsens

THE health condition of Singapore's founding leader Lee Kuan Yew weakened further yesterday as he battled severe pneumonia in hospital, the government said.

The 91-year-old, one of Asia's towering post-colonial leaders, has been in the Singapore General Hospital for more than six weeks and is being aided by mechanical ventilation, a form of life support.

"Mr Lee Kuan Yew has weakened further today," said a statement from the office of his son, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who visited him in hospital.

The government earlier said the patriarch was critically ill.

Hundreds of floral tributes and cards dedicated to Mr Lee have piled up outside the hospital as Singaporeans displayed affection for the British-educated lawyer who steered the city-state to prosperity but is also criticised for his iron-fisted rule.

Singapore media reported that the prime minister mingled early yesterday with well-wishers outside the

hospital block where his father was being cared for under tight security.

The elder Mr Lee was prime minister from 1959, when colonial ruler Britain granted Singapore self-rule, to 1990. He led Singapore to independence in 1965 after a brief and stormy union with Malaysia.

He stepped down as prime minister in favour of his deputy Goh Chok Tong, who in turn handed the reins to Lee's eldest child in 2004.

The former leader is still an MP for the port district of Tanjong Pagar, but retired from advisory roles in government in 2011.

In a book published in 2013, Mr Lee said he was feeling weaker by the day and wants a quick death.

He rapidly began to look feeble after his wife of 63 years, Kwa Geok Choo, died in 2010, and has rarely appeared in public in the last two years.

Mr Lee has signed an Advance Medical Directive, a legal document instructing doctors not to use any life-sustaining treatment if he cannot be resuscitated. – AFP



A girl writes a well-wishing message for Singapore's founding leader Lee Kuan Yew on a board at the Tanjong Pagar community centre in Singapore on March 22. Photo: AFP

N'DJAMENA



Women and children fleeing from Boko Haram attacks sit at Kabalewa Refugees Camp, Diffa in Niger Republic, on March 13. Photo: AFP

Mass grave believed to contain 100 Boko Haram victims

AROUND 100 bodies have been found in a mass grave on the edge of a town in northeast Nigeria after it was freed from Boko Haram Islamists, a Chadian army spokesperson said.

Soldiers on March 20 discovered the bodies – some decapitated – under a bridge just outside Damasak, which was retaken from Boko Haram on March 9 by troops from Chad and Niger.

“There are about 100 bodies spread around under the bridge just outside the town,” said Colonel Azem Bermandoa Agouna, adding that he had visited the scene himself close to the border with Niger.

He claimed the massacre probably occurred about two months ago and said, “This is the work of Boko Haram.”

It was, however, impossible to verify the claim independently.

Colonel Bermandoa Agouna said several of the victims had been decapitated while others had been shot. “There are heads here and bodies there. The mass grave has become

like a termite mound,” he added.

Chad and Niger launched a vast air and ground offensive against Boko Haram in the area on March 8, quickly taking Damasak from the Nigerian Islamist militants.

According to a Chadian army source, the militants suffered heavy losses in the push, with some 200 killed in fighting last week for the loss of 10 Chadian soldiers with 20 wounded.

The “Operation Mai Dounama”, named after a 13th-century emperor of Borno province in northern Nigeria, aims to destroy Boko Haram bases close to Niger, a Nigerien army spokesman said on March 19.

Boko Haram took Damasak on November 24, killing around 50 people and forcing another 3000 to flee, according to the UN’s High Commissioner for Refugees.

The Islamist uprising, which initially began as a campaign against Western education, has claimed more than 13,000 lives since 2009.

The group recently allied themselves with the Islamic State

group in Syria and Iraq.

The Nigerian military has been struggling for years to stamp out the movement and President Goodluck Jonathan, who is facing an election next weekend, has faced fierce criticism over his government’s failure to contain the violence.

The presidential and parliamentary polls were initially due in February but were postponed by the election commission which cited security fears.

Nigeria has claimed major recent gains against the Islamists with the help of coalition partners Cameroon, Chad and Niger, achieving in just over one month what for years it had failed to do on its own.

Two out of three of the worst-hit northeast states – Yobe and Adamawa – have been declared “cleared” while the third, Borno, is expected to be liberated “soon”, the military said this week.

Major towns such as Bama and Dikwa are among some 36 localities recaptured, with just three said to be still in rebel hands. – AFP

WASHINGTON

Obama rebukes Israeli PM for Arab comments

PRESIDENT Barack Obama criticised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over his warning that Arab Israeli voters would vote “in droves.”

In his first public comments about last week’s elections that saw Mr Netanyahu score a surprise third term, Mr Obama told *The Huffington Post* he had “indicated that that kind of rhetoric was contrary to what is the best of Israel’s traditions”.

The White House said earlier this week that Mr Obama had warned Mr Netanyahu on March 19 that his last-minute campaign pledge to oppose the creation of a Palestinian state and his comments about Israeli Arab voters would force a rethink in Washington.

“Although Israel was founded based on the historic Jewish homeland and the need to have a Jewish homeland, Israeli democracy has been premised on everybody in the country being treated equally and fairly,” Mr Obama said.

“And I think that that is what’s best about Israeli democracy. If that is lost, then I think that not only does it give ammunition to folks who don’t believe in a Jewish state, but it also I think starts to erode the meaning of democracy in the country.”

The interview, which took place on March 20, was published in full the following day.

Mr Obama also criticised the Israeli leader’s tough stance on the Palestinians after his election win, saying the United States is “evaluating” options for peace in the region.

“We take him at his word when he said that it wouldn’t happen during his prime ministership, and so that’s why we’ve got to evaluate what other

options are available to make sure that we don’t see a chaotic situation in the region,” Mr Obama said.

Even as Mr Netanyahu scrambled to deny he had ruled out the creation of a Palestinian state – long the starting point for Middle East peace efforts and a cornerstone of US policy – the White House indicated it could withdraw its unwavering support for Israel at the United Nations.

The US president vowed to keep cooperating with the Israeli government on military and intelligence operations, but stopped short of confirming whether Washington would continue to block Palestinian efforts to obtain statehood through the United Nations.

The United States – a veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council – has opposed moves at the United Nations to recognise a Palestinian state, saying that must be part of a negotiated peace deal.

It has also shielded Israel from often Arab-led UN votes castigating the Jewish state for various actions, including alleged human rights abuses.

Such a move would represent a major inflection point for US-Israeli relations, the likes of which has not been seen in years, or perhaps decades.

It is now more than 30 years since former president Ronald Reagan allowed anti-Israel resolutions to pass at the UN after Israel bombed Iraq’s nuclear facilities.

During their phone call, Mr Obama said he told Mr Netanyahu, “it is going to be hard to find a path where people are seriously believing that negotiations are possible”.

– AFP



US President Barack Obama speaks in the White House in Washington, DC, on March 20. Photo: AFP

PARIS

Far Right eyes election gains as French turn out for local polls

FRANCE went to the polls for local elections yesterday that were likely to see big losses for the ruling Socialists, following a campaign dominated by the far-right National Front.

The traditional parties have grown increasingly nervous about the threat from the anti-immigration, anti-EU National Front (FN) led by Marine Le Pen, that has soared to the top of the opinion polls in recent months.

The FN took first place in European elections and control of 11 town halls last year.

It is now riding high at around 30 percent in the polls, according to recent surveys.

It has benefited from a slump in the economy, double-digit unemployment, and a more general loss of trust in the political establishment that has seen approval ratings for Socialist

President Francois Hollande plumb record lows.

Despite a boost for the president in the immediate aftermath of the January 7-9 attacks in Paris, where he was seen as statesman-like and decisive, he appears to have failed to capitalise as the economy continues its slow decline.

Yesterday, voters were choosing representatives for 101 “departments” – another layer in France’s complex governing system – that control issues such as school and welfare budgets.

In a new initiative, parties this year had to present a male-female double ticket to break the male dominance on local councils.

The ruling Socialists and their left-wing allies are expected to take the biggest hit, losing around half the 61 departments they currently hold.

But the FN is not just stealing votes from the Socialists, but also from the conservative UMP, which has struggled to rally behind a single leader since Nicolas Sarkozy lost the presidency in 2012.

Mr Sarkozy returned to frontline politics last year, becoming leader of the party, but faces an array of challengers from within his own ranks as he prepares for a widely expected run for the presidency in two years.

But despite being less popular than the FN, Mr Sarkozy’s party will probably make the most gains, since Socialist voters are expected to support them in second-round run-offs just to keep the far-right out of power – a possible foretaste of the presidential election in 2017.

The FN is therefore aiming to win between one and four departments at

most, while Mr Sarkozy has predicted a “wave” of departments falling to his UMP party.

That would still work in Ms Le Pen’s favour, bolstering her claims that the mainstream parties are two sides of the same coin that are ganging up against her party.

She has batted away persistent accusations that the FN is “fascist” for its hard line on immigration, confident that her policies play well with a large cross-section of voters who feel left behind by rapid social changes.

She was pointedly not invited to the millions-strong march that followed the January jihadist attacks in Paris, but that only reinforced her image as a political outsider.

“In a few months, we’ll get stuck into the regions and then we’re off to invade the Elysee [presidential

palace],” Ms Le Pen said recently, in reference to regional elections at the end of the year.

Still, the FN’s rise worries many social liberals.

They fear that Ms Le Pen’s efforts to “de-toxify” the party’s image since she took over from her father in 2011 is little more than clever marketing that masks continued racism and anti-Semitism from its past.

In a bid to boost turnout – which is expected to be very low – Prime Minister Manuel Valls has said he is “scared” of the FN and has warned Ms Le Pen could be president in 2017.

However, some analysts have cast doubt on whether this is the best move.

“It put the FN at the centre of the game,” said Brice Teinturier, from polling institute Ipsos. – AFP

ADEN

US evacuates Yemen staff after attacks

THE United States yesterday said it had evacuated all its staff from Yemen where the embattled president has appealed for "urgent intervention" by the UN Security Council as attacks by Iran-backed rebels bring his country nearer to civil war.

"Due to the deteriorating security situation in Yemen, the US government has temporarily relocated its remaining personnel out of Yemen," State Department spokesperson Jeff Rathke said in a statement.

The evacuation comes after several suicide bombings claimed by the Islamic State group killed 142 people in Sanaa on March 20, with the jihadists seeking to exploit the chaos gripping the country.

The impoverished nation is torn between a north controlled by Iran-backed Shiite Huthi rebels and a south dominated by allies of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, who fled house arrest in Sanaa to Aden in February.

The UN Security Council is to hold an emergency meeting yesterday following Mr Hadi's appeal.

In his letter to the Council, Mr Hadi denounced "the criminal acts of the Huthi militias and their allies", saying they "not only threaten peace in Yemen but the regional and international peace and security".

"I urge for your urgent intervention in all available means to stop this aggression that is aimed at undermining the legitimate authority, the fragmentation of Yemen and its peace and stability," Mr Hadi wrote.

Yemen has been torn by unrest since ex-strongman Ali Abdullah Saleh stepped down in early 2012 after a year-long popular uprising against him, with powerful armed groups sidelining the government since.

The country is now on the brink of civil war, with a deepening political impasse and an increasingly explicit territorial division along sectarian lines, with rising violence between the Huthi and Sunni tribes and al-Qaeda.

Washington late on March 20

pulled out troops from the Al-Anad airbase in southern Yemen amid fighting involving al-Qaeda militants nearby which left at least 29 dead.

The US would "continue to actively monitor terrorist threats emanating from Yemen and have capabilities postured in the area to address them", Mr Rathke said.

Yemen has acknowledged that US personnel gathering intelligence for drone strikes on al-Qaeda are deployed at Al-Anad.

Mr Hadi pledged on March 21 to fight Iranian influence in his country, accusing the Huthis of importing Tehran's ideology.

The Huthis, who seized Sanaa in September, vowed to take further "revolutionary steps" following the March 20 blasts.

In his first televised speech since he fled to Aden from house arrest in Sanaa, Mr Hadi said he would ensure that "the Yemeni republic flag will fly on the Marran mountain in [the Huthi militia's northern stronghold] Saada, instead of the Iranian flag".

"The Iranian Twelver [Shiism] pattern that has been agreed upon between the Huthis and those who support them will not be accepted by Yemenis, whether Zaidi [Shiites] or Shafite [Sunnis]," he said.

The Huthis belong to the Zaidi offshoot of Shiite Islam. They are believed to have converted to Twelver Shiism, which is followed by Iran, but insist that Tehran does not meddle in Yemeni affairs.

In a letter to relatives of the mosque bombings victims, Mr Hadi condemned the attacks as "terrorist, criminal and cowardly".

"Such heinous attacks could only be done by the enemies of life", who want to drag Yemen into "chaos, violence and internal fighting", he said.

"Shiite extremism, represented by the armed Huthi militia, and Sunni extremism, represented by al-Qaeda, are two sides of the same coin, who do not wish good and stability for Yemen and its people."



President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi delivers a speech in the southern city of Aden in a handout picture released by the Yemeni Presidency on March 21. Photo: AFP

Mr Hadi has declared Aden the country's temporary capital.

The March 20 bombings came a day after clashes in the southern city between Hadi loyalists and forces allied with the Huthis.

Since taking Sanaa the Huthis have tightened their grip on government institutions, aided by loyalists of former president Mr Saleh.

But in their push to widen their control to the south, they have faced fierce resistance from Sunni tribes allied with al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda distanced itself from the March 20

bombings, insisting it does not target mosques.

In an online statement claiming responsibility, the Sanaa branch of IS said the attacks were "just the tip of the iceberg".

Iran "strongly condemned" the bombings.

Mohammed Abdulsalam, spokesperson for the Huthis' Ansarullah party, called the attacks part of a "clear war against the Yemeni people and its popular revolution" - a reference to Sanaa's takeover.

"It is now imperative that we

complete the revolutionary steps to protect the people and their revolution," he said in a statement.

The threat came as reinforcements from the Special Forces, accused of links to the Huthis and Saleh, were sent to the city of Taz, which is just 180 kilometres (110 miles) north of Aden and seen as a strategic entry point to Mr Hadi's refuge.

"The bombings in Sanaa will now be taken as an excuse to open new fronts by attacking Taz and Marib [in the east]," said Yemeni youth activist Bassem al-Hakimi. - AFP

TUNIS

Tunisia president admits security 'failures' in museum attack

THE president of Tunisia, Beji Caïd Essebsi, said security "failures" had helped facilitate the deadly attack on the country's national museum claimed by the Islamic State group that killed 20 foreign tourists.

"There were failures" which meant that "the police and intelligence were not systematic enough to ensure the safety of the museum", Mr Essebsi told the *Paris Match* weekly in an interview published on March 21.

Twenty-one people, all but one of them foreign tourists, were killed when two gunmen stormed the National Bardo Museum in the capital Tunis on March 18.

Mr Essebsi however stressed that the security forces "responded very effectively to quickly put an end to the attack at the Bardo, certainly preventing dozens more deaths if

the terrorists had been able to set off their suicide belts", he was quoted as saying on the *Paris Match* website.

Deputy speaker Abdelfattah Mourou said on March 20 that guards supposed to be protecting the museum and the nearby parliament were having coffee at the time of the assault.

The president's comments came as Tunisian authorities said there were developments in the investigation.

"There are developments in the case, but to protect the secrecy of the investigation we prefer not to provide any details," prosecution spokesperson Sofiene Sliti said.

However, Interior Minister Mohamed Ali Aroui said, "More than 10 people have been arrested for direct or indirect involvement in the attack, among them people who provided logistical support."

He declined to say whether they included nine people already reported arrested, including the father, sister and two brothers of one of the gunmen police killed in the attack, Jabeur Khachnaoui.

The minister also said, without elaborating, that an arrest warrant had been issued for a Tunisian named Maher Ben Mouldi Kaidi for his suspected involvement in the attack.

A police source and acquaintance of Khachnaoui said the gunman's four relatives had now been freed,



Members of Tunisian special forces stand guard outside Tunis-Carthage international airport on March 21. Photo: AFP

but Mr Aroui would not confirm that.

On March 18, the two gunmen targeted tourists visiting the museum, killing 21 people, including a Tunisian police officer.

The dead tourists were four Italians, three Japanese, three French, two Spaniards, a Colombian, an Australian-Colombian, a British woman,

a Belgian woman, three Poles and a Russian. Doctor Chadli Dziri, chief of surgery at the Charles Nicolle hospital in Tunis, said that of 43 people wounded there were still concerns about the prognosis for one, a French woman shot in the stomach and the leg.

Mr Dziri said it was clear that

many people had been shot as they tried to escape, because they had been hit in the back.

The Islamic State group claimed it was behind the attack and threatened more.

Authorities said the gunmen had trained in neighbouring Libya, where the IS is believed to have training camps.

Tunisia has seen an upsurge in Islamist extremism since the 2011 revolution that ousted dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and sparked the Arab Spring.

The brother of the other gunman, Yassine Laabidi, expressed shock that he was dead, and "that he was involved in this. None of us in the family can understand what happened".

He described Yassine as a "bon vivant" who "enjoyed a drink with mates and would joke around with everyone. He had no complex whatsoever."

He said Yassine, who had become more of a devout Muslim in recent years, "was brainwashed by swines who send young men to their death in the name of religion".

Tunisia has taken pride in forming a democratic government and achieving stability since the Arab Spring in marked contrast to countries such as Egypt and Libya. But dozens of police and military personnel have been killed in attacks blamed on Islamist militants. - AFP

'[Yassine] was brainwashed by swines who send young men to their deaths in the name of religion.'

Brother of Tunisian gunman

PHNOM PENH

Poverty tourism: photographers cash in

Photographers in Cambodia don't see eye-to-eye on who should point their lenses at human suffering and who should profit from it

MOST days, Dutch photographer Michael Klinkhamer takes clients on photography tours around the Cambodian Capital Phnom Penh.

Often they stroll around the Royal Palace. Sometimes they walk the gritty streets downtown.

Occasionally - and more controversially - Mr Klinkhamer takes the amateur snappers to the old dumpsite at Stung Meanchey, where people still scavenge in the remaining rubbish six years after the city moved the dump to Choeng Ek.

"[The tourists] want to experience reality - the real life, the harsh life - because there's beauty in it," he said.

"If you take good pictures, there you might end up with amazing photographs. It's romance. It's the gypsy child with the dirty face - that makes people soft."

This type of "dirty tourism" made headlines in the UK's *Daily Mail* last week, when Spanish photographer David Rengel slammed tourists for taking photos of children at Siem Reap's Anlong Pi dumpsite.

"While I was taking photos to demonstrate the realities of child labour, I realised tourists were arriving to visit, sometimes in buses and other times in tuk-tuks, Cambodian taxis; I thought it was horrible, and it should be

reported," Mr Rengel, was quoted as saying in the *Daily Mail*.

"In that moment, I changed my point of view and instead decided to report on the practice of tourism as one of the causes of slave labour, including child labour."

Mr Klinkhamer said it was "hypocritical" for photojournalists to claim a moral high ground over amateurs.

"If you're a professional photographer or a journalist, why would you be entitled to cover that for a newspaper, and not a tourist?" he said, adding that amateur photographers engage in citizen journalism by sharing their images on social media.

"Maybe because of all these tourists coming down there and photographing it and talking about it, there will be something done about it," he said.

While visiting blighted communities, Mr Klinkhamer said he takes care to direct his clients to local businesses and NGOs working in the area.

But photojournalist Thomas Cristofolletti, co-founder of the Cambodia-based Ruom Collective of journalists, said he was uneasy with amateur photographers seeking out grim situations.

"I don't enjoy going to see people suffering - that's not something I like to do, and I don't understand how

people could pay to have this kind of experience," he said.

While he said citizen journalism had its place, particularly during sudden situations requiring quick action, photographers should generally have professional backgrounds before attempting to navigate the ethical dilemmas of bearing witness to poverty.

"You need preparation and [to] follow some kind of ethics to be able to document the reality of a problem," he said.

James Sutherland, international communications coordinator at NGO Friends International, which works at the Anlong Pi dumpsite, said the distinction between legitimate reportage and exploitation was not always clear.

"There's a very fine line indeed here about exploiting the people you're supposedly trying to help by reporting the issue," he said, adding that he has concerns about photojournalists' effects on poor communities and condemns organised tours entirely.

"[Scavengers] are not objects, they're not another piece in your scenario," he said.

Mr Sutherland also said that informed consent can be tricky to obtain when children are involved.

"Children are just fascinated by the idea that someone wants to take their



Tourists take photos of Cambodia's renowned Angkor Wat temple in Siem Reap province on March 20. Some visitors to the country have been accused of taking advantage of impoverished people by picturing them for the holiday snaps. Photo: AFP

picture - they will have a look at it, have a laugh with it and joke about it, but they have no idea what's going to happen with that image," he said.

Mr Cristofolletti said that, while such ethical problems are well known among photographers, he feared amateurs would not have the professional background to make good choices.

"It's not ethical to take pictures of minors without consent of the parents, probably something tourists don't know," said Mr Cristofolletti.

"You don't need to see the faces to understand the reality - I can still try to preserve the dignity of the minor without exposing him to the public. That's something you know because you're professional, because you're doing this job and you know the rules."

At the old Stung Meanchey dumpsite in Phnom Penh, where people still pick through six-year-old refuse,

scavengers expressed mild bemusement that foreigners would care to photograph their neighbourhood.

Seng Savy, a 25-year-old who works as a community seamstress from his shack next to the dump, said he would see up to 10 foreigners a day visiting the site before it closed.

"First I wondered why they came to take pictures of us, but then I realised that maybe they took pictures to show their friends in other countries the young Khmer people living in the rubbish," he said, adding that he hoped the pictures would garner international aid.

Soung Nget, a 29-year-old scavenger, said foreign visitors were an interesting novelty.

"I have little education, and I was happy when I saw many people interested in me. They're strange people," he said. - *Phnom Penh Post*

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NEW DELHI

Bans stirring up a lot of beeping anger

"DON'T eat it, read it, see it, feel it," sings the Michael Jackson impersonator as she raps her way through a list of pleasures banned by India's conservative government before chorusing, "Just beep it!"

As the world's largest democracy, India has long been proud of its tradition of artistic, cultural and religious freedoms.

But a series of bans, ranging from eating beef to watching the *Fifty Shades of Grey* movie, has sparked accusations of a growing climate of intolerance under Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Critics say the bans show how "thin-skinned" their politicians have become in the internet age where attempts to put a lid on offending material are likely to backfire.

The spoof of Jackson's classic "Beat It", which was made by the Indian comedy trio Enna Da Rascalas, has gone viral since being uploaded on YouTube last week, reflecting the backlash against blacklists.

Announcing a ban earlier this month on a British-made documentary about a notorious 2012 gang-rape in Delhi, Home Minister Rajnath Singh said the comments by one of the rappers could fuel public anger.

Days later, a government-appointed board of censors blocked the release of the erotic movie *Fifty Shades of Grey* in cinemas, despite being shown a toned-down version.

And a comedy show that featured several Bollywood stars has fallen foul of the authorities after being uploaded



Leslee Udwin, director of the documentary *India's Daughter* gestures during a press conference in New Delhi on March 3. Photo: AFP

on the internet and is now at the centre of an obscenity investigation over some of its sexually explicit jokes.

"For this government, it seems a ban becomes the quickest way to eliminate a problem," Shiv Visvanathan, a sociologist based in Haryana state, said.

"Bans do not tolerate disorder but without debate and disorder, you can't have a free democracy. It is just making life complex."

Historians point out that the centre-left Congress party which has ruled India for most of the post-independence period has its own track record of bans, particularly during the 1975-77 "Emergency" under Indira Gandhi.

British author Salman Rushdie's 1988 book *The Satanic Verses* was for example banned in India for allegedly insulting Islam.

But the last two decades has seen

a general relaxation on the part of the watchdogs with TV channels able to air shows like *Sex and the City* that would have once been considered too racy.

Even the Rushdie novel adaptation *Midnight's Children* - which is scathing about the Emergency - was released in Indian cinemas in 2013, albeit without the nudity.

Shashi Tharoor, a best-selling author who is also a Congress lawmaker, says the cultural climate has definitely changed since Mr Modi's right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party came to power last May.

"Our mounting concern is that there is a climate of intolerance that has unfortunately been given free rein," Mr Tharoor said.

"Positions which had always struck the Indian mainstream as being fringe positions have suddenly become acceptable to the powers that lead."

The former diplomat made his name with *The Great Indian Novel*, a satire that came out in 1989 and is based on the epic Sanskrit poem Mahabharata. Were it to be published today, Mr Tharoor suspects it would be banned.

Acclaimed Tamil-language author Perumal Murugan quit writing altogether in January following protests by Hindu and caste groups who felt insulted by one of his books.

Pressure from Hindu activist groups was also instrumental in the passing of a ban on beef earlier this month in the western state of Maharashtra, which encompasses the largest city Mumbai. Cows are sacred to Hindus.

The move has been interpreted in some corners as another sign of growing intolerance in a country that is overwhelmingly Hindu but also has sizeable Muslim, Christian and Buddhist minorities.

But Pavan Verma, who has written extensively about cultural and religious history in India, said a certain amount of censorship was understandable in order to avoid causing offence in such a diverse country.

"India is a country of wide social discrepancies ... that try to coexist with each other and it's not an easy job to keep everyone happy all the time," Mr Verma, a former head of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, said.

There was widespread condemnation in India of January's murderous attack on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris which had printed cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed.

But when the editor of a Mumbai-based Urdu magazine reprinted one of the cartoons as a gesture of solidarity, she was arrested under laws against insulting religion.

Tanmay Bhat, one of the AIB comedy team at the centre of the obscenity row, said the wave of bans made little logical sense but did reflect a general intolerance.

"We [Indians] tend to have ... an ostrich kind of mentality," he said at a New Delhi event last week.

"We want to put our heads into the ground and be like, 'if I don't like something then it's got to go away.'"

- AFP

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FROM her poverty-stricken roots in a Philippine backwater, via domestic service in Hong Kong to acclaim in New York, Xyza Cruz Bacani's inspirational journey started with a camera bought with borrowed money.

The 28-year-old came to Hong Kong nine years ago to join 300,000 other women working as maids in the city, hoping to earn enough money to help fund her brother's education.

But photography has transformed her life with her images of everything from trips to the supermarket to scenes of abuse at a refuge for domestic workers earning laudatory spreads in international media and at exhibitions.

Bacani was recently named as one of the recipients of a fellowship by the Magnum Foundation, a prestigious scholarship that will allow her to study in New York for six weeks.

With that in mind, just a week ago she quit domestic service to pursue her passion for photography. But when she first came to Hong Kong, survival was her first priority.

"The urge to survive is much bigger than the urge to do art," she said in Macau where her photographs are on show as part of the city's Literary Festival.

A self-professed dreamer, she said she also saw the move to Hong Kong as an opportunity to leave her home village, nine hours' drive from the Philippine capital Manila.

"It was a big contrast when I arrived

at the airport I was very excited because everything is moving fast, and the lights are wonderful. It looks so alive compared to my village," she said.

Her passion for photography really took off four years ago, when her employer - whom she describes as a "great lady" - lent her the money to buy her first camera, a Nikon D90.

"When I had the camera, I shot landscapes to flowers to portraits of my mom, and then I did street photography."

From that point on Bacani took photographs at every opportunity she had, whether out buying daily produce for her employer or ranging across Hong Kong on Sundays off work.

At first she only shared her pictures with friends on Facebook - mostly shot in grainy black and white, capturing street moments in classic reportage style.

A Filipino photographer based in San Francisco saw them on Facebook and was intrigued by their originality and quality. From there she came to the attention of the *New York Times* Lens blog and then of acclaimed photographer Sebastiao Salgado, who praised her work at an exhibition in Hong Kong late last year.

Reflecting on her journey thus far, she marvels, "Right now it's changed my life 180 degrees. Here I am having a show in Macau, going to places."

With increasing concerns over the treatment of domestic helpers in Hong Kong and the region, Bacani is now turning to documentary photography to try to draw attention to abuses.



Filipina maid captures dreams through photography



"That's what I want my photography to do, to be able to help people ... To me photography is a very powerful tool to change someone's perspective toward an issue," she said.

In the summer of 2014, Bacani documented migrant workers who had taken shelter at a refuge after suffering abuse at the hands of their employers, an experience she described as "life-changing".

"I was angry at first. It was a roller-coaster of emotion when I saw this kind of situation.

"I think I was there to be the voice of those domestic workers who remain unheard, whose voices have been muted."

Just last month a judge sentenced a Hong Kong woman to six years in jail for beating and starving her Indonesian maid in a case that made global headlines.

Bacani's own employer could not be more different, she says, offering support and encouragement to pursue her plans of becoming a photographer full-time.

"She said my domestic worker duties are restricting me from growing up as a person. It's a chain that holds me," Bacani said, after stopping her domestic work last week.

Bacani's story has inspired many other helpers in the city, and she is urging them to pursue their dreams too.

"They keep on telling me ... now that they've seen me, I made them realise that it's possible to do the things that you really want to do outside your job.

"I want people to see that your job, your work, it doesn't define who you are," she added.

"The dreams that I had when I was young, I'm having them now." - AFP

Rescuing tradition from the threat of machines

ZON PANN PWINT
zonpann08@gmail.com

ONCE relied upon as an essential source of income by communities across the country, traditional crafts like hand-weaving have been dying out over the past decade as manually operated looms

have been increasingly replaced by machines.

A pilot project launched in June last year in six regions across Myanmar has sought to revive Myanmar's traditional craft sector by inspiring artists to combine contemporary designs with traditional craftsmanship.

The project - organised by New



Daw Nyunt Nyunt Win is one of the last remaining artists to use traditional copper sequins to create traditional embroidery, known as *shwe chi hto*.



Visitors examine hand-made crafts at the *From Craft to Art* exhibition at Goethe Villa on March 21. Photos: Zarni Phyo

Zero, the British Council and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation - saw artists from the New Zero Art Space collaborating with local skilled artisans to develop artistic creativity while preserving their ethnic cultural identities. The resulting artworks are now on display at Yangon's Goethe Villa, as part of an exhibition entitled *From Craft to Art*, which opened on March 21.

One form of traditional embroidery - known as *shwe chi hto* - is created by sewing patterns or pictures on black velvet using copper sequins, threads and spangles. The use of copper sequins, a key characteristic of *shwe chi hto*, has become increasingly rare in recent years, as artisans often replace them with cheaper, plastic sequins from China.

In Mandalay, there are only two artists remaining who use traditional copper sequins - which cost around K40,000 per pound, compared with plastic sequins which cost K7000.

"Plastic sequins are light, cheap and shiny. Copper sequined embroidery is heavy, expensive and less shiny but the colour of copper becomes more delicate as it ages. But copper is not in demand because it

is more expensive," said Daw Nyunt Nyunt Win, one of the last surviving artists to use copper sequins.

"The older the copper sequined embroidery is, the more beautiful it looks," said the artist, whose embroideries depicting Myanmar festivals are on display in the *From Craft to Art* exhibition.

Daw Nyunt Nyunt Win - whose embroidery can be seen hung in the reception hall of Mandalay Strand Hotel - started creating *shwe chi hto* in 1985 in Mandalay, a city famous for its long-standing handicraft tradition. She operates a shop in the city named Arker Tun.

"My buyers don't like the glittery effect of plastic sequins. They like the delicate look of copper. In previous years, a lot of businesses shut down because of the high cost of the raw materials needed to create traditional embroidery and a lack of demand for the artwork," she said.

When she started the business, Daw Nyunt Nyunt Win employed a

large team of staff who learnt the art from her and worked in the shop. Today, she has only 12 staff.

"Young people who once earned a living making traditional handicrafts are finding work in other sectors," she said. "We can't pay high-enough salaries because business is not good."

"Income from local handicrafts comes largely from foreign buyers, so business slowed down when the Saffron revolution broke out in 2007 as there were fewer visitors coming here," she said.

A hand-woven shawl costs around K30,000, while a machine-produced shawl costs around K8000. But Ma Ngwe Hnin Phyu, a textile weaver from Myitkyina - famous for its intricate textile designs - said hand-woven textiles are more popular than those made by machine.

"These days it's not common to see weavers using hand-loom," she said. "Almost everything is produced by machine."

From Craft to Art is open to the public at Goethe Villa, 8 Ko Min Ko Chin Road, Bahan township until March 25.

TOKYO

Tokyo men stay one step ahead in style

FEMININE glamour may turn the most heads at fashion weeks in New York or Paris, but in Tokyo it is the style-conscious men who set the sartorial trends.

From sharp futurism to wool-and-denim casuals, the finale of Tokyo Fashion Week put the spotlight largely on menswear, aiming to promote the most dynamic area of Japanese clothes design.

"What happens here is probably the future of men's fashion," said Antonio Cristaudo from Pitti Immagine, a collection of fashion industry events in Italy.

"There's individuality they want to be different," he said. "It's important for all the fashion world to see what's happening in Japan."

Such innovation is nowhere more evident than on the streets of Tokyo, from the vintage and skater styles of Ura-Hara to the slick suits of the Marunouchi business district.

With sharp tailoring and eye-catching accessories, from hats and bags to shiny shoes, the get-up of Tokyo gents is striking to the first-time visitor.

"The menswear is just so much more exciting than womenswear here," said Misha Janette, an American fashion journalist based in Tokyo, who suggested the tendency for women to

cover up meant their clothes could be "a bit shapeless".

For the men, meanwhile, "it's ok to do your hair, be into fashion, use skincare," Janette said. "They like to be proper in Japan."

Although Tokyo's dandies shine at home and start trends that travel abroad, the success of Japan's own designers has been limited overseas.

The industry is now trying to change that with the new Tokyo Fashion Awards, backed by the city government, which push homegrown brands to emulate their leading lights such as Junya Watanabe and Rei Kawakubo, founder of Comme des Garçons.

The awards jury chose six brands, predominantly menswear-focused, which were seen to have international potential. The winners held a showroom at Paris Fashion Week this year and presented their autumn-winter collections in Tokyo on March 21.

They ranged from the "sheep boy" theme of the brand Factotum, designed by Koji Udo and inspired by a Haruki Murakami novel, to the futuristic colour-popped creations of John Lawrence Sullivan, a label by Arashi Yanagawa named after the 19th-century American boxer.

"These are brands already very popular in Tokyo but they now have to start going overseas," said Akiko Shinoda, director of international affairs at Japan Fashion Week Organisation, who cited a lack of focus on sales and few English-language speakers as barriers to success.

Winning designer Udo was frank about Japan's need to "develop designs beyond street fashion", but he expressed confidence in his clothes' practical appeal.

"The special feature of men's fashion in Japan is that it's actually wearable on the streets, in contrast to fashion coming from American and European fashion houses," he said after his show.

Motofumi "Poggy" Kogi, a buyer for local retailer United Arrows and a fashion awards judge, said strong collaboration with craftspeople and textile producers was also a crucial part of Japanese fashion.

"Japan has embraced mass



production but has stayed true to the importance of small details," Kogi said.

That attention to detail was praised by international buyers visiting Tokyo, who said the city's pioneering styles were becoming all the more important as men worldwide take greater interest in dress and grooming.

Eric Jennings, vice president and fashion director in menswear, home and beauty at Saks Fifth Avenue in New York, said there had been "unprecedented growth" in the sector in the United States.

"For the first time probably ever, men are embracing fashion, upgrading their wardrobes. They're now outperforming women consistently coming out of the recession," he said on his first visit to Tokyo.

"The trends start in Japan and then they migrate to Europe and then the US. So this is getting one step ahead for me." - AFP

A model displays a creation from the Sulvam label by Japanese designer Teppi Fujita during Tokyo Fashion Week's 2015-16 autumn/winter collection in Tokyo.

Photo: AFP/Toru Yamanaka



IN PICTURES

A Malaysian girl grimaces as her friend smears coloured powders on her face to celebrate Holi at a temple in Kuala Lumpur on March 21. Holi, the festival of colours in which people smear each other with coloured powder and water, is celebrated by Hindus around the world.

Photo: AFP

HANOVER

A 3D picture of the future

FRANK ZELLER

N EED a copy of your wedding ring, a new name tag for the dog or a spare part for the washing machine? Just print it. That's the message at the CeBIT IT fair in Germany.

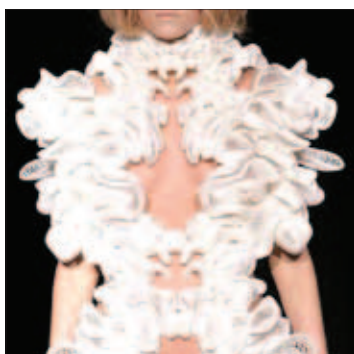
A host of companies are showcasing new tech marvels, from web-connected robots to 3D printers, that can turn homes, schools and offices into design labs and mini factories.

They say the merging of the virtual and physical worlds will unleash a wave of creativity, democratise manufacturing and lead people to print rather than buy their Christmas presents.

One of the most eye-catching projects at CeBIT in Hanover is "Robochop", where heavy-duty industrial robots carve foam cubes into furniture or sculptures, based on designs people upload online.

Part tech show, part digital-age art installation, it invites internet users worldwide to create a shape on their PC or tablet using simple design software and upload it for the bots to cut using a hot wire.

The 2000 most inspiring designs will be mailed free of charge to their creators' homes, anywhere in the world, say the brains behind Robochop, design duo Clemens Weisshaar and Reed Kram.



A 3D-printed dress by Dutch Fashion designer Iris van Herpen. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

"These robots are a mini factory that is connected not to the owner of the factory but to everyone else," said Weisshaar. "That's what's going to completely change over the next years. Software will be written that allows users to take over machinery without having the engineering knowledge that you would normally need if you just bought a robot."

On a more modest scale the 3D printer has for years been a vital tool for designers, engineers, architects and researchers, who typically use it to create models and prototypes. But here too, breakneck advances in precision, resolution, speed and available materials are rapidly changing the industry.

3D printing has made

headlines with eye-popping uses, including downloadable designs for handguns, a prosthetic beak for a Costa Rican toucan, and the "printing" of entire homes with a mix of concrete and recycled rubble by a Chinese company.

The technology "has in fact been around for more than 25 years, but it has been covered by patents", said Sara Bonomi, of US 3D printer maker formlabs. "The industry is really developing so much now because these patents are expiring and the technology is becoming accessible for everyone."

Formlabs makes high-resolution desktop 3D printers that have been used to design everything from jewellery to dentures, and medical devices to the model spaceships seen in Hollywood blockbuster *Interstellar*.

While most 3D printers create models "from the bottom up", using resin from a nozzle to add layer upon layer, formlabs employs lasers that solidify a resin to create objects with ultra-crisp detail, in a process sometimes called "optical fabrication". As 3D printing advances, becomes more affordable and enters more family homes, it will change the way people live, Bonomi said.

"Definitely in the future we will be able to customise rings and shoes, and then you can just print them at home," she said. - AFP

The Global Gossip

TOKYO

Every dog has his half-day

Apartment not big enough for a dog? Too busy for walks? In crowded Tokyo you can rent a mutt for a few hours of wet noses and unconditional loving from Man's Best Friend.

Just a few minutes' walk from Yoyogi Park, one of Tokyo's main green lungs, Dog Heart is part petting zoo and part rental shop.

Visitors can choose between sitting and stroking more than 20 animals or taking them for a walk around the park.

Half an hour of play-time costs 950 yen (US\$8), while 60 minutes of dog-walking will set you back 3600 yen. Both can be extended for additional cost.

Since opening in 2012, owner Yukiko Tsuchiya, 50, says her business has been growing, with some clients coming in weekly.

"In the suburbs, it is easier to get in contact with dogs, but in Tokyo, there is a demand for a places like this," she says.

"People bring their kids here, couples come for dates, men and women come on their own... and elderly people as well, because they feel too old to have a pet at home." - AFP



Rino Kakinuma, 7, plays with toy poodles, beagles and a golden retriever at the Dog Heart cafe in Tokyo. Photo: AFP/Yoshikazu Tsuno



Bradley Cooper and Jennifer Lawrence attend the after-party of a screening of 'Serena' hosted by Magnolia Pictures And The Cinema Society With Dior Beauty on March 21 in New York City. Photo: Jamie McCarthy/Getty Images/AFP



Comedian Ellen DeGeneres and wife Portia de Rossi attend the 26th Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) Media Awards at the Beverly Hilton Hotel on March 21 in Beverly Hills, California. Photo: Jason Kempin/Getty Images/AFP



Singer/songwriter Pharrell Williams speaks at United Nations International Day of Happiness 2015 in New York City. Photo: Mike Coppola/Getty Images/AFP

UNITED NATIONS UN happy after star singer visit

The UN podium has been the scene of countless speeches both passionate and dull, but on March 20 the audience was not world leaders but children, and they mobbed the speaker.

Pop star Pharrell Williams - best known for his viral hit "Happy" - addressed the UN General Assembly on the "International Day of Happiness" as he raised his voice on the dangers of climate change.

After he spoke, "Happy" came on the speakers of the normally solemn hall as dozens of teenagers and younger children raced toward him with their camera phones in hopes he would dance.

UN security guards rushed into the crowd in fear of a stampede as an official took the microphone to urge everyone to step back.

Williams has been working with former US vice president Al Gore to organise global concerts in June to

build public pressure for a UN-backed agreement on climate change at a conference late this year in Paris.

"You should know that happiness is your birthright," Williams told the hundreds of assembled children, whose placards all read "#happyplanet" instead of the usual names of UN member states.

"If you don't take care of your home, you don't have a life, so we have to now transition from climate change to climate action," he said.

Environmentalist Philippe Cousteau Jr joined Williams to warn that climate change's effects were looking even worse than initially feared, pointing to Cyclone Pam, which recently ravaged the Pacific island of Vanuatu, as well as the rapidly melting Arctic ice.

"One of the scary things about climate change is that all of our predictions have been too conservative," said Cousteau, the grandson of legendary French ocean explorer Jacques Cousteau. - AFP

What's on

TODAY

Monday Blues. Mojo Bar, 135 Inya Road, Bahan 9:30pm
Trivia night. Free beer pitcher for round winners and winning team gets a K30,000 bar tab. 50th Street Bar, 50th Street (lower block) 8pm

TOMORROW

"Tuesday snippets." Gallery conversation and drinks. Pansodan Gallery, 289 Pansodan Street, Kyaukada, 7pm- late
Standup Yangon International comedy showcase. Featuring Brian Aylward from Canada and Aidan Killian from Ireland. 50th Street Bar, 50th Street (lower block) 8pm

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

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DARWIN	712	1,682
NEW DELHI	721	1,161
AMSTERDAM	851	2,740
PARIS	882	2,771
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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

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

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

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

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 503	Daily	19:05	23:20

YANGON TO BEIJING

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CA 906	3,5,7	23:50	05:50+1

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

YANGON TO TAIPEI

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CI 7916	Daily	10:50	16:10

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

YANGON TO HANOI

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 956	1,3,5,6,7	19:10	21:25

YANGON TO HO CHI MINH CITY

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 942	2,4,7	14:25	17:05

YANGON TO DOHA

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
QR 919	1,4,6	7:55	11:40

YANGON TO SEOUL

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
OZ 770	4,7	0:50	8:50
KE 472	Daily	23:55	07:45+1

YANGON TO HONG KONG

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
KA 251	Daily	1:10	5:25

YANGON TO TOKYO

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
NH 914	Daily	22:10	06:45+1

YANGON TO DHAKA

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
BG 061	2	11:45	13:00
BG 061	5	19:45	21:00

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 7701	Daily	23:55	07:45+1

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

YANGON TO GAYA

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 601	1,3,5,6	10:30	11:50
AI 236	2	13:10	14:10
AI 234	1,5	14:05	15:05

MANDALAY TO BANGKOK

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 710	Daily	14:15	16:40

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

MANDALAY TO DON MUEANG

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
FD 245	Daily	12:50	15:15

MANDALAY TO KUNMING

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MU 2030	Daily	13:50	16:40

NAY PYI TAW TO BANGKOK

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 722	1,2,3,4,5	19:45	22:45

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

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

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

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

BEIJING TO YANGON

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CA 905	3,5,7	19:30	22:50

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

TAIPEI TO YANGON

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CI 7915	Daily	7:00	9:50

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

HANOI TO YANGON

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 957	1,3,5,6,7	16:40	18:10

HO CHI MINH CITY TO YANGON

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 943	2,4,7	11:45	13:25

DOHA TO YANGON

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
QR 918	3,5,7	19:45	04:59+1

SEOUL TO YANGON

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
KE 471	Daily	18:30	22:30
OZ 769	3,6	19:30	23:40

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

TOKYO TO YANGON

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
NH 913	Daily	11:45	17:15

DHAKA TO YANGON

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
BG 060	2	8:30	10:45
BG 060	5	16:30	18:45

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

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

GAYA TO YANGON

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
AI 235	2	9:10	12:10
8M 602	1,3,5,6	12:50	16:00
AI 233	5	15:00	18:00

BANGKOK TO MANDALAY

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 709	Daily	12:05	13:25

SINGAPORE TO MANDALAY

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 2234	Daily	7:20	16:30
MI 533	2,4,6	11:30	14:50

DON MUEANG TO MANDALAY

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
FD 244	Daily	10:55	12:20

KUNMING TO MANDALAY

Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MU 2029	Daily	12:55	12:50

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)

CRICKET

World Cup anger in sub-continent

ICC chief blasts own president over 'fix' claims

INTERNATIONAL Cricket Council chief executive David Richardson on March 20 slammed his organisation's Bangladeshi president for questioning the integrity of umpires, saying allegations of fixing were "unfortunate" and "baseless".

Mustafa Kamal claimed decisions made by officials during Bangladesh's 109-run loss to India in their World Cup quarter-final in Melbourne on March 19 seemed to have been "pre-arranged".

Kamal was backed by hundreds of Bangladesh cricket supporters who after the game burnt an effigy of Pakistani cricket umpire Aleem Dar and marched in the capital Dhaka. They chanted "Shame, shame, no to ICC conspiracy."

Kamal was angry that India's Rohit Sharma, who top-scored with 137, had not been given out when he was on 90.

Rohit had been caught at deep mid-wicket off the bowling of Rubel Hossain, but umpires Aleem Dar and Ian Gould signalled a no-ball for what appeared to be a legitimate waist-high delivery.

But Richardson defended Dar and Gould from all accusations of biased officiating.

"The ICC has noted Mr Mustafa Kamal's comments, which are very unfortunate but made in his personal capacity. As an ICC President, he should have been more considerate in his criticism of ICC match officials, whose integrity cannot be questioned," said Richardson.

"The no-ball decision was a 50-50 call. The spirit of the game dictates that the umpire's decision is final and must be respected," the former South Africa wicket-keeper added.

"Any suggestion that the match officials had 'an agenda' or did anything other than perform to the best of their ability are baseless and are refuted in the strongest possible terms," Richardson insisted.

Kamal said he was considering quitting his post in protest.

"As the ICC president, whatever I have to say I will say it in next meeting. It could happen that maybe I will resign," Kamal said in comments aired on Bangladeshi television.

"There was no quality in the umpiring. It looked like they took the field after it [the outcome] was pre-arranged," he alleged.



A Pakistani cricket fan beats effigies of Pakistani cricket players in Karachi on March 21 following defeat in the World Cup quarter-finals. Photo: AFP

Bangladeshi fans were also furious at the dismissal of star batsman Mohammad Mahmudullah who was caught close to the boundary rope.

The match was the biggest in the history of the cricket-mad nation, marking the first time that Bangladesh had made the World Cup quarter-finals.

Kamal, whose position has been largely ceremonial since India's Narayanaswami Srinivasan became the body's chair last year, said the ICC's

acronym seemed to stand for the Indian Cricket Council.

"I cannot represent the Indian Cricket Council. If someone has imposed a result on us, in that case no one can accept it," added Kamal, who is a minister in the Bangladeshi government.

Meanwhile the Indian cricket board said Kamal should have made his feelings known to his fellow administrators before airing them in public. - AFP

Mock funeral in Pakistan's Multan

Angry Pakistan cricket fans smashed TVs and staged a mock funeral for the team on March 20 after poor batting and sloppy catching saw them dumped out of the World Cup.

A limp display with the bat saw Pakistan bowled out for just 213 and co-hosts Australia chased the target down with relative ease to win by six wickets despite a fiery spell from fast bowler Wahab Riaz.

News channels showed footage of fans smashing up a television set in anger at the team's elimination.

In the central Pakistani city of Multan around 50 fans organised a symbolic funeral procession through the streets, complete with a coffin with bats on top.

Multan's residents are much given to protests and staged a similar event after Pakistan's humiliating 150-run defeat to the West Indies earlier in the tournament. - AFP

ATHLETICS

Vertical win for Pole

POLAND'S Piotr Lobodzinski won the inaugural race up the Eiffel Tower in Paris on March 19, known as the "Vertical".

Lobodzinski leapt up its 1665 steps to the third floor in just 7min 50sec despite cold weather and high winds that made the final stages terrifying.

In total, 57 people from 16 different countries - top class athletes as well as a cancer survivor and an amputee - took part in the race, part of a weekend of trail events ranging from 18km to 80km known as the "Ecotrail".

In total, competitors climbed 324

vertical metres to reach the top, where exhausted bodies gasped for oxygen and lay strewn on the metal.

"It's worse than a sprint, worse than a marathon and worse than giving birth," said American Madeleine Fontillas-Ronk, 46, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2013.

"It's 10-15 minutes of all-out effort. You feel your lungs, your throat, your brain is telling you to stop. But you want to finish.

"It's between me and the tower. If she's still standing, I'm still standing. We're both winners." - AFP



IN PICTURES

Photo: Myanmar Fighting Cocks AFL



65 - 28



AFL Asia, Star City Sports Oval, March 21

FOOTBALL

Compensation for December World Cup

FIFA said March 20 it will pay more than US\$415 million for players who take part in the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, with most of the cash going to top European clubs.

The European Club Association said it will also get a bigger say on dates for internationals under the new accord with the global governing body which the ECA chief called a "milestone" for club power.

The accord could end European demands for compensation for changing the dates of the 2022 Qatar World Cup to November-December.

It was announced one day after FIFA fixed December 18 as the date of the 2022 World Cup final - at the height of the European season.

FIFA will hand over \$209 million to clubs with players on duty for each of the next two World Cups, under the deal signed by FIFA president Sepp Blatter and ECA chief Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, chair of Bayern Munich.

The figure is three times the \$70 million paid out by FIFA to clubs after the 2014 World Cup.

As three-quarters of the players at the Brazil tournament were under contract with European clubs, the payments went mainly to Europe.

"We are taking a huge step forward in promoting relations between FIFA and the clubs in a spirit of mutual and constructive cooperation," said Blatter in a statement announcing the accord which lifts another obstacle to a smooth World Cup in Qatar.

Blatter had at first rejected demands for compensation made by the ECA after a FIFA working group called for the Qatar World Cup to be moved to the winter months because of the scorching summer temperatures in the Gulf state.

But Blatter and Rummenigge have since held talks on increasing the payments for players called on World Cup duty.

"In serious and fair negotiations,

the ECA has agreed with FIFA on a transparent economic and organisational cooperation until 2022," Rummenigge commented.

"For the first time, the European clubs will have a direct say on the international match calendar, which was very important to me personally.

"As a result, the ECA will be actively involved and contribute constructively to the design of the calendar, especially for 2022."

Rummenigge said the FIFA payments "will benefit clubs from around the world who release World Cup players to their respective national associations.

"From an ECA perspective, this agreement is a great achievement. It marks another milestone for club football as a whole," said the ECA boss.

A top FIFA executive member who has been a critic of the Qatar World Cup said that everyone must get on with making the event a success.

Jim Boyce, Britain's FIFA vice president, said the 2022 World Cup would be a one-off winter tournament.

"It's one year out of the calendar and I think if everyone works together for one year we can work it out to make sure everyone is satisfied," Boyce told reporters on the sidelines of a FIFA executive committee meeting.

"There is always going to be someone who will complain," said Boyce who has in the past said there should be a revote for the 2022 World Cup if corruption claims were proved and who spoke strongly against a summer World Cup in the Gulf state.

Boyce said there were clear benefits for a winter World Cup.

"All the spectators who are going to Qatar will have a wonderful time from a climate point of view.

"And the players could be fresher than they have ever been for a World Cup - so let's get on with it," declared the FIFA vice president. - AFP

FOOTBALL

Denmark resolve pay dispute

DENMARK'S football association revealed March 21 that a pay dispute with the players' union has been resolved, with national players accepting pay cuts in return for bonuses.

"This is a really good day for international football and for Danish football," a visibly relieved Claus Bretton Meyer, head of the Danish Football Association (DBU) said during a press conference.

"It has been incredibly important to reach a common agreement for the national teams."

Denmark are set to play a friendly at home to the United States on March 25 but had lacked an agreement on pay levels for international games since a previous deal expired last year.

Negotiations broke down last week with both sides accusing the other of intransigence before returning to the negotiating table.

The new agreement, which runs to 2018 for the men's national team and to 2017 for the women's team and under-21s, includes a 17 percent pay cut which the DBU had been seeking.

In return, the DBU agreed to the players' union demands for new bonuses for national players if the team qualifies for finals such as Euro-2016 in France. It will also maintain collective pay agreements which it had attempted to scrap.

"We are pleased that the men's team players are willing to lower fees and contribute toward better finances so we can afford to invest in fan-experiences, talent and all sorts of football activities," Bretton Meyer said.

"It will be good to be able to focus now on the national team and the upcoming matches."

The Danish Footballers' Association, which represents players, had fought for a "results-oriented" pay deal.

"We are pleased that we now have collective agreements in place," the association's president Thomas Lindrup said in a statement. - AFP

RUGBY UNION

Defend fortress Twickenham, says captain Robshaw

CAPTAIN Chris Robshaw shrugged off England's latest Six Nations heartbreak to claim that victory over France was a huge step toward making Twickenham a real fortress come the World Cup.

The Harlequins flanker had mixed emotions after a monumental effort from his team to get the 26-point win over France which would have gifted them the title at Twickenham.

But an incredible match, which saw England run in seven of the twelve tries on show and a 55-35 win over their rivals, ended with Ireland being crowned Northern Hemisphere champions.

It was a fourth successive missed opportunity for England who have finished runners-up now in each tournament since Stuart Lancaster took charge from Martin Johnson following the 2011 World Cup.

But Robshaw focused on the positives of making it a third home win in the tournament and beating a team who will be a major rival come England 2015 in September.

He insisted, "To score 50-odd points against France was a cracking effort but once again we have been pipped at the post. Of course it is tough to take and all the guys are devastated in the dressing room."

"It is never easy to take and because this one happened at home it is probably the toughest of the lot."

"We thought we had the ascendancy and could get the points needed. But we just fell short after a massive effort from the guys. I'm proud of them."

"We have won another Twickenham game and we are building up a head of steam at the stadium going into the World Cup, which is a positive. We are playing well at home."

"That was the loudest I've heard at Twickenham, ever. But at the end we have to look at the things we did wrong and chances we left on the field against other teams. That was what cost us. We should have got a couple more tries last week but it's now important to look forward."

"This side has proved it can score plenty of tries when we get the chance

on the big occasion and the World Cup is not far away now."

"We are heading in the right direction."

Head coach Lancaster admitted, "Losing against Ireland cost us the title. But winning and losing a title is not just down to one single thing on the field."

"It's tough to take and the players have to learn these tough lessons. But the ultimate feeling is one of pride from what the guys did today."

"It's hard to try and beat a quality side like France by 26 points. They won't just come here and roll over for you. They may not have been able to win the title but they still played with great pride and determination."

"We have to be more consistent to win a tournament like this or a World Cup. But we have six months to work on things and we will be ready by the time the World Cup comes round."

"I am positive. We've scored 18 tries this year compared to 14 last time. We also have the likes of Joe Launchbury and Manu Tuilagi to come back into the team."



England beat France but it wasn't enough to win the Six Nations. Photo: AFP

"It was a cup final atmosphere and a highly pressurised one. But we scored 55 points and many fine tries."

France head coach Philippe Saint-Andre, whose team finished fourth in the table, insisted, "It was an amazing game but we were like Father Christmas. We gave away tries like presents to them and that is

not good enough against England at Twickenham."

"I remember a crazy match like this one as a player but never a coach. But the fact is we lost. The score means it was an exciting game with lots of good rugby but also not so good defending. So it is still not what I am looking for from the team." - AFP

WEIGHTLIFTING

New doping scandal hits Bulgarian weightlifters

THE Bulgarian weightlifting team will not take part in the upcoming European championships in Tbilisi, Georgia, after 11 athletes tested positive for doping, the Bulgarian federation announced on March 20.

Eight men and three women returned positive results for doping during tests carried out by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) two weeks ago.

The continental championships are due to begin on April 11.

The anabolic steroid stanozolol, which stimulates increased muscle tissue, was allegedly put into the athletes' meals, claimed their coach Ivan Ivanov.

"All our efforts have been in vain. We were hoping for medals, as well as at the world championships and Olympic Games," the federation president told daily paper *Standart*.

The athletes now face bans of four years, while four athletes face life bans for a second offence, ac-

cording to press reports.

A similar scandal marked the Bulgarian weightlifting team in June 2008 ahead of the Beijing Games when a number of athletes tested positive for the banned steroid metandienone.

Two lifters were banned for life by the national federation while nine others, including three women, were suspended for four years and the federation were hit with a fine of US\$465,000.

- AFP

AMERICAN FOOTBALL

Rule changes discussed

NATIONAL Football League team owners have begun to consider 23 potential rule changes for next season at their meeting in Phoenix that started yesterday, including one that could bring touchdown plays to a possible nine points.

That radical rule revamp proposal at the annual owners gathering was made by the Indianapolis Colts, who tout the idea as a way to entice more teams to attempt two-point run or pass conversions rather than kick for a single point after scoring six points on a touchdown.

The Colts want teams who make a successful two-point conversion to then have a chance to make a 50-yard kick for another point, nine in all, which could keep trailing teams within reach longer, adding drama in games and tension for teams ahead by less than 10 points.

Convincing owners to back such a change might be difficult, but several other ideas up for consideration, according to a posting on the NFL website, could garner significant support, including expanded use of television instant replay to challenge officials' on-field calls and even the expiration of play clocks between snaps of the ball.

One idea would allow any referee call to be challenged by a coach, while another would limit extra challenges to personal fouls. Another would require a coach to call a timeout to challenge a decision, with the team regaining the timeout only if the on-field call is overturned.

The reigning Super Bowl champion New England Patriots want some rule tweaks as well, including allowing coaches to challenge calls in the final two minutes of a half or overtime, something now handled only by the review official.

They also will ask for fixed cameras along the sidelines, goal lines and back lines of the end zone in addition to those used by television networks for game coverage.

And another Patriots pitch would move back one-point conversion kicks to the 15-yard line to increase the difficulty of a play that has become all-but automatic, although two-point run and pass attempts would remain at the two-yard line.

The Chicago Bears will suggest that each team be ensured of a possession in overtime, eliminating the sudden death aspect now in place for a team that scores a touchdown on the opening possession of overtime.

Owners also figure to consider potential expansion of the number of teams that qualify for the playoffs and language on what is needed to constitute a successful pass reception.

Pre-game control of footballs, an issue in the playoffs this year that sparked "Deflategate" charges that New England used an under-inflated ball for a competitive edge, is not a topic while the league awaits the results of an investigation on the matter. - AFP



IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP

Jerian Grant (22) of the Notre Dame Fighting Irish has his shot blocked by Kameron Woods (31) and Andrew Chrabascz (45) of the Butler Bulldogs during the NCAA "March Madness" tournament. Notre Dame won 67-64 and now progress to the "Sweet Sixteen" round to be played on March 26 and 27.

IN BRIEF

Boxing
Garcia, Peterson eye showdown
Danny Garcia and Lamont Peterson are unconcerned about the possibility of becoming future foes for the Manny Pacquiao-Floyd Mayweather megafight winner.

Rival 140-pound (63.5kg) world champions Garcia and Peterson will meet April 11 in New York at a catchweight of 143 pounds, so neither US fighter's titles will be risked when they determine who rules the light-welterweight ranks. - AFP

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