

INSIDE  
4-PAGE FEATURE

March of reconciliation  
Four years of democratic transition



INSIDE  
THE PULSE

A burning desire for wealth



HEARTBEAT OF THE NATION

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A police officer points an accusatory finger after an altercation with a reporter from the BBC during a protest in Mandalay on March 27. Photo: Si Thu Lwin

## Returning migrants tell of abuse and torture

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WHEN the Myanmar warship *Mahar Thiha Thura* docked in Yangon yesterday, more than 100 migrant workers poured out, relieved to be far away from the Malaysian detention camps where they say they were tortured, starved and beaten.

The 102 undocumented migrants were brought home after the Navy ship attended an expo in Malaysia and decided it had room for workers who wanted to return.

The migrants, exclusively men and largely from ethnic minority areas, had all entered Malaysia illegally or overstayed their legal documents. After working under the radar for several years - sometimes up to a decade - they were arrested for violating immigration law and, without money to go home, sent to detention camps.

"I will not try to go to Malaysia ever again because the camp where I was held was the worst," said Lein Khaw Gay, a frail 16-year-old.

Leing Khaw Gay, from Chin State, entered Malaysia alone and without any papers when he was 14. He worked for a year as a car washer and sent K400,000 back to his family before he was arrested and detained for a year.

CONTINUED ON NEWS 4

## BBC reporter charged after clash with police

Reporter for BBC's Myanmar service facing potential prison term of three years after police accuse him of punching an officer during a student protest in Mandalay on March 27. **NEWS 3**

**BUSINESS 12**

### Growth poses staffing headaches for banks

The booming bank industry is growing at a rapid rate - but private firms are struggling to find qualified staff to fill positions at new branches.

**BUSINESS 14**

### Myaynigone overpass opens to traffic

After months of traffic chaos, Yangon's newest flyover welcomes cars for the first time as construction wraps up on the US\$15 million project.

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# Page 2

editor **Kayleigh Long** | kayleighlong@gmail.com



## THE INSIDER: Felicitations to all on Armed Forces Day

### Once was Burma...

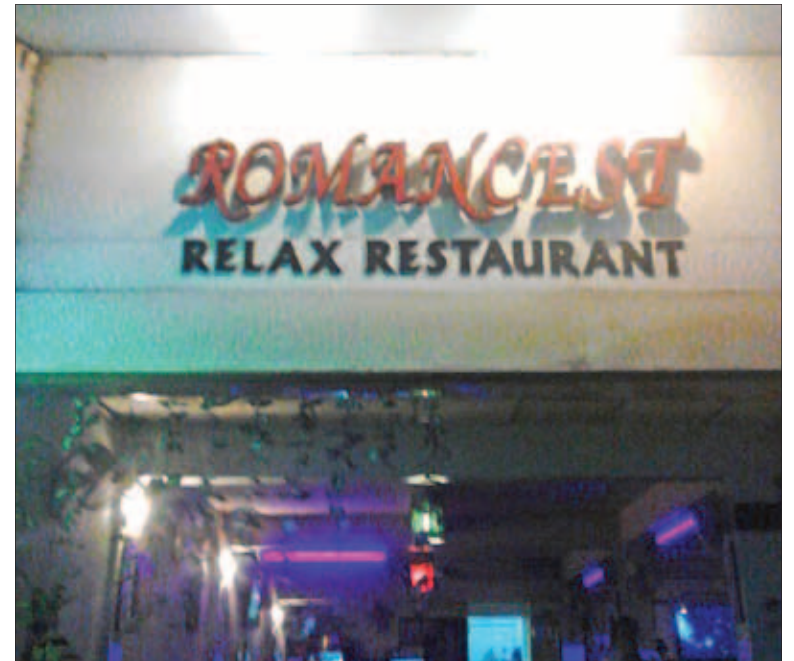
*Archival material courtesy of Pansodan Gallery*

First floor, 286 Pansodan, upper block, Kyauktada township

Tennis now is no longer confined to the cities and big towns but has reached the masses in smaller towns, where it is being played with relish and enthusiasm. Through the efforts of the Sports and Physical Education Committee, systematic methods of playing the game have now been propagated in 46 townships in the country. Rangoon City and its environs alone have no less than 160 tennis courts with about 1,300 players at the game.



An article on the thriving tennis scene from British colonial-era publication *Burma To-Day*



How I Met Your Brother: Next time you're in Bangkok, why not check out Romancest – a romantic family restaurant in Phra Khanong?

#### Up in smoke

An entire neighborhood in the Tangerang district of Jakarta wound up getting high after police burned a half-tonne pile of devil's lettuce, Indonesian outlet AsiaOne reported last week.

Fumes from the million-dollar bonfire, stoked and contained by mask-wearing officers, spread over nearby homes. Locals and journalists covering the blaze reported feeling "buzzed", and all the villagers said they had an uncharacteristically large appetite.

The drugs burning ceremony is also a time-honoured tradition in Myanmar, providing authorities and rebel groups with an opportunity to show how seriously they're taking eradication and substitution initiatives.

Page 2 contacted a reporter who recently attended a drug burning ceremony in Shan State, where a carefully laid-out display of methamphetamine was ceremoniously incinerated alongside poppy heads that had clearly already been scored and drained of any narcotic potential.

"Yeah, yeah yeah – it was pretty interesting – real interesting – scribbled some notes and \*\*\*\* and had a bunch of energy so I ran most of the way back to Lashio because I was pretty sure some \*\*\*\* was following me – hey are you listening to me? Oi, don't look in me in the eyes – I'll \*\*\*\*ing bash ya \*\*\*\*," they said.

\*\*\*\*\*!

The winner of last week's 'caption this' Than-Shwe-using-an-lpad contest will be contacted privately and their answer will remain a secret.

#### In brief

Foreign attendee "got a lot out of" IPI conference, seems blissfully ignorant of the irony of an event called "Towards a Free Press" that costs \$1200 to attend

Senior military figure admits some of the more theatrical elements of his vision for this year's Armed Forces Day parade had to be toned down because "half of the police were rostered on" and "a fair chunk of the army" is on deployment; promises next year's revue will be "more than a little bit" inspired by the Mass Games: "I mean, they really have set the standard."

#### Next week

Foreigner about to spend their first Thingyan in Yangon still under the adorable, misguided impression that everyone was kidding about the giardia thing

Puppy dragging itself along with two broken back legs "only the second or third most depressing thing" woman saw on three-block commute to office



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# Muted protest as rights council raps Myanmar – again

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IN an annual ritual, Myanmar has been rapped again by the United Nations Human Rights Council in a resolution that extends the mandate of the UN special rapporteur for another year, following a debate that once more highlighted divisions between Western governments and Asia.

Not many months ago Myanmar might still have harboured hopes that the role of the special rapporteur, currently held by South Korea's Yanghee Lee, would be downgraded to reflect progress made in its democratic transition.

But her harshly worded report this month to the Geneva-based council ensured there would be no diplomatic softening, as she warned that President U Thein Sein's government was showing continued "signs of back-tracking" following recent crackdowns on students and labour activists, and a worsening humanitarian crisis for Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State.

Tensions surrounding Ms Lee's most recent visit, in January, were also exacerbated by insults hurled

by U Wirathu, a nationalist Buddhist monk, who called the envoy a "whore" and followed up by urging people "to teach the beastly woman a lesson" – without any rebuke from the government.

The resolution, submitted by Latvia on behalf of the European Union and passed on March 27 without a vote, differs little from that of 2014, but the thrust of the report and its diplomatic language is somewhat tougher, referring, for example, to the "increase in nationalist-based intolerance of religious and ethnic minorities". In an apparent reference to U Wirathu, the council urges the government to publicly condemn threatening language directed at the UN and other international humanitarian organisations.

The worsening rights situation meant human rights organisations had not needed to lobby as hard to keep the mandate of the special rapporteur. And in contrast to recent years, Myanmar made seemingly little effort to argue against the resolution.

"A year ago it was expected that in 2015 the mandate for the special rapporteur would be dropped and the situation in Myanmar be downgraded

to one where only technical support is required. It is indicative of how badly the reforms have gone in the past year that this is no longer the case," commented Mark Farmaner, head of Burma Campaign UK.

However, Mr Farmaner described the resolution as "soft", reflecting the political capital spent by some countries in backing U Thein Sein. The report prioritised politics – such as the need for free and inclusive parliamentary elections this year – rather than human rights, and did not reflect the reports of the rapporteur, he added.

Derek Tonkin, a former British ambassador to Thailand and adviser

**'There is indeed little the West can or should do except carry on with engagement.'**

Derek Tonkin  
Network Myanmar

to Bagan Capital, dismissed the significance of the resolution as "little more than a ritual which serves only to irritate Nay Pyi Taw but is useful to some Western governments for their own domestic political reasons".

The resolution, drafted by the EU, included no Asian regional sponsor, he noted. As usual, China and India dissociated themselves from the resolution and no Asian country spoke in general support.

Myanmar sensed the ritual and possibly realised that "little is likely to be gained by too vigorous lobbying" amid all the international talk of "backsliding", Mr Tonkin said.

"The 'something must be done' brigade is in a bind, as [Daw Aung San] Suu Kyi has now turned her back on sanctions. There are fewer and fewer high-level visits ... There is indeed little the West can or should do except carry on with engagement, trade and investment," he said.

U Maung Wai, Myanmar's envoy to the UN in Geneva, rejected the resolution as "imbalanced and politicised" but pointedly thanked "a number of delegations for their tireless efforts to make the draft resolution more balanced". He told the council that the

reforms of the past four years had "contributed greatly to the people's better enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, significantly in the areas of freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly".

"The achievements make Myanmar stand proudly in the region and beyond. Applying different norms on countries set another clear example of double standards," he said.

The ambassador flatly rejected paragraph nine of the resolution, which expressed concern at the rise of intolerance toward religious and ethnic minorities. "They are far from reality," he said. And in an apparent defence of U Wirathu, he added, "Individual comments against another individual should not be generalised".

Welcoming the resolution, the UK said it recognised the "significant steps" Myanmar had taken toward democratic reform over the past two years. But it added that "progress has declined in some areas of late and much more remains to be done", listing "credible and inclusive elections", national reconciliation and the need to "urgently address the situation in Rakhine State".

## BBC reporter charged after Mandalay protest



SI THU LWIN MRATT KYAW THU

A LOCAL reporter for the Myanmar service of the BBC has been charged with assaulting a police officer in Mandalay during student-led protests on motorcycles there and in Yangon on Armed Forces Day that also resulted in several arrests.

Police in Mandalay said yesterday that Ko Nay Myo Linn had been charged under section 332 of the penal code, which can carry a jail sentence of up to three years.

"A police officer helped someone pick up his motorcycle, which had got entangled with others while police forces were stopping protesting students. At that time, a dispute occurred between the police and Ko Nay Myo Linn, who accused them of pushing the motorcycle over. Then he punched the policeman and injured his left eyebrow, which was bleeding," the Mandalay Region Police Force Office said in a statement yesterday.

It is unclear whether Ko Nay Myo Linn has been arrested. His Facebook page appeared to have been shut down yesterday, and he was not answering his phone. The BBC's Myanmar service could not be reached for comment.

Small groups of students took to the streets of Mandalay and Yangon on March 27 in protest against a police crackdown on their rally in Letpadan on March 10 when 127 people were arrested and many beaten while trying to march from the northern city to the south to demonstrate their opposition to the national education law.

Demanding that the arrested students be freed, students in Mandalay rode around five townships on motorbikes. They also called on those responsible for the police violence in Letpadan to resign. Students allege that police in Mandalay broke up their protest rally by knocking motorbikes to the ground.



Activists lead a protest through the streets of Mandalay on March 27 calling for the release of those detained at Letpadan. Photo: Sithu Lwin

No students were arrested on the day of the protest, Mandalay police said.

Students in Yangon said at least eight students were charged after the March 27 protests, including a senior member of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU).

The demonstrations came a day after the Amyotha Hluttaw, or upper house of parliament, approved amendments to the National Education Law which MPs said incorporated 10 of the 11 student demands. The bill passes next to the Pyithu Hluttaw, or lower house.

In Yangon on the morning of March 27, a group of about 30 students put up posters, while a second group of 20, led by Ko Kyaw Ko Ko and Ko Nanda Sit Aung, addressed passers-by.

"Our revolution is not over, action for democratic education is not over and we are still only halfway through our protest. We should not rely only on parliament, but must take to the streets," shouted Ko Kyaw Ko Ko, president of the ABFSU.

Ko Nanda Sit Aung, who is also a senior ABFSU member, said marches would take place all over the country, and urged the government to honour the outcome of the four-party talks held on the education law

in January and February.

The crackdown in Letpadan and proceedings in parliament appear to have dealt a serious blow to student militancy over the education law, with their protests failing to elicit strong public displays of support. Students and some educators say the law, passed by parliament last September, keeps universities under strong central control and does not go far enough in expanding education to middle school and recognising the language needs of ethnic minorities.

Students said police arrested three protesters in the evening of March 27. Ko Aung Htet Aung and Ko Shein Yarzar Tun were released the following morning after being charged under the public assembly law, but the third, Ko Nanda Sit Aung, was transferred to Letpadan, where he is expected to appear in court with other students detained since March 10.

Students claim a further five students were arrested and detained in Myingyan township in Mandalay region after the motorcycle protests.

Student leader Ko Myat Thu posted on his Facebook page, "Please be patient for our next protest, we are worried about all students and supporters." – Translation by Thiri Min Htun and Zar Zar Soe

## NLD leader meets Karen National Union

HTOO THANT

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DAW Aung San Suu Kyi and leaders of the Karen National Union held talks in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday to discuss the 2008 constitution, rule of law and the peace process.

Both sides declined to give details on the nature of the two-hour meeting, which also focused on the coming general election and was held at the National League for Democracy leader's residence.

"There will be no announcement about the meeting," Pado Saw Kwe Htoo Win said afterward.

Both sides said the meeting had contributed to improving understanding between them.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said they



Daw Aung San Suu Kyi shakes hands with KNU leader General Mutu Say Poe yesterday. Photo: Supplied

would look to expand their cooperation in future. "There will be difficulties but we can overcome them to establish democracy," she said.



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CONTINUED FROM NEWS 1

# Migrants return from Malaysia with stories of abuse, torture

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"I was tortured badly at camps," he said, while itching an inflamed rash on his legs.

He said his legs became swollen and irritated while he was in the camp, but he was routinely denied any medical care.

"Whenever I requested drugs I was beaten," he said.

His experience of Malaysia's notorious detention centres was not unique among the workers coming off the boat. They said they knew of 14 camps in Kuala Lumpur and nine facilities in other cities. Each of these held more than 600 Myanmar migrants – in addition to detainees from other countries – in what were described as squalid, cramped conditions.

"Most of the Myanmar workers in the camps were tortured, such as being chained outside until they became sunburned, beaten with a pipe and forced to bite the boot of the warden," said Ko San Zaw Moe, 39, from Mon State. He migrated to Malaysia in 1999 and spent six months in detention before being brought home.

Another worker from the boat, Ko Soe Thein, 40, said he worked for nine years in Malaysia as a welder before he was taken to Pekan Nemas, a facility infamous among the workers for its poor conditions.

"We had 140 detainees in our camp building. We had to sleep sideways the whole night to fit," he said, adding that the camp had four other similar buildings.

Ko Soe Thein held a passport and a Myanmar ID but lacked an official work permit to legalise his stay in Malaysia. Like many of the other migrants who arrived home yesterday, he had applied for a certificate of identity card shortly before immigration police arrested him.

After the Navy ship arrived in Yangon, the migrants who didn't need medical attention were taken to the labour department, where they were processed and each given K10,000 by the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation to



Migrant workers who returned from Malaysia yesterday on a Navy vessel wait to be processed at a labour department office in Yangon. Photo: Naing Wynn Htoon

cover transportation home.

They were each banned from legal re-entering Malaysia for five years.

"If they were in Malaysia legally, we

**'We had 140 detainees in our camp building. We had to sleep sideways the whole night to fit.'**

**Ko Soe Thein**

Returning migrant worker

could have helped them more," said U Kyaw Htin Kyaw, the federation's secretary general.

During President U Thein Sein's visit to Malaysia earlier this month, both he and Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak pledged to improve conditions for Myanmar's workers. While they discussed the signing of an agreement, critics say it will do little to improve the plight of migrant workers in Malaysia.

Migrant rights' organisations estimate that between 250,000 and 500,000 Myanmar migrants work in Malaysia, many of them without a passport and valid visa documents.

U Myo Aung, director general of the labour department, said returnees should stay in Myanmar instead of

facing risks associated with working abroad.

"I want to tell them there are job opportunities right here right now for skilled labourers. The workers who returned have skills so the job opportunities are waiting," he said.

But despite the awful conditions they faced and the five-year legal entry ban, many of the recently returned workers said they will soon attempt to head back to Malaysia, lured by the promise of a higher wage.

"I will go back to Malaysia after I stay just a week," said Ko Zaw Moe. "I don't want to return, exactly, but I am without any job here. In Malaysia I opened a Myanmar store, so I want to return."

## Petition calls for end to Ngapali sand mining

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A GROUP calling itself the "Alliance against Sand Mining at Ngapali and Myanmar Beaches" has launched an online petition urging President U Thein Sein to put a halt to sand extraction and overdevelopment at Myanmar beaches, particularly Ngapali in southern Rakhine State.

As *The Myanmar Times* reported earlier this month, dozens of truckloads of sand are being taken daily from beaches in the Ngapali area. While contrary to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism's Coastal Beach Directives, local officials say they have allowed sand mining at three beaches vetted by the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry for "regional development" projects. Dozens of truckloads are being taken each day from the beaches, right in front of tourists lying on sunbeds.

The change.org petition says the beaches at Ngapali are being "destroyed" by sand mining, as well as



Workers take sand from a beach at Ngapali in July 2013. Photo: Supplied

the building of hotels directly over the beach and land confiscations. It blames "collusion" between private businesses and local authorities.

"Please sign this petition to urge Myanmar President U Thein Sein to understand that saving Ngapali's beaches is a matter of national urgency. Only President U Thein Sein himself may have the power to stop the destruction

of Ngapali & other Myanmar beaches – before it is too late," it says.

Launched on March 28, the petition had about 70 supporters by yesterday evening.

Oliver E Soe Thet from Laguna Lodge, a Ngapali-based hotel, said he hoped the petition would bring the issue to the attention of senior officials in Nay Pyi Taw.

He said during a visit to Ngapali in October 2013 President U Thein Sein had urged sustainable, community-based development at the beach and the sand mining and other issues appeared "totally contrary" to the president's vision for the area.

"It takes nature tens of thousands of years, wave by wave, to turn a shell into soft white grains of sand. It's a free gift from nature, and today guarantees tourism business, jobs, income and sustainable development for communities in the Rakhine coastal area," he said, adding that sand for construction could easily be taken from nearby rivers or beaches away from human settlements and tourism.

Mr E Soe Thet, who is also a former environmental adviser to the government on Rakhine coastal areas, expressed concern that beach sand was being used in construction projects, as the salt causes iron used in reinforcing to rust. "Buildings made using chlorinated sea sand become very unsafe about 10 years after construction," he said.

# SELAMAT DATANG TO MALAYSIA YEAR OF FESTIVALS



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*Truly Asia*

# Funding for rabies vaccines dries up



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EFFORTS to step up the fight against rabies appear to have stalled, as the two main organisations concerned hunt for donor funding. Though stocks of vaccine are expected to run out within the year, no reliable alternative source has been found.

In 2013, the World Organisation for Animal Health, known as OIE, donated 200,000 doses of rabies vaccine to the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department with support from the European Union.

However, the funding - for the

development of a rabies vaccine bank in Asia through the EU's Highly Pathogenic and Emerging Diseases program - ended last December, forcing the OIE to seek an alternative donor.

The OIE and the livestock department jointly put together a funding proposal for support from a different donor. Ronello Abila, the OIE's sub-regional representative for Southeast Asia, said there were initially "good indications" that funding had been secured but "an unexpected budget adjustment from the donor's side was recently announced".

"We were advised to wait until May 2015 for further updates, and until then, the final agreement is temporarily put on hold," Mr Abila said.

The most recent figures provided to OIE by the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department show that

nearly 115,000 doses have already been used. Mr Abila said the OIE is waiting for an update from the department on the figures, which date to last year.

U Kyaw Naing Oo, a director at the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and

**'We cannot manufacture the vaccine ourselves and now we have no more funding.'**

U Kyaw Naing Oo

Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development

Rural Development, said the provision of vaccines had enabled the ministry to immunise stray dogs, as well as those with owners.

"We cannot manufacture the vaccine ourselves and now we have no more funding," he said, adding that this meant owners would be solely responsible for immunising their dogs, while the veterinary association would be left to tackle strays.

The issue has acquired particular importance in view of a drive by ASEAN to eliminate the deadly disease from its member countries by 2020. Of all ASEAN members, only Laos has worse rabies infestation than Myanmar, where 400 people die of the disease each year, according to official estimates.

However, World Health Organization figures put the disease burden 150 percent higher, at about 1000

deaths per year.

A crackdown on rabies announced earlier this month by the health ministry has been criticised for concentrating on Nay Pyi Taw, Bagan and Inle Lake, areas better known for tourists than for mad dogs.

U Chit Soe, a professor at the University of Medicine 2, said vaccinating dogs was essential for bringing rabies under control and called on the government to allocate funding to buying vaccines.

"They need to get serious about tackling rabies," he said. "Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department should also be making more noise about this. And if it really wants to get more funding, it should make sure that the official figures for rabies deaths are accurate and show the real impact."

## Minister deflects media protesters

LAIGNEE BARRON

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MINISTER for Information U Ye Htut wasn't taking any hits during the opening of the International Press Institute's free media conference on March 27.

Journalists and activists attempted to use the annual press congress to ramp up the heat on the government and draw attention to perceived backsliding on free speech.

Rather than take offence, the minister took the attacks in stride and said they evidenced a "sign of change".

The Facebook-pro also turned to his profile page after the event to further applaud how the activists exemplified his speech.

"I expected that I would have to explain that Myanmar's media world is more transparent than before," he said. "But fortunately, I saw some journalists demonstrate at the entrance of the hotel, and when I gave my talk I saw a journalist demonstrator carrying a placard.

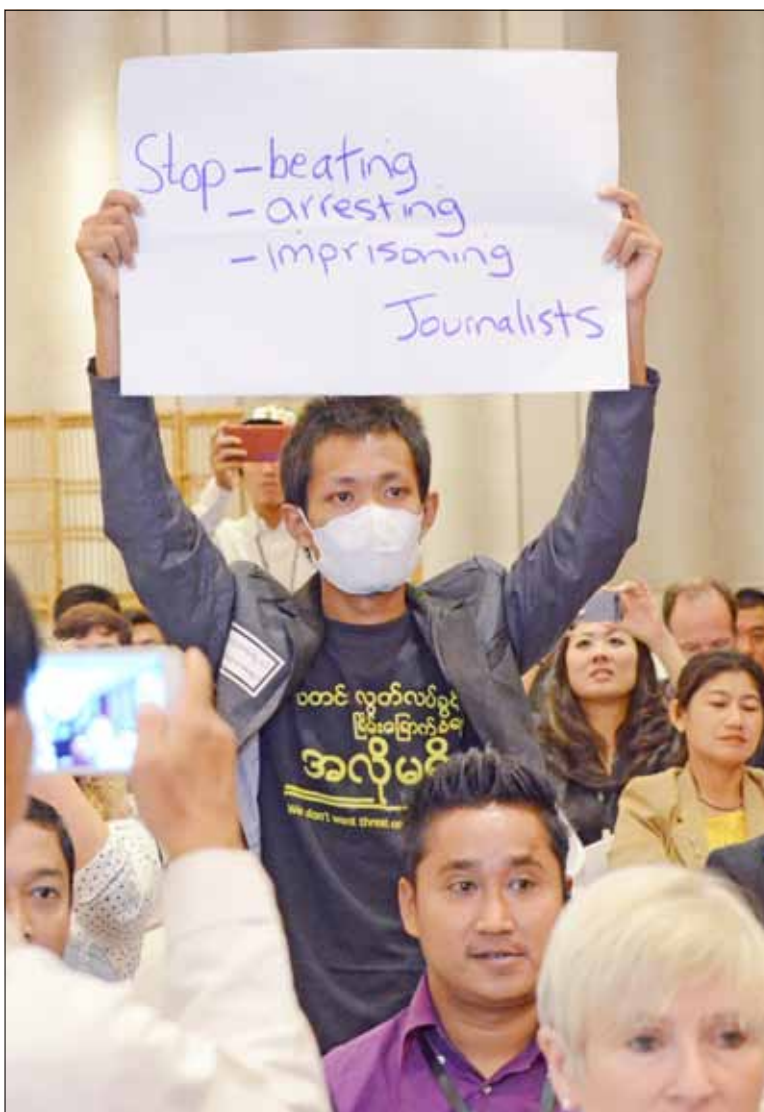
"It was impossible to protest like that five years ago ... These incidents reveal how Myanmar has changed."

The banner-wielding activist had flashed a sign to the cameras that read "Stop beating arresting imprisoning journalists".

In response, U Ye Htut told the audience to applaud, and used the interruption to ram home his point: the country's transition has faced setbacks but "is irreversible".

U Ye Htut also said the government is investigating reports that police beat and detained journalists who were covering recent protests, but rejected calls from fellow panelists that government should "immediately release" all imprisoned journalists.

IPI members acknowledged Myanmar's improving media landscape but also unanimously adopted a resolution expressing concern at recent



A protester holds up a sign criticising the government's treatment of journalists during the opening day of the International Press Institute world congress in Yangon on March 27. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

events, including the death of freelance journalist Ko Par Gyi in military custody late last year.

The government should "press forward with legal reforms to ensure

the country brings itself fully into line with international standards on free expression and media freedom," the resolution said.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun

## Expert highlights Thanlwin dam earthquake risk

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A SERIES of dams planned for the length of the Thanlwin River could court disaster, environmentalists and experts told a meeting at Hpa-an, Kayin State, on March 27. The river follows a geological fault, and changes in the structure of the underlying rocks that could result from dam construction could trigger an earthquake.

The government plans to build at least six dams along the 2800-kilometre (1730-mile) Thanlwin, which is also known as the Nu or Salween River.

The largest dam, the Mong Ton, will take 14 years to build and produce an estimated 7000 megawatts, of which 90 percent will go to China and Thailand, with 10pc reserved for domestic use.

But U Myo Thant, a member of the Myanmar Earthquake Committee, said there are active faults along the Thanlwin's course.

"The destructive potential of earthquakes depends on the depth of the epicentre. If the centre is shallow, destruction can be enormous," he said at the event, which was organised by the Karen Environmental Social Action Network (KESAN) and attended by local residents.

"When water is stored in a reservoir, the properties of the rocks beneath change, increasing pressure on the faults. At least three portable seismometers should be installed on any completed dam," he said.

In 2012, U Myo Thant and his colleagues drew up a map indicating the probability of earthquake recurrence around the country and the estimated

timeframe.

"In June 1923, a quake with a magnitude of 7.2 occurred near the Thanlwin River, east of Lashio," he said. "The last time there was a quake at Kyaukkyan Fault was in 1912. The exact timing of recurrence cannot be predicted, but earthquakes that occur before the predicted timeline are smaller in magnitude. If the earthquake comes later, the magnitude can be higher."

U Khin Maung Win, a central committee member of the Renewable Energy Association Myanmar (REAM), said the government should not claim hydropower as renewable energy.

"Renewable energy can never be exhausted, should be consistently renewable and can never harm the environment. But in most of our hydropower plants, we don't have regular electricity during the dry season. This violates the first of those criteria," he said, adding that relatively few people have benefited from hydropower.

U Cho Cho, managing director of National Engineering and Planning Services, said the reduced flow of river water caused by damming could allow seawater to flow into the mouth of the river.

"Water can be stored in the reservoir for long periods, during which the volume of fresh water is reduced, causing damage to agriculture and fisheries," he told the meeting.

KESAN members were involved in a protest at a public consultation meeting over the proposed Mong Ton dam held in Taunggyi, in southern Shan State, last month.

On March 28, poets from PEN Myanmar joined participants in the event in a visit to Mi Kayin, a village located on the Thanlwin River.

## Ethnic media groups push for seat on press council

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ETHNIC media leaders are calling for an official presence on the Myanmar Press Council (Interim) in order to protect reporters from minority newsgroups.

Editors meeting at the third ethnic media conference in Haka, Chin State, earlier this month requested at least two ethnic media representatives be added to the council when it reconvenes.

"There are many rumours and incorrect information reported from the government newspapers, but we can't tell the right story because we are still threatened and the government doesn't protect us," said Ko Min Min, an editor from Rakhine State's Development News.

Sau Khon, editor of Kachin State-based *Myithkyina Journal*, also said ethnic journalists are more vulnerable than their mainstream media counterparts.

"We have to be cautious of both

the KIA government and President U Thein Sein's government as we are not safe from either side," he said.

"To get true news, mainstream media also needs the help of ethnic journalists because organisations and residents from ethnic areas don't trust unfamiliar faces, including mainstream journalists who visit the places only when the issues happen."

The Myanmar Press Council (Interim) was formed in 2012 to write a new media law to replace legislation

from 1962 that bans ethnic language media. Its representatives are drawn mostly from Yangon-based private print media.

While ethnic media groups have previously requested representation on the council, they said they have been repeatedly rebuffed.

"Over the last three years, since we first hosted the ethnic media conference, we asked to join the council but they didn't reply and we don't know why," said Aow Kou Rot, coordinator from Ethnic Peace Resources Project,

who also reports on news in Mon State.

Press council member U Chit Win Maung said there are plans to re-establish the council under the News Media Law. While passed by parliament last year, bylaws for the legislation have not yet been enacted to bring it into force.

The new council would be formed through elections, he said, adding that "ethnic journalists should try to get places on the board at the election".

# Views



Monks gather outside Yangon's City Hall in October 2012 for a protest against the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation. Photo: Kaung Htet

## EDITORIAL

### The right kind of debt for Myanmar

CONCERN has recently been expressed about the national debt, which comes in at about US\$200 per head. It seems that when people hear this figure, many think the country is in deep trouble. The truth is that while this figure might sound alarming, our debt is far lower than most developed and developing countries.

The United States, the second-largest economy in the world, has a debt ceiling of \$16.7 trillion dollars. Myanmar's international debt is a bit less than \$10 billion – \$9.6 billion, to be precise. Debt takes on meaning when expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product, or GDP. Myanmar's debt-to-GDP ratio is about 16 percent. This puts Myanmar well and truly in the safe zone by most standards.

Does this mean we are in a comfortable position in regards to our debts? Well, not exactly. There still is one number that keeps on haunting us: the debt that Myanmar owes to China. In soft and hard loans, this totals more than \$4 billion. As a result, nearly half of Myanmar's international debt is to China.

As a developing country, Myanmar is in line to receive low-interest loans from international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and others. Bilateral loans can also be quite cheap. Sometimes the annual interest rate is approaching zero, while the length of the loan might be 40 years. Some of the debt Myanmar is taking on from China has interest rates as high as 4.5pc per annum, plus almost 1pc in administration fees. A more robust debate weighing up the potential benefits of such loans should take place.

Myanmar's total debt is quite manageable, particularly if GDP growth remains steady. But that doesn't mean that the government should have carte blanche to take on any loan it likes, at any terms.

## On Rakhine, karma and the art of good government

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THE monks of Sittwe live in a colony of vast monasteries spread throughout the isolated waterfront capital of Rakhine State. They are famous for their role in the 2007 uprising against the military government. It was from Sittwe that some of the first iconic images of lines of defiant marching monks emerged. These same monks are now implicated in the anti-Muslim violence that has made the town, and northern Rakhine State, a tense place, primed for more violence at the slightest provocation.

From Sittwe, the threat of Muslim encroachment is strongly perceived, and has flowed out across the country. In the age of "969" and Ma Ba Tha, the political role of Buddhism has taken centre stage. As the much-publicised "face of Buddhist terror", the Mandalay monk U Wirathu is a household name and his outbursts are now reported around the world. What this means is that ordinary religious practice is being connected to bigger stories of power, conflict and control.

The rise of U Wirathu and a generation of other zealous monks has catalysed new awareness of the diversity of Buddhist thought in Myanmar. Whatever their personal views, many of the country's Buddhists are unwilling to disown the invocations of U Wirathu, now famous for his outspoken rejection of Muslim neighbours and his torrents of misogyny.

The goals of 969 and other such movements also receive a level of higher-ranking support. In corridors across Nay Pyi Taw there is general endorsement of the idea that Buddhism needs to be protected and that for its

survival Myanmar requires a strong religious foundation. This moral re-fortification is one of the outcomes of the political and social transformation unleashed by the loosening of the military's grip. There is little stomach for wishy-washy liberal notions of tolerance when faced with a professed existential threat.

And yet the stoking of inter-religious feuds has changed the way that Myanmar governments can operate, and constrained many of their options. It has made the work of leaders more difficult and introduced potentially destabilising dynamics into the calculus of social and political change.

**In Sittwe, there are still many people who are convinced that a goal of the new political order should be to purge their neighbourhoods of Muslim interlopers.**

In response, there is academic reflection on the need to harness Buddhist teaching to neuter the appeal of anti-Muslim spite. In a recent monograph published by the East-West Center, Matthew Walton and Susan Hayward suggest "Buddhist counter-arguments to nationalist discourse are already being advanced on the ground in Myanmar". They take the view that these "promote attitudes and practices that can prevent further communal violence and develop social norms and attitudes that foster coexistence and

understanding between groups". From this perspective it is the core teachings of Buddhism, especially related to right speech, non-attachment, loving kindness, compassion and equanimity, that offer hope for more peaceful inter-communal relations.

What Walton and Hayward offer is a re-appraisal of the deep reservoir of Buddhist concepts, including karmic understandings of the nature of change and existence, that are ripe for supporting peace-making efforts. The problem, as Walton and Hayward acknowledge, is that religious tensions have a basis beyond such scriptural theory and wise logic.

In Sittwe, for instance, there are still many people who are convinced that a goal of the new political order should be to purge their neighbourhoods of Muslim interlopers. They also dread violent retribution from Islamists and seek government guarantees about the protection of Buddhist culture and society. Where they imagine that the central government doesn't support their interests, new outbreaks of violence seem to be a preferred response. Under these conditions, anxiety about what the future holds is deeply felt by Muslims and Buddhists alike.

In other parts of Myanmar it's fair to judge that threats to Muslim populations are also yet to fade. From Meiktila to Mingalar Taung Nyunt, the future of diverse neighbourhoods is in doubt. The fear is that recent years of bloodletting along the Muslim-Buddhist divide are just the beginning of entrenched campaigns of attack and counter-attack. That would surely undermine many of the political improvements of recent years and test the deeply pragmatic spirit that has started to guide aspects of government policy-making.

For those who are responsible for ensuring Myanmar's internal peace and security, the challenges of keeping Muslims and Buddhists safe are simply immense, and are best understood

from the vantage of a hot afternoon in Sittwe. Everyone swelters under the same sun – Buddhist and Muslim, soldier and civilian – but there is too little common ground. It's an unenviable task but the security forces need to make good on the hopes of all the people who suffered for too long under the jackboot of military rule.

A great injustice will be done if such stale authoritarianism is replaced by narrow, hyper-politicised versions of Buddhist nationalism. This would signal a retreat to the politics of exclusion and high fences, where Myanmar ignores a special chance to present its own positive model in a multi-cultural world.

Nicholas Farrelly is a fellow at the Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University. He leads an Australian Research Council-funded project on Myanmar's political cultures in transition.



PATH is an international nonprofit organization implementing a broad portfolio of activities on a range of health issues. We are seeking to fill the following positions for our rice fortification project in Myanmar, a LIFT/UNOPS supported initiative. This project focuses on improving the nutritional status of the Myanmar population as well as creating economic opportunities for local businesses.

PATH is seeking qualified candidates for two positions in our Yangon office:

- **Program Director (Job code #6596)** to lead a dynamic team of local PATH staff, partners, and consultants in project planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation of the work plan activities and deliverables. Responsible for overall management of supply chain, demand generation and advocacy activities.
- **Program Officer (Job code #6468)** to support the Project Director in tracking the project schedule, coordinating work plan activities, and reporting to donors. Provide technical support and training to supply chain partners and information management for PATH team and external working groups.

For full job descriptions and information on the application process, please visit the jobs section of the PATH website ([www.path.org](http://www.path.org)). Deadline for on-line application submission: **April 12th, 2015.**



# The difficult conversations must have with my Myanmar friends

Born in Yangon and living in San Francisco, **Kenneth Wong** sizes up the reform process as it looks from a distance, facing up to some uncomfortable truths

**I had always had nagging questions about the signs marking certain sections of the pagodas off-limit to women, about the jokes we told at the expense of Hindu and Muslim kids, and about the ugly caricatures of Chinese and Indian merchants that appeared in some journals and comics. But I brushed them all aside.**

**U**NDER Yangon's clear blue sky, my taxi sped along University Avenue. It was my second trip to my homeland since I'd immigrated to the US in 1989. I wanted to see with my own eyes the so-called reforms that Thein Sein's government claimed to be implementing. Usually, mounds of trash hugged the sidewalks, fritter stands invaded the pavements, and bumper-to-bumper gridlocks snarled traffic. But not that day.

My driver U Aung Myint was a man of few words. When he spoke, he chose his words carefully, perhaps a survival skill honed under decades of military rule. He quipped, "Next time we want to clear the streets, we should just invite the American president over."

That day – November 19, 2012 – Myanmar unveiled its new face to President Obama, the first sitting US president to visit the country. With a hasty coat of paint on Yangon University, the new government had prepared a clean-swept cityscape for the historic occasion. That was the photogenic backdrop that framed the articles that ran in the following day's *Time* magazine, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

The hour of Obama's appearance drew near. A group of young boys on the street called timeout from their soccer game to find a cafe with a TV screen; some sidecar operators huddled around a battery-operated

radio to catch the broadcast. Then Obama spoke. His first words were "Myanmar naing gan, mingalabar!" (Greetings, the country of Myanmar!). He had them at hello.

I watched local schoolkids in white and green, carrying signs that read "Welcome Mr Obama!" In my Facebook newsfeed, I saw the Former Political Prisoners Association's photos of newly released dissidents reuniting with their loved ones, smiles and tears all around. Swept up in the mass euphoria, I was willing to overlook that many of the current government were formerly generals who had signed arrest warrants for these student leaders, following the 1988 protests and crackdowns.

On the same trip, I also came across reminders of the cloistered society's conservatism and prejudice, nurtured in the shadow of isolation. Whereas I as a man could freely go into the inner sanctums of some sacred shrines, my sister and mother were explicitly forbidden from these sections on account of their womanhood. People squirmed when I mentioned the Rakhine-Muslim conflict; they tensed up when I uttered the tabooed word "Rohingya". But I didn't want the soap bubble to burst. So I deferred the uncomfortable conversations, postponed the confrontations, and trusted the reform process would bring out the best in people.

This March, I saw the spectre



of military rule in the police's use of force to break up the student protests in Letpadan. One week later, three people – a New Zealander and two of his Myanmar associates – were sentenced to two years in prison for publishing a poster depicting Buddha with headphones to promote a bar. The religious hardliners who called for the prosecution of the trio were the same ones championing a bill to deter interfaith marriages between Buddhist and Muslims.

What surprised and saddened me most was reading the online comments from some of my old friends who showed sympathy – if not outright support – for the hardliners. That convinced me that I must make clear my own positions on a variety of subjects, even if doing so put my relationship with some people in jeopardy. After all, transparency is the bedrock of reform.

In the heart of downtown Yangon, glass-encased Sakura Tower overshadows Sule Pagoda's gold-tipped spires. In teashops, cellphone-juggling teens in Mohawk cuts and skinny jeans sit next to saffron-

robbed monks. The space between Myanmar's enduring traditions and encroaching modernity is getting smaller, growing tighter. A head-on collision is inevitable. My own conscience is the battleground where the two often clash.

I grew up under Ne Win's quasi-Socialist government in the 1980s. I had always had nagging questions about the signs marking certain sections of the pagodas off-limit to women, about the jokes we told at the expense of Hindu and Muslim kids, and about the ugly caricatures of Chinese and Indian merchants that appeared in some journals and comics. But I brushed them all aside as part of the country's social construct, its quirks that didn't harm anybody.

Perhaps they're not so harmless. In the small opening provided by the reform, these attitudes found new outlets. The controversial monk Wirathu's popularity remains undiminished even after he'd publicly called a UN special rapporteur a "whore". His conduct is a reflection of the religious conservatism that sees women as less than man.

## MAE SOT

# Life after prison

A counselling program for former political prisoners helps them come to terms with their experiences of incarceration



## KAYLEIGH LONG

"WE can't control situations, but we can learn to control the thoughts, and to feel better," says Kyaw Soe Win, chief clinical supervisor at the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), otherwise known as the AAPPB. "This is TDW Part 1."

### Thinking in a Different Way

The AAPPB was founded in 2000, on the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of key 88 Generation figure Min Ko Naing's arrest. Min Ko Naing was released in a 2012 amnesty, having chalked up 19 years in prison. The group remains an exile organisation, documenting cases of political prisoners – of which there has been a recent population boom – from their Mae Sot office. They also provide support to families of those incarcerated. Until late last year, they were part of the Committee for Scrutinizing the Remaining Political Prisoners (CSRPP), before the surprise announcement that they had been excluded from the rejigged panel.

Sitting at the organisation's modest headquarters in the Thai border town of Mae Sot, a hub for exiles and NGOs, Kyaw Soe Win explains the 12 components of the CETA (Common Elements Treatment Approach) program. "There are a lot of acronyms," he concedes.

CETA is the treatment program, which has since been rolled out across the border

in Myanmar, which sees former political prisoners given one-on-one counselling in order to help them cope with the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and other issues that stem from lengthy incarceration and torture.

In 2010 – with help from US-based Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health – the AAPPB, SAW and the Mae Tao Clinic assembled a sample group of 150 people residing in and around Mae Sot for qualitative analysis.

They included former political prisoners, child soldiers and trafficked women. The goal was to develop a trauma counselling program that would suit a low-resource setting.

The group was divided into two: the control group (those who did not receive counselling) and the treatment group (those who did). The results indicated that 79 percent of those who received counselling felt better – that is, their symptoms of depression were somewhat alleviated, they displayed improved daily functioning, and they found they were less prone to irritability, paranoia and anger.

Following the success of the program's initial run with Mae Sot's not insignificant population of former political prisoners, CETA was expanded inside Myanmar in 2013. Since then, upward of 100 former political prisoners and victims of torture have received treatment. The program is







– that is especially true of the minorities' rights."

In 2011, after spending almost two decades behind bars, my classmate Richard Aung was freed, just days before Hillary Clinton was set to arrive. Richard is now part of the Sanchaung branch of the NLD. Two years ago, when I met him again in person, I spent a memorable evening playing guitars with him in Yangon University, pretending to be our 20-year-old selves as we serenaded the hostel students in the windows.

I caught up with him on Skype last week. "Have you lost friends over your stance on religion, race, or the [religious hardliners'] Race Protection Organisation?" I asked him. He chuckled.

"I have my own convictions guiding me on those, and they're crystal clear to me," he said. "If some people want to hate me because they disagree with me, let them. But I must say, I have never hated anybody because of their race or their religion."

"Do these topics tend to come up when you get together with classmates and old friends?" I asked.

"I know some friends have strong religious views. I leave them alone and they let me be," he said. "When we get together, we talk about old times, but avoid these sensitive topics. It's not like we made a pledge not to talk about them, but I think people realise their sensitivity."

Richard urged me to look beyond the sectarian conflicts and see the puppet masters. "Look at the police's show of force to respond to the student protests in Letpadan," he said. "And look at how little effort was made to stop the violence in Meiktila [where religious riots killed dozens and displaced thousands in March 2013]. This shows you this government's true nature."

I also tracked down the phone number for taxi-man U Aung Myint. His familiar voice came through Skype. I asked him how he felt about the reforms.

"I'm not that interested in politics," he said. "I'm just trying to make a living. I'll respect whoever becomes president, whether it's Daw Suu or some official from the current administration. If I can make a comfortable living, I can live with that."

I had heard of the religious hardliners campaigning to boycott the Muslims in daily commerce. In the taxi community, that would take

the form of stickers bearing the sign 969, which signals to the passenger that the operator is a Buddhist. Some claim the sticker is no more than a symbol, as innocent as the image of a saint or a cross. But I imagine Muslims might see it differently, because the same three digits are prominently featured at the Race Protection Organisation's gatherings. Both Richard Aung and U Aung Myint told me they hadn't seen Yangon taxi drivers using the sticker as means to discriminate against passengers belonging to other faiths. Still, I had to ask.

"Is there a 969 sticker on your

### Some of these developments boosted the population's morale. Others made the conservatives feel under siege.

car?" I asked, holding my breath for the answer.

"No," said U Aung Myint. "I keep a Buddha figurine in my car. People can tell I'm a Buddhist just from that. I don't need to hang a 969 sticker."

I reminded him of the joke he made about the best way to clear up traffic in Yangon – by inviting President Obama back for another visit. Obama, in fact, did return for a second visit last November.

"But in his second visit, I ran into a traffic jam," U Aung Myint revealed. "At the 8 Mile junction, I and my foreigner passenger were stuck in traffic for 45 minutes, waiting for Obama to pass."

Myanmar is waking up from a long nightmare. The 51 million who live within it are well acquainted with the Buddhist principle of impermanence. But change is still hard. The reform brought Hillary Clinton, President Obama and Jason Mraz to the country. It also paved the way for the first LGBT film festival in Yangon; and ushered in tourists with Buddhist symbols tattooed on their limbs. Some of the country's youth

unleashed their pent-up energy during the water festival, with shorter skirts and edgier shirts each year. Some of these developments boosted the population's morale. Others made the conservatives feel under siege.

The country's Buddhist clergy has always held a powerful sway over the population. Its role in national politics stretched back to the colonial days; and its heroism in the 2007 Saffron uprising rightfully garnered the world's admiration. But how will it react to the separation of Church and State, a basic rule in secular government? The support enjoyed by Wirathu and the Race Protection Organisation is significant. It suggests some in the religious community are not willing to settle for a smaller role. Quite the opposite: they're seeking to exert more influence on secular affairs.

Some citizens, either out of disinterest or weariness, may drop out of the political process altogether, focusing instead on day-to-day survival like U Aung Myint. For others like my friend Richard Aung, the years they'd sacrificed behind bars was far too great an investment, so they must push ahead. Advocates like Aung Myo Min have a tough job ahead. He has to somehow explain to his countrymen that human rights are not a privilege but a responsibility.

It would take many uncomfortable talks: about why women should not be relegated to the back rows in shrines that hold the relics of a being who championed kindness; about why a monk's robe doesn't give anyone the right to incite hatred and discrimination; about why the Muslim neighbour across the street shouldn't be judged for the acts of the extremists in the Middle East.

There are the difficult conversations we must have with our Myanmar friends, because without tackling these, the democratic reform process doesn't stand a chance. We must have these exchanges, even at the risk of our friendship. If we don't, we give up on the people of Myanmar.

Kenneth Wong is a Myanmar-American author and blogger who grew up in Yangon.

He now lives in San Francisco, California. His essays and short stories have appeared in *Grain*, *AGNI* and *San Francisco Chronicle* magazines, among others.

*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

Aung Myo Min, who participated in the 1988 uprising as a university student, fled to neighboring Thailand to avoid arrest. His exile abroad would last 24 years. In 2012, he finally returned home and founded the Equality Myanmar network. As an openly gay activist, I knew he had to have attracted more than his fair share of ire from the hardliners. So I reached out to him via Facebook.

"I face challenges for speaking out on behalf of minority groups, such as women and LGBT," he said. "I was attacked [in the media] several times for being LGBT and strongly supporting women's rights, particularly against the interfaith marriage bill. I've received death threats on my Viber account, email and SMS."

In December 12, 2014, issue of *Aung Zeyatu* journal, a columnist accused Aung Myo Min of "speaking the Devil's words". Using a Burmese maxim, the author described Aung Myo Min as "a blind elephant stumbling through a forest".

In response Aung Myo Min remarked, "Some people interpret human rights as something that belongs to them but not to others



The AAPPB office in Mae Sot, Thailand, includes a model of Yangon's Insein Prison, a replica prison cell and other artifacts of prison life.

Photos: Kayleigh Long

funded by USAID's Victims of Torture Fund.

Four teams operate in Yangon and one in Mandalay. Each comprises around five people – usually former political prisoners themselves – and one supervisor. The ToT (Training of Trainers) program is under way in both of those cities, and there are hopes to one day expand it further so that counselling services could be made available in war-torn and disaster-hit regions of the country.

Each client's counselling program runs over a course of around eight to 12 sessions, usually one per week.

In Myanmar, where the healthcare system is desperately lacking and mental health services are all but nonexistent, the AAPPB aims to "fill in the blanks", Kyaw Soe Win explains.

The stigma surrounding mental health treatment, he says, is a major challenge.

"Many people don't understand what mental health is – they see little distinction between full-blown psychosis and mental health issues like depression. Mental health means you have difficulties with everyday function. That is mental health."

The focus on CETA as a peer-driven program seeks to shatter the perception that counselling is something for "crazy people". Slowly but surely, he says, it's an

### 'We think that our country is a trauma society.'

Kyaw Soe Win  
Chief clinical supervisor, AAPPB

idea people are coming around to.

"In this community – how we use words like trauma, depression – people need education.

"We think that our country is a trauma society," he says.

Asked if there were any countries that Myanmar's trauma burden could be compared with, Kyaw Soe Win says Columbia, Congo and northern Iran are all valid examples.

#### Thought – Feeling – Behaviour

One of the more important components of the counselling program is that it helps the former political prisoners learn to differentiate thoughts from feelings, and recognise the impact of these on behaviour – a valuable tool for anyone prone to being overwhelmed by the amplified emotional responses that come with PTSD and depression.

He raises a hypothetical scenario in which one loses a slipper in a crowd. "What do you feel? Perhaps embarrassed? That is the feeling. Why do you feel that way? Maybe the thought is 'other people will laugh at me', and that is why you are feeling embarrassed. But if you recognise that thought as unhelpful, and instead think 'I am not the only one who has lost their slipper and I certainly won't be the last', the feeling changes. Maybe you would go and buy a new slipper. Problem-solving."

Kyaw Soe Win brings up the example of one client who, after leaving prison, was terrified of the dark. "He did not trust anyone." Living in Yangon presented a significant problem, in that its frequent blackouts left him distressed, fearful and unable to sleep.

After examining the memories that drove the traumatic response and brought his prison experience crashing back into the present, he learned to objectively separate thought from feeling. Keeping a torch within arm's reach allowed him to seize control in the darkness – thus defeating the overwhelming and familiar feeling of powerlessness he experienced in prison.

"We provide the skills," Kyaw Soe Win says. "What many people realise is 'I already knew the answer!'"



## What we talk about when we talk about peace

Min Ba Htoo looks at where we go from here

American senator Jeff Reardon defined peace as no violence used in any form in physical, mental, social and constructional states. This definition is, however, only a negative definition – it defines peace by what it is not. What peace requires was discussed by Ralph Bunche at his Nobel Prize speech. He said peace meant food, housing, health, education, dignity and freedom. If we combine both definitions, we can come up with our own: cooperation, freedom, fairness, following human rights and solving dissent, and all without using violence.

The talks being held in Myanmar now are to negotiate a ceasefire. This is the easiest way to approach peace. It doesn't, however, begin to solve armed conflicts. To solve armed conflict itself, we need to look at balancing the structure of power.

To do so we can look back to the beliefs and actions of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. King's six principles of non-violence are well-known. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people;

Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding;

Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people;

Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform;

Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate;

Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.

So when the peace talks are over, the armed conflict has been solved and the civil war has ended, what should we do from then on? We must build on the path King's words set for us. We must strengthen justice and, whatever it takes, conduct a national reconciliation process.

We must pay particular attention to Bosnia's reconciliation process, which set a global standard and worked in five stages. First, people and properties in war zones must be settled and secured, as nothing can be done without security. Second, a police force to represent those in the war zone can be formed and trained. Third, relationships can be rebuilt with past enemies. Fourth, trust can be built by cooperating with past enemies in restoring infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, roads, water sources, housing, offices, industries, businesses and so forth. (These third and fourth stages are called the healing stages.) Fifth, a balanced democratic system can be built, one which takes on a degree of resiliency.

In South Africa, a truth and reconciliation commission was formed in 1995 to examine cases of human rights abuses during the preceding 35 years. Archbishop Desmond Tutu heard all cases as the chair of the commission, and all information raised at the trial was distributed nationwide in 12 languages, ensuring the process operated transparently, for the benefit of all.

Many victims of oppression testified in detail before the commission. Among the accused, 7112 appealed for the amnesty. The commission permitted 849 of these appeals while rejecting 5392. Other cases which charged twice, or withdrawn because of false charges, or withdrawn according to the will of the plaintiff.

East Timor underwent a similar process, examining cases of human rights infractions over a 25-year period, from 1974 to 1999.

Fortunately, the democratic transition of Myanmar has been brought about more gently than in those other countries. Still, this good fortune cannot remove all bad fortunes. Because the democratic transition has been gentle, many still feel unwilling – or unmotivated – to relinquish their old ways. They are attached to things that were good to them in the past.

Annihilating our enemies has never been achieved, nor will it ever be achieved. Therefore we have nothing to choose except the peace process. Those pushing for more conflict may find it brings what they want, but only in a limited place for a limited time. When we look for a true way to the peace, then we will find the better relationships that will help us end wars. If we together choose long-term strategies of democratic transition and economic development, peace will follow.

– Translation by Kyawt Daryl Lin

# Striving to restore dignity by admitting past wrongs

More than two decades after a brutal internal purge resulted in the torture and killing of suspected spies, the All Burma Students' Democratic Front publishes a shocking investigation into its own history, seeking to confront its past and make amends to victims and their families

## WA LONE

*DIGNITY*, the report of the commission of investigation of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front, is a detailed and documented account of the torture and murder of dozens of the group's members at the hands of their colleagues in the early 1990s, following accusations of internal spying.

The atrocities took place in a remote and heavily militarised camp in Kachin State in 1991-1992. Many student opponents of the military regime had taken refuge there from the repression that followed the 1988 uprising. The camp became known as the ABSDF-Northern, headquartered in Laisin/Pajau.

The new report – compiled, with support from Switzerland's embassy, by the organisation's Truth and Justice Committee on the basis of interviews with more than 60 people, including survivors, eyewitnesses and family members of the victims – relates that in August 1991, 105 ABSDF members and a civilian were arrested following accusations that some members of the camp were in fact spies for the government.

The accusations came against a background of harsh militarisation of the camp, in which students protesting the military government became rigid and hierarchical themselves. Strict discipline was enforced by physical beatings in a climate of paranoia and mistrust.

During their detention, 17 were executed and 19 died under torture or from the denial of medical treatment. Fifty-five more fled into China, where the authorities arrested them and handed them back to the Myanmar government.

Most of the torture at the Kachin camp took place at the barracks of the Intelligence Unit which, the report says, spent much of its time gathering information not about the Tatmadaw but the ABSDF members themselves.

Tortures included electric shock, beatings, application of hot tar to victims' bodies, burning with hot nails or knives, suffocation with a plastic bag and infliction of severe pain by rolling bamboo rods onto the shins.

In some cases interrogators tied detonators to the bodies of their victims and then attached them to a battery, causing an explosion. Those suspected of being government spies were also forced for long periods into stress positions and denied adequate food, clothing and medical care.

Most shockingly, the report describes 17 execution-type killings, of which 15 took place on Union Day, February 12, 1992, at ABSDF headquarters, at a spot known as Assam Hill. Among those killed was the chair of ABSDF-Northern, Htun Aung Kyaw. The other two executions took place in the Hpakant area.



Dignity shows an ABSDF member giving a certificate of apology to a victim's family. Photo: Staff

Survivors told the investigation that the victims were allowed to choose the method of their execution: shooting, beheading by sword, or being beaten to death with shovels and mattocks. A further 11 killings took place during interrogation, apparently under torture. The committee found that all these killings were extrajudicial, and took place in the absence of any due process. The bodies were buried in pits. A further eight people died while in detention.

In a key finding, the committee stated that the ABSDF-Northern acted alone, and that its military leadership, and particularly the Intelligence Unit, perpetrated the torture and the killings. It said some central committee members of the organisation also played direct roles, and that the ABSDF headquarters was aware of events in the northern camp, and that its response was "limited".

The Truth and Justice Committee – which addresses recommendations to ABSDF, the government of Myanmar, and national human rights and civil society organisations – says the report is intended to promote national reconciliation, even though it concerns only its own actions.

"If they [the ABSDF] can reveal, and confess to, past mistakes, people can emulate this as an example. Then it is certain that real national reconciliation will be achieved," said artist (Panchi) Htein Win, a survivor of the atrocities.

"An apology is difficult to make," said U Kyaw Linn, who helped compile the report. "Some people believe that apologising means everything they did in the past is

wrong. Actually, apologising is a mutual recognition."

Current ABSDF members went to meet victims' family and survivors, and presented them with official letters of apology.

The report, however, did not weigh in on whether actual spying did occur, nor was it able to exonerate the accused.

"The report couldn't fully help with the grievances of the survivors and victims, but it can recognise their dignity and prestige, to a certain extent," U Kyaw Linn said.

While committee members said the report could entirely close the chapter for victims, they said relatives and victims have welcomed it to some extent nonetheless. Two press conferences, held in March in Yangon and Mandalay, included victims' families and survivors.

"I think both sides need to be honest with each other, have foresight and establish goodwill toward the younger generation when we move toward national reconciliation," said survivor Ko Moe Kyaw Thu.

However, those who lived through the ordeal say they feel unsafe still, having suffered mental as well as physical anguish. And some say the stigma of the accusations made still lingers, over two decades later.

"It has been 20 years. Some people still believe that we are staff from the military intelligence to this day. When I contacted 88 Generation to join, I was rejected. I was a member of the students groups in 1988. I want to get back my dignity," said Ko Phoe Kyaw, a former ABSDF member.

Though there many accusations of human rights violations have been made regarding the former military junta's dictatorship, the ABSDF says theirs is the first report about human rights violations released in Myanmar.

Among other suggestions, the report recommends aid be offered for the healthcare and rehabilitation of survivors and family members of victims; for each perpetrator to apologise officially; for victims and survivors to be recognised as members of ABSDF again; and for legal actions to be taken against on perpetrators.

While these are the wishes of the current generation of the ABSDF, the group said those interviewed by the investigators expressed varying degrees of responsibility, regret and apology. Whether or not past generations will step forward to apologise for the events is a question neither the book nor the ABSDF can answer.

– Translation by Thiri Min Htun and Win Thaw Tar



Dignity was launched at ABSDF press conferences in Yangon and Mandalay. Photo: Wa Lone



# The party line

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

## Union Solidarity and Development Party

Formed: 2010 (rebranded from Union Solidarity and Development Association, formed 1993)  
Hluttaw seats: Amyotha 129, Pyithu 219

### U Htay Oo, vice chair

"WE have confidence that we will win" the 2015 elections, U Htay Oo, vice chair of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), told *The Myanmar Times* in a recent interview. But he also added that winning isn't everything, and that the USDP is always working for national reconciliation, and will continue doing so whether or not it achieves victory in November.

"Our objectives date from when the USDP was an organisation called the Union Solidarity and Development Association [pre-2010]. Our two main objectives are peace and development. They are associated with each other. If there is no peace, there will be no development. If there is no development, it will be difficult to manage to achieve peace. So when our association was transformed into a party we didn't change our objectives. We will never change our objectives whether the USDP achieves victory in the coming election or not. Our USDP party is always working for national reconciliation," U Htay Oo said.

As unity among ethnic groups is of major importance in realising national reconciliation, U Htay Oo said he puts faith in the negotiation

process to reach a consensus.

"We all have our own opinions, experiences and backgrounds. There are people with different opinions. We cannot blame them and criticise them. I think what is most important is that we find a way to reach our destination by negotiation and without arguing," said U Htay Oo.

Asked to define reconciliation, he said it is built on all parties seeking peace.

"Reconciliation is a new term which

**'Peace is what the armed forces from both sides want most, because if a country has no stability and fighting occurs, they are the ones who face the effects of war first.'**

has become popular. But actually all we are doing today is working to get peace in the country and unity among all national races for non-disintegration of national solidarity. I think of this means reconciliation.

"Today, all parties are in peace talks and they agree on some issues but not others. But peace is what the armed forces from both sides really want most, because if a country has

no stability and fighting occurs, they are the ones who face the effects of war first. And people in the conflict areas come after them - I'm sure they also want peace. So if there is a will and the will is strong, we can find a way to achieve it," said U Htay Oo.

One important event that may set the tone of how the reconciliation process proceeds will come in November. Candidates from the USDP party plan to contest all constituencies, U Htay Oo said.

"We will compete in the coming election because we have confidence that we will win. It is not a blind faith though. There are people who collect opinion polls, and so do we. But the situation may change at the last minute. For us [USDP], we have confidence, so we compete," said U Htay Oo.

- Pyae Thet Phyto,  
translation by Win Thaw Tar

## National Unity Party

Formed: 1990 (formed out of Burma Socialist Programme Party)  
Hluttaw seats: Amyotha 5, Pyithu 12

### U Je Yaw Wu, MP for Kachin State constituency 12

IT'S the best time to sign the nationwide ceasefire because our Bangladeshi allies from the West and Chinese from the East are terribly mad at us, one for the spread of Islamism and another for egoistic business. It's the best time to reconcile and unify among the nationalities. If I am empowered I am sure to concentrate and focus on the signing of a nationwide ceasefire. That will be the first step.

The second will be setting roadmaps for nation-building. Both parties [government and other groups] must have genuine and pure love of and dedication to the State and Nation. They must be true to what they have signed and said, and actualise what they have included in the treaty.

All the nationalities must be enthusiastic in the nationwide ceasefire and peace process. They must be witnesses between Government and the revolutionaries.

- Than Naing Soe



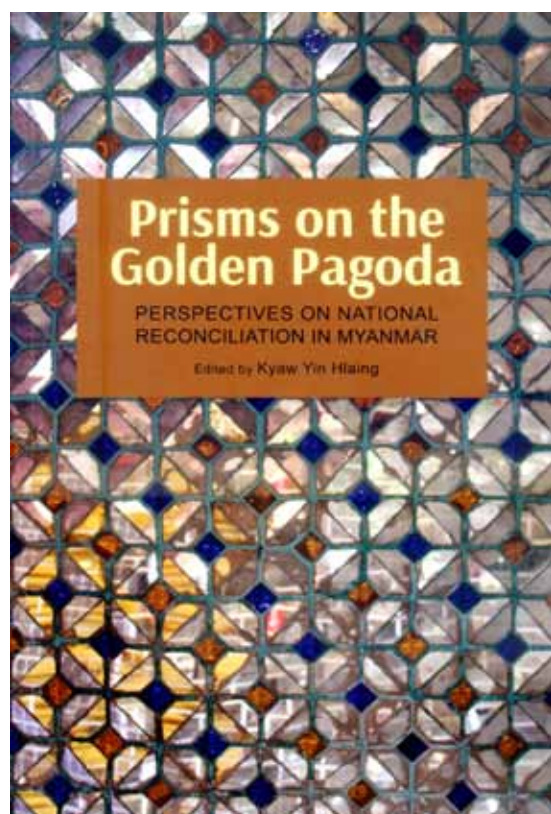
## Book Review

### *Prisms on the Golden Pagoda: Perspectives on National Reconciliation in Myanmar*

Editor: Kyaw Yin Hlaing

Published: 2014

Publisher: NUS Press (National University of Singapore)



AS its title suggests, this anthology of English-language essays aims to present "a spectrum of perspectives on the national reconciliation process". The work is edited by Kyaw Yin Hlaing, director of political dialogue at the Myanmar Peace Center, who also contributes four of the 10 essays. Four other Myanmar writers contribute (three of whom are since deceased - the volume is dedicated to them), as do Robert H Taylor and Derek Tonkin. The Myanmar writers include a former military officer and a Shan politician, and the editor states there has been no attempt to work out a communal definition of - let alone opinion on - reconciliation. Rather, the volume is intended to represent the fractured views of society at large, presenting not the "truth" but its "complexities".

The first essay looks at the term "national reconciliation" itself, pointing out that it has been used by every incoming leadership in the country. The first was in the "parliamentary period" of 1948-62, when "Prime Minister U Nu's creation of Buddhism as a state religion - in an act of abuse of democratic institutions - ... contributed to the emergence of the Kachin insurgent movement." Broken promises of statehood for ethnic groups eventually led up to 20 separate groups to take up arms and work to overthrow the government, or at least drive it out of their territory. Lack of reconciliation led the Tatmadaw to step in, taking over the country under the guise of protecting it from splintering and collapsing. General Ne Win's military also tried reconciliation, but it was no more than a demand for minorities bow to centralised rule, and "neither the government nor the

insurgent groups thought about making major compromises but instead gave priority to achieving the interests of their own groups over peace". The "us vs them" attitude then festered in the decades since, through the socialist and junta eras. The junta did manage a surprising number of ceasefires - 17 - and invited, but then ignored, the ethnic groups at the National Convention of 2003. This, and the push to turn armed groups into Border Guard Forces, under the Tatmadaw's control, squandered whatever good will might have arisen.

The book's scope ends more or less in the early years of the transition. Also of interest is consideration of how reconciliation is considered abroad - normally government/NLD rather than government/ethnic groups - and what this means for development, as well as the NLD's past intransigence and situations where its decisions to play along with the government or not had wide-reaching ramifications. Decisions to work, or not work, within the government's roadmap framework has always been a matter for debate, and knowing the direction this roadmap has taken does not take away from the interest of these chapters. Knowing the past is the best way to understand the present, and change the future.

The book is academic but not difficult to read, with at least one valuable insight per page. Paired with Thant Myint-U's *The River of Lost Footsteps*, it ought to be required reading for anyone in need of a primer on modern Myanmar. Events, we see, are guided by people and their choices - an important thing to accept in any approach to understanding or bringing reconciliation

- and we see just how many times the now-well-known narrative could have gone another way.

An index, bibliography, glossary and appendix of relevant facts round out the volume. One downside is while the essays contain a number of interviews with undoubtedly well-placed sources, the endnotes tend toward the opaque: One compelling detail about a journalist visiting "remote northeastern" Shan State in 1996 and finding most people entirely unaware Myanmar had achieved independence compels one to follow the note for specifics, only to be met with "Interview, January 29, 2006". Obviously discretion is required, particularly for government sources, but hopefully sources can be more open in future as general paranoia in the culture reduces.

It would also be nice to have a still broader cross-section of contributors - erudite, learned and well-sourced though Kyaw Yin Hlaing's several essays, he is but one voice. In fact, this would have been the case had not the government refused a number of visas for the conference to which the book relates, held in Hong Kong in January 2009. While most of the essays do not encompass the five years that have passed between conference and book publication, most of the factors discussed still remain sadly vital, as they have not yet been resolved. A conference on the post-2010 era was organised for January 2012, with essays to be gathered into a future volume. No doubt 2012-15 - and beyond - will merit plenty more material, and hopefully turn this into an ongoing series.

- Wade Guyitt

# Business



Growing banking businesses require increasing amounts of staff – though it is difficult hiring them all. Photo: Zarni Phyo

## Headaches for banking sector staffing as companies expand



JEREMY MULLINS

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THE banking industry is booming, but finding skill workers and training staff is a constant challenge.

The largest banks, such as KBZ, CB and AYA, are rapidly adding locations, and players across the entire industry are adding a suite of services such as iBanking that have not existed before in the marketplace.

While technology can be purchased, staffing all these locations and services means there are thousands of workers entering the banking industry, usually at the entry level – though training them for the task is a challenge.

“Big banks want to grow organically,” said Jemin Popat, managing director of MyJobs.com.mm.

“But at the same time they want to open branches now, they want to offer customers services now and they need people now.”

U Mya Than, chair of Myanmar Oriental Bank, said traditionally formal business training did not factor as one of young peoples’ desired career paths, with many of the brightest youth intent on jobs such as doctors. But there are plenty of doctors, and generating income is difficult as competition in the medical profession can be fierce and fees are small.

“Now youth are keen on the business sector and they know about business,” he said in an interview. “They know after they study and get



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experience, they will find good jobs in Myanmar.”

It is also important for the country that business attracts youth with experience and talent, as growth of business – into which banking is entwined – is what will cause economic growth.

“The business sector has a good future, and needs a lot of skilled people. Now is the best time to enter business.”

**‘We want to call Myanmar people back from abroad. But only a few bankers come back.’**

U Mya Than  
Myanmar Oriental Bank

Mr Popat said he has seen rapid growth in interest in the financial sector.

“Two years ago, I was getting hardly any enquiries saying I want to work in a bank. Now I’m getting them regularly,” he said. “The PR for the industry has definitely improved.”

Current university students say

they view the sector as leading to a higher future payoff than most other businesses.

Ma Nay Chi said she wants a career in banking, but was not able to get high enough marks to enter banking – so went into chemistry instead. Still keen on a business career, she takes long-distance business education in her spare time.

Human Resources (HR) is the main problem for the banking system, according to U Mya Than.

There are not enough people with enough skill in the industry, requiring extensive use of foreigners in the industry. “There is demand but no supply,” he said.

Banks are increasing investing in their staff, providing training, often with the help of development partners or foreign banks. Some even go abroad and work in foreign institutions, before returning as train-the-trainers. “We want to call Myanmar people back from abroad. But only a few bankers come back because the salary is much lower compared to international jobs and many have settled in other countries,” he said.

Banks often have little choice but to hire foreigners at large salaries.

U Mya Than also pointed out that private banking is comparatively young in the country. While there were private banks prior to nationalisations in the early 1960s, there was a period of 50 years with no private banks, until 1990 when the government signalled private banks would be allowed to enter.

In 1993, private banks began opening, but the services they offered were limited. The quantity of banks has gradually increased, though they are still generalists, with

little specialisation and personality.

Banks are now launching services like debit cards and mobile banking, though there is a shortage of people with skills in these specialty systems.

MyJobs’ Mr Popat said most banks have hundreds or thousands of vacancies each year.

MyJobs held a jobs fair in February focusing on middle and senior management roles that are often difficult to staff, such as department heads – as Mr Popat said, “those are the kind of candidates they don’t see on a day to day basis.”

Nine foreign banks are also expected to set up this year, though many of them are staffing from regional headquarters, meaning they are expected to have relatively small local hiring footprints.

Local banks as well often end up looking outside Myanmar for senior staff, and will likely continue to until the next generation of new employees get enough training and experience.

Ko Ye Lwin Phyo has worked at KBZ for six years. He graduated with an engineering degree and initially had little interest in banking, but a friend at the time said it was relatively easy to get jobs in the industry.

“At the time, banking was not famous and jobs were not good like now,” he said. Ko Ye Lwin Phyo joined with the bank’s IT department, though later switched over to international banking.

“At first I wasn’t very interested, but the more I worked, the more interested I became in banking,” he said. “I also studied on my own to improve my skills – training is not enough, but interest is the most important.”

## Everyday people fear inflation with budget

KO KO AUNG

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ECONOMISTS and everyday people say they are concerned about rising prices resulting from a large planned civil servant salary increase, as members of parliament spoke in favour of planned pay raises during parliamentary sessions on March 26.

The large increase planned for civil servants may fuel rising consumer prices, which are already increasing partly due to kyat depreciation against the US dollar – the currency in which many imports are denominated.

Experts have said the planned salary increase for civil servants risks increasing the amount of money in circulation, fueling inflation further.

“To some extent, increasing salaries will be a benefit for civil servants, but it will also increase the inflation rate and then commodity prices will rise,” said economist U Khin Maung Nyo.

The plan revealed on March 26 calls for minimum civil servant salaries to increase from K75,000 to K120,000 per month (US\$72.50 to \$121). The maximum salaries will double from K250,000 to K500,000.

Salary increases are expected for some 2 million government employees, from teachers to postal clerks to senior officials such as director generals and also members of the armed forces.

**‘We worry that the basic price of commodities will increase.’**

Ko Maung Hla  
Taxi driver

Independent experts have said inflation is likely to increase in the next year, partly on the back of the plan to increase public salaries.

The Asian Development Bank last week said current inflation of about 6 percent compared year-on-year is likely to increase to about 8.4pc in the coming fiscal year.

Some local people also say they are aware of the debate, questioning why government workers may receive salary bumps that result in hardships for others. “We worry that the basic price of commodities will increase,” said taxi driver Ko Maung Hla. “We are already living a hand-to-mouth existence. We can’t find extra money for increasing prices of basic commodities.”

Roadside vendor Daw Tin Win said it is hard for local people to make ends meet. “I don’t understand why the government raises civil servant salaries frequently, because after increasing salaries, commodity prices are on the rise,” she said.

Those that stand to benefit directly say they support the increase.

Primary school teacher Ma Ei Thandar Win said it good news for educational professionals. “Maybe commodity prices will increase a little, but I don’t think it will be by that much,” she said. “Increasing salaries is better than not increasing them.”

Government surveying for another Yangon bridge

**BUSINESS 14**



Vietnam contends with challenges as rice industry takes off

**BUSINESS 16**

**Exchange Rates (March 29 close)**

Currency	Buying	Selling
Euro	K1135	K1140
Malaysia Ringitt	K283	K285
Singapore Dollar	K750	K755
Thai Baht	K32	K32.5
US Dollar	K1070	K1075

# Experts warn on black money flowing into stock market



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CARE needs to be taken to prevent illegal money flowing through the planned Yangon Stock Exchange, or it risks its reputation as a reliable place to do business, according to experts.

The exchange is slated to launch in October, marking Myanmar's first modern stock market, though a number of rules governing the market are still to be release.

U Soe Thein, executive director of Asia Green Development Bank, said controlling flows of black money is one of the most important elements of the planned market, adding rules must be neither too loose nor too strict.

Domestic banks pay some attention to customers transferring or depositing over K100 million (US\$967,000), but generally only report the transaction as required, he said. U Soe Thein was formerly an official with the Myanmar Securities Exchange Centre, an existing over-the-counter style market in the Myanma Economic Bank building in Yangon.

With detecting illegal money difficult in banks, it will be even more challenge on the stock market given the frequency of trading.

"[Preventing flows of black money] will be much more diffi-

cult on the stock exchange, as cash can change hands every minute or second, much more than happens in banks," he said.

U Soe Thein added cash transactions such as salaries are often handled outside of banks in Myanmar, meaning it can be difficult to prevent illegal activity in some cases.

**'We need clear rules how black money, that is in Myanmar, can be transformed in a legal way to white money.'**

**Aung Thura**  
Thura Swiss CEO

Myanmar is still highlighted as a jurisdiction that has not made sufficient progress in implementing its action plans on money laundering, by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an inter-governmental body that aims to set standards and promote legal, regulatory and operational measures to combat money laundering, terrorist financing and related threats to the international financial system.

In February, FATF said Myanmar has taken steps to improve its anti-money laundering regime,

but still needs to address a number of deficiencies.

Regulations stipulate that all transfers, deposits and withdrawals of more than K100 million must be reported, as well as any unusual or suspicious movements below that amount.

Some firms attempt to circumvent the rules through measures such as breaking down large transfers into smaller amounts, which is a practice that may be extended to the stock market.

U Soe Thein said the role of securities companies is important to handle the issue on YSX - "if not, it is a big place to wash money," he said.

A total of 57 companies have applied for underwriter, dealer, broker and service provider licences, with an announcement expected in April or May declaring which firms will be allowed to participate in these roles once the YSX opens.

Last week, U Aung Thura, chief executive officer of Thura Swiss consulting, said transparency is important people invest in the market because they believe in the economy and market fundamentals, and do not abuse it as a place to launder money.

"We need clear rules how black money, that is in Myanmar, can be transformed in a legal way to white money," he said. "This could be amnesty rules, not only set up by the government but going through parliament, through laws."

If a firm had not previously

declared tax, it could do this now, pay a penalty or a specific tax, but then the money becomes official.

Then people won't use real estate markets, won't use other markets, to transform black money into white money," he said last week at a seminar.

Others say that the problem of black money at the exchange may not be an early concern, but could grow over time.

The market will be new in 2015 and will carry a number of restrictions, including not allowing foreign entities to purchase shares.

"It is easy to handle the market in the early stage," said U Tin Myint, executive director of Myanmar Securities Exchange Centre.

With trading expected to be relatively light in the earliest days, more thorough checks can be completed if a trader cannot show the source of money.

The Myanmar Securities Exchange Centre currently has rules and officials responsible for anti-money laundering, he added.

Banking and investment consultant U George Soe Win said there are some regulations in place that need to be precisely enforced. Foreigners also will not initially be able to buy shares, though these restrictions will be gradually loosened as the market develops.

Money laundering has been a local problem for many years, and the YSX must be well-run to ensure the problem of black money does not dampen market trading.

## YCDC to take permits in all townships

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The Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) Department of Engineering (Building) will begin accepting building permit applications across all of Myanmar's townships this week. The permits had previously only been made available at City Hall in Sule, Kyauktada township, sparking complaints from contractors and developers.

The Committee began deploying adept and online services for permit applicants last year. Although its One Stop Service (OSS) has turned out to be effective, its online mechanism accepting free applications has proven less so due to internet connectivity issues, department officials said. The One Stop Service office at City Hall has also been tricky to get to for applicants, who mostly hail from the outskirts or suburbs of Yangon and whose trips are complicated by traffic and other infrastructure issues.

Now, the Department of Engineering (Building) will enable each township's city development office to take building permit applications started April 2, said department spokesperson U Nay Win.

Township offices will be open to accept applications between 10 and 2 on Tuesdays and Thursdays, he said.

A senior official with Htun Thit construction company in Thingangyun township said the previous system of travelling to City Hall for permits frequently resulted in delays.

"Sometimes we had to go eight times for one project to get one permit," he said. "It was talking too long."

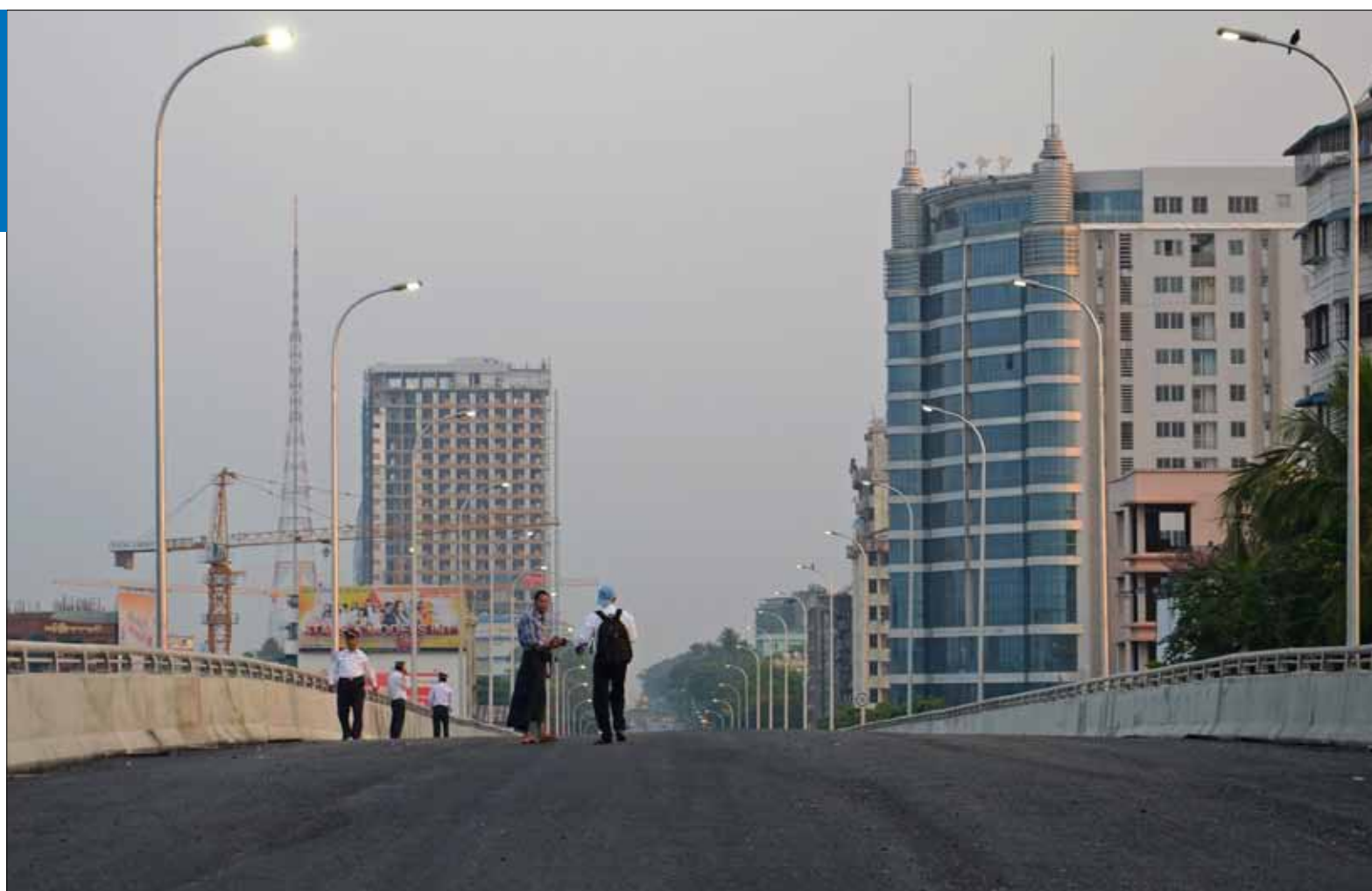
He added he hopes the new method is an improvement.

**IN PICTURES**

**PHOTO:**  
**AUNG HTAY HLAING**

The newly-completed Myaynigone overpass may never be this quiet again. Here, pedestrians take in the project hours before it officially opened at 6:30 on March 27.

**For related article see Page 14**



## PHNOM PENH

## Cambodia hit by strong greenback

IT is no secret that Cambodia is a highly dollarised country, with certain estimates suggesting a more than 80 percent penetration of the greenback. A large section of FDI and the urban economy is fuelled by the US dollar, with little indication that things are going to change soon.

While economists believe that the current dollar rally, which started in late 2013, may not accelerate at the pace it has in the past 18 months, it is expected to continue to strengthen this year. The dollar has seen a 15pc appreciation against a basket of foreign currencies, including the euro and yen, in the past six months, with only the euro showing some resilience in the past few days.

Cambodia, while expected to be largely unaffected in the short term, could see some downsides to this trend in the long run.

Grant Knuckey, CEO of ANZ Royal, said that the country will be shielded from this appreciation in some respects, but there can be pressure on agricultural exports, especially to Europe, because a depreciating euro will make exports costlier to the economic bloc.

"For exports to Europe - mainly rice and garments - there can be an impact, although the effect may be lagged depending on the term of the export contract," said Mr Knuckey.

He added that another problem area could be tourism, where depreciation in local currencies makes it more expensive for European and Asian travellers, who currently make up the bulk of tourists to the Kingdom.

This decrease in export competitiveness also poses a future risk to garments, which account for around 70pc of outbound shipments, said Hana Becickova, senior economist for the Mekong region at Mantis BV, a risk quantification and forecasting firm in the Netherlands.

Nations like Thailand and Vietnam, whose currencies are floated, have the option of adjusting their currencies through monetary tools, where as Cambodia cannot because it is so strongly pegged to the US dollar.

According to Ms Becickova, the wage hike last year was a "good thing", but given the current economic situation, it puts added pressure on Cambodia's competitiveness, particularly when the Kingdom is unable to use monetary policy to mitigate the rising cost of exports.

"Cambodia currently has really a higher wage level, in nominal terms, compared to other garment manufacturers within the region," she said. "Garment wages is not the only thing that matters for garment investors. When we look at electricity prices, Cambodia is one of the costlier countries in terms of electricity. So again this is something not really favourable for the garment sector," Ms Becickova added.

On the upside, Cambodia will not have to grapple with local currency depreciation, asset volatility and higher priced imports, given that the country is a net importer.

Hiroshi Suzuki, CEO at the Business Research Institute for Cambodia, said one unintended benefit is repayment of loans made in other currencies, because an appreciation in the dollar makes these repayment amounts smaller.

"In case of Japanese ODA loans, the Cambodian government could enjoy big savings in the repayment amount in US dollar because all the loans are denominated in Japanese yen and the yen has been depreciated around 40pc within the two years," Mr Suzuki said.

- Phnom Penh Post

## Myaynigone overpass opens to traffic



NOE NOE AUNG

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CARS can now soar over gridlock via the new overpass in Myaynigone, Sauchaung township.

The byway's soft opening on March 27, prior to its official launch, has already generated positive buzz as people say traffic in the area has improved.

Ma Thaw Tar, 30, said she is really satisfied at the overpass' opening, as it cut down her commute - Hledan to Kyauktada - to less than half an hour.

"Normally it would take more than an hour, sometimes 90 minutes, to get to my office. There were three main traffic jams everyday - Hledan junction, Hanthawaddy roundabout and Myaynigone junction. But now, the traffic is smooth," she said.

Officials from the builder Capital Development, which is part of local conglomerate Capital Diamond Star Group, and the government organised a modest opening ceremony for the overpass on March 27.

"Only the finishing touches remain to be completed. Vehicles can use the flyover during the day, and we will complete the work at night,"



Commuters cut their travel times shortly after the March 27 soft-launch of the overpass. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

said an official from the company.

Work on the K16 billion, four-lane flyover began last September. The north-to-south structure is 2310.5 feet (704 metres) long, spanning Myaynigone and Shinsawpu junctions. "We had intended to open on March 30, but we decided

the public wanted it open sooner," he said.

Cab driver U Aye Maung said the overpass, though unfinished, provided a smoother ride.

"It should be better still once they've finished. Traffic was terrible at Hledan and Myaynigone

junctions," he added.

Officials from Yangon Region have pledged to build two large-scale overpass projects in the city this financial year.

One is the Myaynigone overpass, which has just opened, and another is in Insein township.

## ABIDJAN

## From beans to bars for Ivorian chocolate

IVORY Coast reigns as the world's top cocoa producer but it wants to sell more than the beans, turning them into the even more lucrative chocolate, from breakfast spread to candy bars.

Home to more than 35 percent of the world's cocoa crop - with a record production of 1.7 million tonnes in 2014 - this west African country whose equatorial countryside is dotted with plantations made cocoa its economic engine since independence from France in 1960.

The "brown gold" accounts for 22 percent of Ivory Coast's gross domestic product (GDP), half of its exports, and around two-thirds of people's jobs and income, according to the World Bank.

During the 2013-14 season, Ivorian cocoa producers saw profits of 2.13 billion euros (US\$2.3 billion), according to Ivory Coast's coffee-cocoa council.

Worldwide cocoa reaped some \$13 billion in profits.

But those figures were dwarfed by the world's chocolate earnings, which were nearly 10 times greater that season, according to the International Organisation for Coffee and Cocoa (ICCO).

As one local analyst in the sector put it, "It's not normal that cocoa should leave Ivory Coast and then come back. It's an aberration".

And Ivory Coast wants to take a bite out of the rich chocolate market. In neighbourhoods of the economic capital Abidjan, cocoa beans are being converted into a paste that can be used to make chocolate bars.

"We are interested in exporting finished and semi-finished products," said Ivorian Trade Minister Jean-Louis Billon.

After a decade of political and military crises, and bloody post-election violence in 2011, Ivory



An employee of the CEMOI chocolate factory empties bags of cocoa beans onto a metal grate for the beans to be cleaned at the CEMOI cocoa processing plant in Abidjan on March 25. Photo: AFP

Coast has become more stable with an economic growth rate of 9pc between 2012 and 2014.

According to the ICCO, it is set to become the number one processor of cocoa beans.

Ivorian authorities say their goal is to process half their cocoa bean crop inside the country by 2020.

"We believe it is necessary to allow the country's [cocoa] producers to gain some added value. We are encouraging them to grind their own product," said Jean-Marc Anga, ICCO executive director.

Abidjan also hopes to become the ICCO's headquarters, which is currently based in London, in order to increase its influence in the sector.

Converting the cocoa beans locally means "giving more work to Ivorians, bringing more revenue to the state, and contributing to the development of our industry," said government spokesperson Bruno Kone.

Earlier this month, President Alassane Ouattara personally inaugurated in the western city of San Pedro a new factory for converting cocoa beans owned by Olam, a company from Singapore.

Olam invested some \$75 million in the construction of the factory with a capacity to handle 75,000 tonnes of cocoa beans each year.

And after grinding the cocoa beans, Ivory Coast is making further deals such as with French chocolate-maker Cemoi, which has invested 6 million euros in a factory to produce chocolate powder, bars and breakfast spread to sell in west Africa.

Cemoi will be the first Western company to operate a chocolate factory in Ivory Coast.

"There is in this region the strong emergence of a middle class which has the purchasing power to buy real chocolate," said Cemoi executive director Patrick Poirrier.

- AFP

## Govt surveys Yangon bridge

## HTOO THANT

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A NEW bridge being planned for Yangon's Kyeemyingdaing township could mean the difference between life and death for villagers on the other side. The Ministry of Construction has been working with a Japanese company in initial preparations for the 2700-metre (8000-foot) bridge, parliament heard on March 25.

Deputy construction minister U Soe Tint told Pyithu Hluttaw that the Japanese firm JEF Engineering, with Japanese government support, had been conducting initial studies on the Hlaing River, which the bridge would span.

Kyeemyindaing township MP U Than Sein told the Hluttaw that a huge gap existed in development standards between the two banks of the river. Living standards in the 11 villages across the Hlaing from downtown Yangon city were low, and roads, education and health care were poor.

"They have not finished building the single 15-bed hospital that I have requested," he said.

"Emergency patients and mothers about to give birth have to cross the river by boat at the risk of their lives. About 20 people have already died on their way to hospital in Kyeemyindaing," he said.

The deputy minister said the bridge was included in the Great Yangon Development Project (2040) approved by the Yangon Regional government, Yangon City Development Committee and JICA, the Japan International Development Agency.

"The bridge will be 2657 metres in length. We are conducting observations with the help of related departments, gathering information and doing fieldwork," he said.

- Translation by Emoon

SYDNEY

# Oz considers joining new China-backed bank

AUSTRALIA said it will sign an agreement to become a prospective founding member of a China-backed infrastructure bank, but continued to express concerns about how the institution is to be governed.

China and 20 other countries signed a memorandum of understanding last October to establish the Beijing-headquartered US\$50 billion Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) bank.

Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia have also announced plans to join, despite scepticism about the AIIB in Washington and Tokyo.

South Korea on March 26 became the latest country with close ties to the US to say it would also seek membership.

"Good progress has been made on the bank's design, governance and transparency over the past few months, but we still have issues that we will address through ongoing consultations," Prime Minister Tony Abbott, Treasurer Joe Hockey and Foreign Minister Julie

Bishop said in a joint statement. "Key matters to be resolved before Australia considers joining the AIIB include the bank's board of directors having authority over key investment decisions, and that no one country control the bank."

The government said it would sign a memorandum of understanding which will allow Australia to take part in negotiations as a prospective founding

member to set up the bank.

The ministers added that the AIIB "has the potential to play a valuable role in addressing infrastructure needs and boosting economic growth in the region with potential benefits for Australia".

The new multinational lender is seen as a threat to the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, two institutions under strong US influence.

Washington has voiced concern about whether the bank would meet international governance, environmental and social standards.

- AFP



Tony Abbott's Australia is weighing whether to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Photo: AFP

MANILA

# Philippine Airlines buys two Airbus jets in expansion bid

THE Philippines' struggling flag carrier said yesterday it has purchased an additional two Airbus jets as part of its re-fleeting program.

The two Airbus A321 NEO planes bring to 40 the total number of deliveries that Philippine Airlines will receive from Airbus up to 2024, the carrier said in a statement.

"The A321 NEOs will enable PAL to continue to grow its current single-aisle fleet and spread out its aircraft delivery stream in line with market growth," according to the statement.

The jets will be used for domestic routes, said company spokesperson Cielo Villauna.

Before the purchase of the two jets was announced yesterday, the company said it was expecting 10 deliveries this year.

Asia's oldest airline posted a "small profit" last year after billionaire Lucio Tan regained control, company president Jaime Bautista told Bloomberg Television earlier this month.

Mr Tan bought back for a reported US\$1 billion last year the 49 percent stake that he had sold to San Miguel

Corporation in 2012. He also reinstalled Mr Bautista as PAL president.

Mr Bautista said in November last year that PAL was looking for a new investor to help fund an expansion program that includes the purchase of more long-haul jets.

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Amount billionaire Lucio Tan spent to buy back a 49pc stake in the airline

The carrier resumed flights to New York this month and announced plans to reopen its hub on Cebu island.

Parent company PAL Holdings Inc posted a net income of 233.7 million pesos (\$5.3 million) for the nine months ended September. - AFP

NEW YORK

# ANA goes with Boeing

JAPAN'S All Nippon Airways has ordered three 787-10 Dreamliners, becoming the first airline in Asia to operate all three versions of the high-tech jetliner, Boeing said on March 27.

The new 787-10 is the largest of the Dreamliner family, capable of carrying 323 passengers up to 13,000 kilometres (8078 miles), a distance that represents more than 90 percent of the world's twin-aisle routes, according to the US aerospace giant.

"We are honoured to play such an important role in ANA's continued success as they look to expand their fleet to include the entire family of 787 Dreamliners," said Ray Conner, Boeing Commercial Airplanes president and chief executive, in a statement.

The ANA order is valued at roughly US\$900 million at list prices. The airline had announced its commitment to buy the aircraft in January.

ANA currently operates the world's largest 787 fleet with 34 Dreamliners, built with lightweight composite components that helped to lower fuel consumption. The largest Japanese airline was the launch customer for the Dreamliner, which entered service in October 2011.

According to Boeing, the 787-10 will be 25 to 30pc more efficient than the airplanes it replaces.

Boeing has a net order total of four 787s, according to a company update this week. In 2014, Boeing booked a net 65 orders for the Dreamliner, down from 183 orders in 2013.

Shares in Dow member Boeing dipped 0.1pc to \$148.000 in mid-day trade on the New York Stock Exchange.

- AFP

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## NEW DELHI

## SpiceJet runs out of airplanes

SPICEJET will not be able to meet its flight plans for the summer schedule starting March 29 after the Indian budget carrier failed to obtain enough jets, people familiar with the matter said.

SpiceJet, which operates 17 Boeing 737 jets and 15 Bombardier Q400s, will not be able to operate 280 daily flights as planned, said company officials who asked not to be identified because the plans are private. The airline currently offers 218 flights a day but has been unable to take bookings on some of the planned new flights because of the lack of planes, the officials said.

Failure to meet its announced schedule could raise concerns about whether SpiceJet, which ran into financial trouble last year, can succeed on its recovery path. One official said the carrier is in talks with lessors who went to court demanding to take back jets for non-payment, and separately is seeking to lease two or three more planes to fulfill the expanded summer schedule.

"We are in the process of inducting more aircraft as we speak, and expect to be operating at our full summer schedule by mid-April," chief operating officer Sanjiv Kapoor said by email.

SpiceJet shares fell as much as 5.3 percent, their biggest intraday fall since March 2. They closed down 3.6pc at 20.15 rupees in Mumbai trading, their lowest close since February 19.

The Delhi High Court on March 19 ordered India's aviation regulator to deregister six SpiceJet planes so lessors could take them back. The court also reserved an order in a similar case for five more SpiceJet planes, the *Press Trust of India* reported.

— Bloomberg

## TOKYO

## Daughter avoids ousting in Japan furniture feud

A BITTER family feud at a leading Japanese furniture chain took a dramatic turn on March 27 after its acid-tongued founder lost a battle to oust his daughter as president in a highly charged shareholder vote.

The drama captured headlines for weeks with 71-year-old Katsuhisa Otsuka giving his daughter Kumiko a public dressing-down last month, saying he was sorry for having a "bad child" who committed "terrorism" with her tit-for-tat bid to boot him from the board of Otsuka Kagu.

On March 27, investors cast their vote on the duelling proposals with over 60 percent backing daughter Kumiko, 47, to stay in the top job, after the elder Otsuka blasted her battle as treasonous.

Flanked by his wife and a slate of male executives supporting his bid, the company's chair introduced himself as the man "dethroned as president in a coup d'etat".

By contrast, his stone-faced daughter apologised to shareholders for the family tempest, saying the company needs to improve its governance standards and rebuild a brand that stretches back four decades.

The father-daughter pair were bitterly divided over how to run the Tokyo-based firm that Katsuhisa, a former cabinet salesman, started in 1969.

"One day, members of the founding family need to leave their company. This is the only way companies can survive," his daughter told shareholders.

The fight erupted when Kumiko,

a former consultant, was dismissed in July after five years running the company, despite being credited by outsiders with turning it around by moving away from her father's business model.

The elder Otsuka subsequently took over running the firm for six months – later saying it was a mistake to appoint his daughter as president – until the board re-installed Kumiko in the job as the firm suffered its first loss in four years.

The vote on March 27 marked a rare battle pitting a female executive against a senior member of male-dominated Japan Inc.

It also underscored concerns about corporate governance in a country where shareholder activism is rare and investors are often not consulted on important business decisions.

"An open discussion is not a bad thing, but it's rare to see a public fight like this," said Masaharu Hanazaki, a professor specialising in corporate governance at Tokyo's Hitotsubashi University. "This conflict might have

**'One day, members of the founding family need to leave their company.'**

**Kumiko Otsuka**  
Otsuka Kagu furniture



President of Japan's Otsuka Kagu furniture chain Kumiko Otsuka answers questions during a press conference after its annual shareholders' meeting in Tokyo on March 27. Photo: AFP

not happened at Otsuka if the company had a close adviser who is not a family member," he added.

Japan is mulling tighter governance standards, backed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who is trying to lure more foreign investment in Japanese firms as part of a wider bid to revive the world's number three economy.

Among the measures is a push for companies to appoint more independent directors while Mr Abe is also hoping to lure more women into senior positions. Only about 10pc of 1800 Tokyo-listed firms have female directors and Japanese companies lag far behind counterparts in the United States and much of Europe, according to data compiled by Bloomberg News.

"Female presidents are very rare in Japan so I support Kumiko," one male shareholder told the meeting.

While Katsuhisa enjoyed decades of success, its fortunes waned over the past decade in the face of competition from budget furniture retailers such as local rival Nitori and Sweden's IKEA.

Katsuhisa and his daughter were split over the chain's membership-driven business that focuses on premium furniture and customer service.

Interior design consultants roam the shops at more than a dozen storefront locations across Japan, in sharp contrast to Otsuka's do-it-yourself rivals. Some shareholders were critical of the founder's resistance to changing his decades-old formula.

"The chairman's way of running the ... stores is outdated – I came here hoping there would be a change" in management, one 75-year-old investor told the meeting.

— AFP

## CAN THO

## Vietnam rice growth pressures farmers and environment

RICE farmer Nguyen Hien Thien is so busy growing his crops that he has never even visited Can Tho, a town only a few miles from his farm in the southern Mekong Delta.

"When I was a child, we grew one crop of rice per year – now it's three. It's a lot of work," said 60-year-old Mr Thien, who has been farming since he was a child, while on the edge of his small paddy field.

Experts say Vietnam's drive to become one of the world's leading rice exporters is pushing farmers in the fertile delta region to the brink, with mounting costs to the environment.

The Communist country is already the world's second-largest exporter of the staple grain. But intensive rice cultivation, particularly the shift to producing three crops per year, is taking its toll on farmers and the ecosystem.

"Politicians want to be the world's number one or two rice exporter. As a scientist, I want to see more being done to protect farmers and the environment," said Vietnamese rice expert Vo Tong Xuan. A major famine in 1945 and food shortages in the post-war years led to the government adopting a "rice first" policy. This now generates far more of the crop than needed to feed Vietnam's 90 million population and has catalysed a thriving export industry.

Rice yields have nearly quadrupled since the 1970s, official figures show, thanks to high-yield strains

and the construction of a network of dykes that today allow farmers to grow up to three crops per year.

The amount of land under cultivation in the Mekong Delta has also expanded and quotas are in place to prevent farmers from switching to other crops. But experts are questioning who really benefits.

According to Mr Xuan, farmers don't reap the rewards of the three crop system – the rice is low quality and they spend more on pesticides and fertilizers, which become less effective year by year. He argues the delta would be better off if farmers cultivated a more diverse range of crops, from coconuts to prawns, with just the most suitable land used to grow rice.

The country should consider abandoning the third crop and focus on improving quality and branding to sell Vietnamese rice at higher prices, he said.

Currently, the bulk of Vietnam's rice is exported at cut-price costs on government-to-government contracts through large state-owned enterprises (SOEs) like the Southern Food Corporation, known as Vinafood 2.

"Over the last five years, the trend is toward lower-quality rice," admitted Le Huu Trang, deputy office manager at the firm.

Some argue that such SOEs have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo as they earn lucrative kickbacks from the huge contracts.

But even as salt water intrusion,

drought and flooding increase in the delta – to say nothing of agricultural chemical pollution – it is also hard to convince farmers to change.

"The prevailing mindset is to grow three crops ... we have to explain two crops is better," said Nguyen Tuan Hiep from the Co Do Agriculture company.

Over the last 20 years, Co Do – which is state-run but a flagship model of how the industry could evolve – has identified the best rice-growing land in the delta and helped farmers expand their farms. They now work with 2500 families on 5900 hectares (14,600 acres) of land, enough for each family to make a living – typically the average rice farm in the delta spans less than one hectare.

The firm invests heavily in high-quality seeds and improving irrigation, while also advising farmers on the best chemicals to use.

"Two crops is more sustainable long term – the soil is not degraded, the environment isn't polluted, and value of the rice increases," Mr Hiep said.

Climate change is another factor threatening the delta, according to the World Bank Group's vice president and special envoy for climate change Rachel Kyte. Ultimately Vietnam has tough choices to make, including whether to help people transition from a rice-based economy to aquaculture – fish or shellfish farming or other crops, Ms Kyte added.

— AFP



Workers place bags of paddy on an elevator as they load paddy into a boat for a customer at Co Do Agriculture Company in Vietnam's southern Mekong delta province of Can Tho. Photo: AFP



## ATHENS

# Greece pledges plan to right poor economy

GREECE said the reform proposals it will soon present to its creditors will put the country's economy on track without the pain of austerity.

A government document said the proposals, to be finalised by technical experts this weekend, would bring in 3.0 billion euros (US\$3.2 billion) in revenue, without resorting to wage and pension cuts.

The measures would also see the crisis-hit Greek economy grow by 1.4 percent this year, the document said.

Greece needs a deal next week to unblock stalled EU-IMF loans and enable it to keep paying its debts.

Greek experts were to go to Brussels on March 28 to finalise a list of reforms to be presented later today, said a Greek government source.

The government source also dismissed as "groundless" a report in Germany's *Bild* daily that Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis would soon resign. *Bild* quoted an unnamed government insider saying that the minister's resignation was "only a matter of time".

Mr Varoufakis, who has often cut a controversial figure in the negotiations, said on Twitter that rumours of his resignation were "amusing".

The maverick economist and prolific speaker had uncharacteristically scaled back public appearances this month after a dispute over whether



Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras delivers a speech at Athens University entitled "The Greek Revolution as European Fact" on March 25. Photo: AFP

he flashed his middle finger at Germany during a 2013 speech.

Greece's new radical government, which rejects austerity measures, has until next month to persuade its EU-IMF creditors to accept its alternative reforms. The government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, which came to power in January, has pledged to crack down on tax evasion and corruption to restore growth. But in

the absence of a deal, Greece has received none of the money still remaining in its 240-billion euro (\$263 billion) bailout.

Another government source on March 27 said that Athens had repeatedly warned its creditors it would no longer be able to keep up with its debt payments unless the flow of loans resumed.

- AFP

## HONG KONG

# CNOOC beats out its competitors, turning profit as crude slumps

CNOOC, China's biggest offshore explorer, reported a 6.6 percent increase in full-year profit on March 27, beating the plunge in crude prices that has hit explorers across the world.

Net income rose to 60.2 billion yuan (US\$9.7 billion), or 1.35 yuan a share, from 56.5 billion yuan, or 1.26 yuan, a year earlier, according to a statement to the Hong Kong stock exchange. The mean profit of 24 analyst estimates compiled by Bloomberg was 52.3 billion yuan. Sales dropped 4pc to 275 billion yuan.

Brent, a benchmark for half of the world's crude trading, dropped 48 percent last year, forcing explorers worldwide to pare investment and fire workers. Beijing-based CNOOC beat the downturn by raising oil and gas output and lowering its cost to produce a barrel of oil for the first time since 2010.

"While production volumes were strong, renewed laser-like focus on cost control enabled CNOOC deliver the beat," Neil Beveridge, a Hong Kong-based analyst at Sanford C Bernstein, said in an emailed note. "This should help restore faith in China's leading explorers moving forward."

PetroChina, the country's biggest explorer, reported a 17pc profit decline in 2014 profit on March 26, while China Petroleum & Chemical Corp. posted a 30pc slide on March 22.

CNOOC's per barrel cost dropped to \$42.30 in 2014 from \$45.02 per barrel a year earlier, and it lowered exploration, drilling and construction costs by 9 billion yuan, according to a presentation posted to the company's website.

The explorer's shares closed 0.6pc lower to HK\$10.50 (\$1.35) on March 27 before the earnings were announced. The stock has dropped 14 percent in the past year, compared with a 12pc gain in the city's benchmark Hang Seng Index.

The company's cost control "measures laid a solid foundation for the company to cope with the low oil price environment," chief executive Li Fanrong said in the statement.

The explorer's total oil and gas output was 432.5 million barrels in 2014, up from 411.7 million barrels a year earlier. CNOOC plans to increase production by as much as 15pc this year, while cutting capital expenditure by as much as 35pc to 70 billion yuan.

Its Canadian unit, Nexen Energy, said earlier this month that it is cutting 13pc of its workforce and getting out of the oil-trading business.

CNOOC is "actively looking" at overseas acquisition opportunities and considering using methods such as asset or share swaps to pay for them, chair Wang Yilin said in a briefing in Hong Kong on March 27.

- Bloomberg



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# World

WORLD EDITOR: Kayleigh Long

## PHNOM PENH

### Three sentenced for organ trafficking

A CAMBODIAN court sentenced three people to between 10 and 15 years' jail for organ trafficking on March 27, after they persuaded poor Cambodians to sell their kidneys to wealthy compatriots undergoing dialysis in Thailand.

The convictions were the first for organ trafficking in the impoverished Southeast Asian nation.

Yem Azisah, 29, received a 15-year jail sentence after Phnom Penh Municipal Court found her "guilty of trafficking people with the purpose of organ removal".

Her step-father Phalla, 49, who has been released on bail, and her 22-year-old brother-in-law Pheng Sabay, who remains at large, were sentenced to 10 years each as accomplices in kidney trafficking, the judge said.

The court also ordered the trio to pay US\$7000 to each of their victims.

Yem Azisah and Phalla were arrested in July when two people - both cousins - filed a police complaint saying they had been persuaded to sell their kidneys by the group for wealthy Cambodians on dialysis.

The removal procedure was done in a gleaming hospital in neighbouring Thailand.

AFP interviewed one of the gang's victims last summer - an 18-year-old man.

From a tumble-down shack on the outskirts of Phnom Penh he described resorting to selling his kidney for \$3000 in 2012 because of grinding poverty and mounting debts.

Trafficking is a widespread problem in impoverished Cambodia and police routinely investigate cases linked to the sex trade, forced marriage or slavery.

But this was the first case related to organs, a trade more common in places like India and Nepal.

The complicity of donors, whether compelled by poverty or coerced by unscrupulous brokers, makes it an under-reported crime which is difficult to expose.

In August media reports emerged about new alleged organ trafficking cases at a military hospital in Phnom Penh.

But police and court officials, who investigated the case, said it was a training exercise between Chinese and Cambodian doctors, using voluntary Vietnamese donors and patients.

Driving the demand for a black market in organs is the globally soaring number of sick patients waiting for transplants, especially kidneys.

- AFP

## PHNOM PENH

### Malnutrition, stunting remain stagnant

Over 40 percent of Cambodian children under five years old suffer from stunted development due to poor nutrition, a rate that has not changed since 2010, according to data revealed on March 27 by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

While Cambodia has put substantial work into poverty reduction efforts, malnutrition remains a serious issue, especially among children in Preah Vihear and Oddar Meanchey provinces, FAO representative Nina Brandstrup said on March 27.

"In 2014, we observed that the rate of stunted height declined, but the rate of underweight children had increased in Oddar Meanchey province and ... in Preah Vihear province. The situation has become worse," she said.

The FAO, together with Germany's Justus-Liebig University Giessen and the Agriculture Ministry, unveiled the data yesterday at a seminar focused on how best to combat malnutrition by improving food security, adequate

food supply and education.

The root of malnutrition goes beyond the simple volume of food consumed, Ly Kongry, a nutrition expert for the Malis Project, said.

"The majority of mothers do not feed their babies and children a variety of nutritious foods - they just feed them gruel, which lacks the nutrition [needed] for children's physical growth and health," she explained, while adding "The amount of food is also not enough."

Diets that contain sufficient caloric intake but are devoid of adequate vitamins and minerals - the cause of a phenomenon known as "hidden hunger" - can severely impede mental development in addition to causing telltale physical markers like stunting, according to Gates Foundation research.

EU representative Fiona Ramsey also emphasised the importance proper nutrition during the first two-and-a-half years (or 1000 days) of childhood.

"If they do not get nutritious foods

during that period, they will face difficulties in [their ability to learn] and study," she said, a situation that will ultimately "weaken the national economy".

A 2014 report from the Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition states that malnutrition costs Cambodia more than US\$400 million annually and contributes to the deaths of 6000 children each year.

Ty Sokun, secretary of state for the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, yesterday added that it is common for people to only eat what they produce and urged a collaboration with agricultural partners - NGOs and the Ministries of Health and Education - to teach villagers more advanced farming techniques.

"We know we need to [improve] agricultural productivity, [and] will do whatever to guarantee that the Cambodian people have food security and enough nutritious food."

- Phnom Penh Post

## MANILA

### Aquino warns on consequences of not ceding autonomy to Muslim minority

PHILIPPINE President Benigno Aquino has called on lawmakers to pass a bill endorsing a pact aimed at ending a decades-long Muslim separatist rebellion, warning on March 27 that they would otherwise start counting "body bags".

Mr Aquino had wanted the bill, which would give autonomy to the majority Catholic nation's Muslim minority in the south, passed this month.

But Congress suspended debates on the proposed law in the face of public outrage over the killings of 44 police commandoes by Muslim guerrillas in a botched anti-terror raid in January.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which signed a peace deal a year ago, had said its members fired in self defence at the commandoes, who passed through a rebel camp while going after Islamic militants.

"This is the crossroads we face: We take pains to forge peace today, or we count body bags tomorrow," Mr

Aquino said in a nationwide television address.

"Perhaps it is easy for you to push for all-out war," he said, hitting out at critics who have condemned the peace deal with the MILF.

"But if the conflict grows, the number of Filipinos shooting at other Filipinos will grow, and it would not be out of the question that a friend or loved one be one of the people who will end up inside a body bag."

The rebellion for a separate state or self-rule has claimed nearly 120,000 lives and cost billions of dollars in economic losses, according to government estimates.

Under a peace deal signed with the MILF, the 10,000-member group pledged to disarm while the Philippine government vowed to pass an autonomy law in Muslim areas of the south.

"The Bangsamoro basic law is one of the most important proposed bills

of our administration. It answers the two most pressing problems of our countrymen: poverty and violence," Mr Aquino said on March 27.

He warned it would be difficult to restart peace talks if the current process failed and the MILF leadership lost its influence among its members to more radical elements.

Mr Aquino is required by the constitution to stand down in mid-2016 after serving a single six-year term.

The January police raid sought to capture or kill two men on the US government's list of "most wanted terrorists" who were living among Muslim rebels in southern Philippine farming communities.

One of the men, Malaysian national Zulkifli bin Hir, who had a US\$5 million bounty on his head, was reported killed.

But the other, Filipino Abdul Basit Usman, escaped as rebels surrounded and killed the police commandoes.

- AFP



Singaporeans prepare a memorial to former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew yesterday.

## SINGAPORE

### Singaporeans droves to pay

THOUSANDS of people braved heavy rains yesterday to line major streets in Singapore for a final farewell to founding leader Lee Kuan Yew, who will receive a rare 21-gun salute before a state funeral attended by world dignitaries.

Officials said more than 450,000 people had paid their last respects to the 91-year-old, who served as prime minister for 31 years, before his public wake ended in parliament on Saturday night.

"It has been a deeply moving experience," his son, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, said in a Facebook post thanking the public for honouring the former leader, who died on March 23 after seven weeks in hospital.

Families turned up early to catch choice spots along the 15-kilometre (10-mile) procession route from parliament to the National University of Singapore, where the state funeral started at 2pm.

"We are here today as a family to witness this historic moment. As Singaporeans we may have our differences, but when it comes to a crunch we stand together. That is what Singapore is about and that is Mr Lee's legacy," said teacher Joel Lim, 35.

Mr Lee became Singapore's first prime minister in 1959, when the island gained self-rule from colonial ruler Britain. Singapore became a republic in 1965 after a brief and stormy union with Malaysia.

Mr Lee stepped down in 1990 in favour of his deputy Goh Chok Tong, who in turn was succeeded by Mr Lee's son.

Shortly after midday, Mr Lee's dark brown wooden casket,

**'As Singaporeans we may have our differences, but when it comes to a crunch we stand together. That is what Singapore is about and that is Mr Lee's legacy.'**

Joel Lim  
Teacher

## UN pulls staff from Yemen as strikes intensify

WORLD 21



as thousands turned out for his funeral. Photo: AFP

# turn out in respects to Lee

draped in the red-and-white Singapore flag, will leave parliament in a glass case atop a gun carriage pulled by an open-topped ceremonial Land Rover.

It will pass by landmarks associated with the British-trained lawyer's 60-year political career.

Howitzers will give Mr Lee a 21-gun salute normally reserved for sitting heads of state, even though he was just an MP when he died.

Four F-16 fighter jets from the Air Force's aerial display team, the Black Knights, will do a formation known as "The Missing Man", with one of the planes peeling away to signify Mr Lee's passing.

During the state funeral, sirens will sound for the nation to observe a minute of silence for their former leader.

Former US president Bill Clinton will lead the American delegation that also includes former secretary of state Henry Kissinger, a close friend of Mr Lee.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, South Korean President Park Geun-Hye, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Malaysian King Sultan Abdul Halim

Mu'adzam Shah and Brunei's Sultan Hassanah Bolkiah are among the leaders attending the funeral.

Singapore's former colonial ruler Britain will be represented by Leader of the House of Commons William Hague, who earlier served as foreign secretary.

Mr Lee is revered by Singaporeans for his economic and social legacy but criticised by rights groups for sidelining political opponents, muzzling the press and clamping down on civil liberties.

Singapore has one of the highest GDP per capita incomes in the world at US\$56,284 in 2014, up from a mere \$516 when it gained independence.

Ninety percent of Singaporeans own their homes, thanks to a public housing scheme launched by Mr Lee, and the country enjoys one of the lowest crime rates in the world.

Its highly paid civil service is consistently ranked among the world's most honest.

But development has created fresh problems, topped by a rapidly ageing population, making Singapore dependent on foreigners who now make up nearly 40 pc of its 5.5 million population. - AFP



## Revelations emerge about co-pilot in Germanwings crash

WORLD 23

BANGKOK

## Concerns over Prayut's 'dictator law'

A PLAN to replace martial law with sweeping new powers for Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has prompted fears it will promote human rights abuses.

Critics of the plan are concerned that Gen Prayut will use a new order issued under Section 44 of the interim charter to give himself absolute power over executive, legislative and judicial decisions.

Yodpol Thepsitthar, a law lecturer at Naresuan University, described section 44 as a "dictatorial law" and said it would be no better than leaving martial law in place.

Section 44 is modelled on section 17 of the 1959 constitution, brought in by the regime of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. Mr Yodpol said the regime used its power to execute about 10 people tied to drug cases.

He said while martial law granted military authorities power over civil authorities in security operations, section 44 would grant absolute power to the junta chief.

Gen Prayut would have the power to order the arrest, imprisonment or execution of any individual without any criminal investigation process, Mr Yodpol said.

He said the prime minister had exercised his executive powers under section 44 once before, but only to issue an order allowing executives and members of local bodies to continue working.

"That was a use of administrative power which doesn't cause any problem. But we don't know how far he

will go," Mr Yodpol said.

Gen Prayut suggested on March 27 that martial law, which has been in effect since May 20 last year, would be lifted and replaced by a new order issued under section 44, although did not specify when this would occur.

Justice Minister Paiboon Koomchaya said the prime minister would be the one to issue the orders under section 44, and he did not know what they would contain.

Gen Prayut's remarks followed growing calls both here and abroad to lift martial law, which grants military authorities full power of search and seizure, among other powers, and protects them from legal action.

Chiang Mai University law associate professor Somchai Preechasilapakul said section 44 essentially provided absolute power to the prime minister.

He said Gen Prayut would be able to overrule judicial and legislative authority by penalising anyone without having to seek court endorsement.

Ramkhamhaeng University law associate professor Sukhum Nualsakul said the new powers could allow for any individual to be detained at any time and for any duration. Mr Sukhum believed the government was bowing to pressure to revoke martial law purely for the sake of tourism and investment.

Pairoj Polpetch, a member of the Law Reform Committee, called on the prime minister not to invoke section 44, saying it would do more harm than good. "The rights of the people

can easily be violated if section 44 is enforced," Mr Pairoj said.

Pheu Thai Party member Phongthep Thepkanchana said invoking the section was against the rule of law and would pose a greater threat to human rights than martial law.

He said the government would only be able to "fool" the international community for a short while after martial law is lifted.

Mr Phongthep said that Gen Prayut had so far refrained from using his powers the section in a way that threatens human rights and civil liberties.

"I don't know how or to what extent section 44 will be enforced. We'll have to wait and see. But there will be repercussions," he said.

United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship chair Jatuporn Prompan said the powers under section 44 were not bound by any fixed legal or constitutional rules, and so there was no guarantee of how the junta chief will exercise them.

"We know what martial law is and what it contains. But for section 44, it depends solely on the judgement and emotions of the person who wields the power," he said.

Thaworn Senneam, a leading member of the People's Democratic Reform Committee, which led the street protests before last year's coup, said he supported the enforcement of section 44. But he called on Gen Prayut to control his temper and use the power carefully.

- Bangkok Post

KUALA LUMPUR

## Protestors call for Anwar's release

MALAYSIAN police arrested three leading opposition politicians in a bid to thwart a protest march on March 28 demanding the release of jailed opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, his party said.

The protest went ahead anyway, however, with several hundred people taking to the streets of the capital Kuala Lumpur to denounce the government of Prime Minister Najib Razak.

The arrests are the latest in an growing tally of sedition charges levelled at government opponents amid anger over Mr Anwar's jailing last month on a sodomy charge.

"This is an abuse of the sedition law, and an abuse of everything. The government is acting maliciously," said Tian Chua, a member of parliament and vice president of Mr Anwar's People's Justice Party, shortly before he was arrested on March 28.

Police had banned the rally and said participants faced arrest.

Demonstrators staged a short march through the city towards its convention centre, where participants had vowed to disrupt wedding celebrations for Mr Najib's daughter.

Scores of police blocked them from the area, and they later dispersed. There were no arrests or violent incidents reported.

Washington has been among the international critics of Mr Anwar's conviction and the crackdown on dissent, saying both raised rule-of-law concerns.

Mr Anwar denies the charge that he sodomised a former male aide in 2008, saying it was fabricated by Malaysia's long-ruling government to halt a run of

opposition electoral gains.

Mr Najib promised in 2011 to end the authoritarian tactics of his ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO).

But after that failed to win back ebbing voter support in 2013 polls, his government has launched a tightening clampdown in which dozens of opponents were hauled up on sedition or other charges over the past year.

Mr Anwar's daughter Nurul Izzah, a member of parliament and one of those charged recently with sedition, warned on March 27 that Malaysia was sliding toward becoming a "police state".

Mr Najib last week defended his policies, saying dissent cannot be allowed to jeopardise stability.

But Amnesty International on

March 23 noted "troubling signs of an escalating crackdown" on civil liberties.

"The space for dissent and debate in Malaysia is rapidly shrinking, under the guise of punishing 'sedition' or maintaining public order," it said in a statement.

Besides Tian Chua, police on March 28 also arrested Mohamad Sabu, deputy president of the opposition Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS).

Rafizi Ramli, a vice president of Anwar's party, was arrested on March 27.

A police official confirmed Mr Rafizi's arrest but declined comment on the others.

It was not clear what the men, who were still in custody later on March 28, would be charged with. - AFP



Supporters of Malaysia's opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim carry placards during a protest demanding his release in Kuala Lumpur on March 28. Photo: AFP

ABUJA

# Glitches cause delay as Nigeria votes

NIGERIANS hit by failures in new election technology returned to the polls yesterday, to allow them to cast their ballots in the country's close-run presidential election.

President Goodluck Jonathan - who was running against former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari - and at least three governors from his ruling party were among those whose biometric details could not be checked by the devices, which are designed to combat electoral fraud.

Instead, they had to be processed by hand. Mr Jonathan's Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) called it a "huge national embarrassment" and a "vindication" of their position against the technology.

"There should have been a test-run for a smaller election before deploying it for an election of this magnitude," said Mr Jonathan's presidential campaign spokesperson Femi Fani-Kayode.

Mr Buhari, Mr Jonathan's main opponent whose All Progressives Congress (APC) party had backed the voter identity card readers, however, suggested the row was overblown.

"All this, I think, negative thought about Nigeria election shouldn't hold because of [a] problem in even a maximum of five states," he said.

A 24-hour extension to the election was "in order", he added after voting in his home state of Katsina, in the Muslim-majority north.

The confusion over the malfunctioning technology added to problems in voting in Africa's most populous nation which included election

**'There should have been a test-run for a smaller election before deploying [this technology] for an election of this magnitude.'**

**Femi Fani-Kayode**

Goodluck Jonathan spokesperson



A man listens to a radio sets to monitor proceedings during Nigerian presidential elections in Daura, Katsina State, on March 28. Photo: AFP

officials arriving late - or sometimes not at all.

Boko Haram, which has dominated the campaign trail, also loomed large, apparently holding good to their pledge to disrupt what it sees as the "un-Islamic" elections by launching a series of attacks.

On March 27, 23 people were beheaded and homes set on fire in Buratai, some 200 kilometres (125 miles) from the Borno state capital, although it was not clear if it was poll-related.

On March 28, at least seven people were killed in a string of shootings that witnesses blamed on the Islamists in the northeastern state of Gombe. Three of the attacks were at polling stations.

An election official in the Nafada district, who asked not to be identified, said the gunmen were heard

shouting; "Didn't we warn you about staying away from the election?"

The Islamists have repeatedly targeted Nafada but the APC on March 28 blamed its political opponents.

Yesterday there was tight security in place for the vote, given Nigeria's past history of poll-related violence that in 2011 saw some 1000 people killed after the result was announced.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had said the overall result would be announced within 48 hours of polls closing.

But the enforced delay, which will see those affected by the technical glitches accredited by hand, seems likely to stretch an already loose deadline.

INEC chair Attahiru Jega told NTA state television in an interview on March 28 night that what happened to Mr Jonathan was "regrettable and

a national embarrassment".

But he added that "in general, we believe that in spite of the challenges things have gone very well" and that turn-out was "quite large".

The body's spokesperson Kayode Idowu said voting would take place on yesterday in "just about 300 polling units out of about 150,000" across the country.

"These include about 109 places where cards were not read. Barely 100 places with biometrics issue and others had issues with batteries," he told reporters in the capital, Abuja.

"There are some states without any such incident at all."

The problems come with close interest in Nigeria's presidential election, which is the mostly keenly fought in the country's history.

Retired army general Mr Buhari, who headed a military government in

the 1980s, has repeatedly attacked Mr Jonathan's record on tackling Boko Haram, rampant government corruption and the economy.

Mr Jonathan has portrayed the 72-year-old Mr Buhari as yesterday's man, warning that his reputation as a bulwark against graft and "indiscipline" is a cover for dictatorship.

Both men have been seen as neck-in-neck in rare pre-election polling with the real possibility that the PDP could be defeated for the first time since the return to civilian rule in 1999.

Observers have, however, seen the six-week delay in voting from February 14 on security grounds as a ploy for Mr Jonathan to claw back lost ground using the greater power of incumbency.

Voting is also taking place for the country's parliament. - AFP

TUNIS

## Protesters denounce museum massacre

THOUSANDS of Tunisians, led by their president and joined by several dignitaries, marched in the capital yesterday to denounce terrorism after the museum massacre of 22 tourists.

On March 18, two gunmen targeted the National Bardo Museum in an attack claimed by the Islamic State group, dealing a severe blow to a country that was the cradle of the Arab Spring and is highly dependent on tourism.

A Tunisian police officer was also gunned down. On March 28 the death toll rose to 22 after a Frenchwoman succumbed to injuries sustained in the attack.

The march was set to begin in Tunis at 10am, going from Bab Saadoun Square to the museum where a stone tablet will be dedicated to the memory of the victims.

The attack was "a big blow, but this blow did not kill us, it made us stronger", Tourism Minister Salma Elloumi Rekik said on television on March 28.

President Beji Caid Essebsi will host the foreign dignitaries including his counterparts from France, Francois Hollande, and Poland, Bronislaw Komorowski, as well as the Palestinians'

Mahmud Abbas.

Mr Essebsi called earlier in the week for a huge turnout for the march to the museum, which is due to reopen to the public today.

The Bardo's doors were open on March 27 to schoolchildren and students only, and an AFP journalist said bullet holes could still be seen on some of the walls inside.

"I was a little [scared] but now that we are here I can see that things are safe," Lena Bottlender, a 17-year-old German student, told AFP.

Ms Soumeiya, a young Tunisian who visited on March 27, said she was "scared when she watched [the attacks on] the television".

"We are here to show people that there is nothing to be afraid of," she added.

Tunisia has seen an upsurge in Islamist extremism since overthrowing longtime strongman Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011, but has taken pride in forming a democratic government since the Arab Spring - in marked contrast to countries such as Libya, Syria and Yemen.

- AFP

CONAKRY

## Guinean president declares 45-day Ebola 'emergency' in five regions

GUINEAN President Alpha Conde has declared a 45-day "health emergency" in five regions of the Ebola-hit nation in a bid to stem the spread of the deadly disease.

The focus of the virus "has shifted to our country's coastal areas", the president said in a statement published in national media.

"That is why I am declaring a reinforced health emergency for a period of 45 days in the prefectures of Forecariah, Coyah, Dubreka, Boffa and Kindia," he said.

The regions affected are in the west and southwest of the country.

In the capital Conakry, "strict measures will be taken to increase vigilance in communities," the president added.

Since the Ebola outbreak began in Guinea in December 2013, more than 24,000 people in nine countries have been infected with the virus, and over 10,000 of them have died.

All but a handful of those deaths have occurred in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea.

Mr Conde announced a series of

measures on March 28, including the temporary closure of hospitals and clinics where there have been cases of Ebola.

"Anyone who hides the sick or moves bodies from one locality to another will be prosecuted according to the law for endangering the lives of others," Mr Conde warned.

He called for a continued "unwavering commitment" to the fight against Ebola.

The World Health Organization declared in January that the epidemic was finally declining in west Africa after the three countries at the epicentre recorded a steady drop in cases.

But renewed concern has been triggered by fresh setbacks in the worst-hit nations.

Liberia on March 28 announced the death of a woman who last week became the country's first new Ebola patient in more than a month. Health officials also said two new suspected cases had been identified.

Liberia has recorded more than 4300 Ebola deaths but was at an

advanced stage of recovery, expecting to be declared Ebola-free by mid-April before the latest case in the capital Monrovia.

And Sierra Leone on March 27 began a new three-day nationwide lockdown sparked by fears that the virus was making a comeback in certain parts of the country.

The country's 6 million people, with the exception of health workers, were to remain indoors from am Friday to 6pm yesterday on orders from President Ernest Bai Koroma.

The lockdown was called over fears the disease that has killed about 3700 out of 11,800 people infected in Sierra Leone was making a comeback in certain parts of the country.

As the lockdown carried on through the weekend, nearly 26,000 volunteers went door-to-door in a national search for hidden corpses and sick people, with particular focus on hotspots in the capital, as well as areas in the north and west of the country.

- AFP

SANAA

# UN staff flee Yemen, Russia issues warning

THE United Nations has evacuated staff from war-torn Yemen as Russia warned Saudi-led air strikes on Iranian-backed rebels were affecting crucial nuclear talks between world powers and Tehran.

Yemen's President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi urged his Arab allies to keep up the bombing raids in his country until the Huthi Shiite rebels surrender, branding them Iran's "puppet".

The impoverished and deeply tribal Arabian Peninsula state, on the front line of the US battle against al-Qaeda, is the scene of the latest emerging proxy struggle between Middle East powers.

A Sunni Arab coalition, led by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies, is battling to avoid having a pro-Iran regime on its doorstep, as the Huthi rebels tighten the noose around Mr Hadi's southern stronghold of Aden.

"I call for this operation to continue until this gang surrenders and withdraws from all locations it has occupied in every province," Mr Hadi told an Arab League summit in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

"I say to Iran's puppet and whoever is with him, you are the one who destroyed Yemen with your political immaturity," Mr Hadi said.

He later flew to Saudi Arabia with King Salman and does not plan to return to Yemen until "the situation settles", Foreign Minister Riyad Yassin said. Late last week, anti-Huthi popular committee fighters were reported to have taken full control of Aden airport with the loss of five men, and nine killed on the rebel side.

Russia's chief negotiator in the Iranian nuclear talks said Moscow hoped that the Yemen fighting would not jeopardise the negotiations between Tehran and world powers under way in Switzerland.



A Yemeni man receives treatment on burns sustained following an explosion that hit an arms depot in Yemen's second city of Aden on March 28. Photo: AFP

"Unfortunately, we are seeing that the tragedy that is happening in this country [Yemen] is having an impact on the atmosphere of the negotiations," Moscow's deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted as saying by RIA Novosti news agency.

"We hope that the situation in Yemen will not bring about a change in the position of certain participants." As night fell on March 28, coalition air strikes resumed for a fourth night, residents of the capital said.

More than 200 staff from the UN, foreign embassies and other organisations were evacuated by air earlier in the day, aid workers said. Pakistan said it was preparing to evacuate its

citizens and diplomatic staff.

According to Saudi Arabia, more than 10 countries have joined the coalition defending Mr Hadi.

The Western-backed leader had gone into hiding earlier in the week as rebels bore down on Aden and a warplane attacked the presidential palace there.

Mr Hadi surfaced in Riyadh late last week before heading to the Egypt summit.

At least 61 people have been killed and around 200 wounded in three days of fighting between Shiite rebels and anti-Huthi militia in Aden, the city's health department director Al-Kheder Lassouar said.

Fourteen charred bodies were also pulled from an arms depot in a cave near the port city after a series of massive blasts, he said.

The cause was not immediately clear, but residents had been looting the arsenal of Soviet-era weapons, apparently to defend themselves as the city slides into chaos.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi told fellow leaders the region faced "unprecedented" threats.

And Saudi King Salman vowed that the air strikes would continue until they bring "security" to the Yemeni people.

But UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged Arab leaders to "lay down

clear guidelines to peacefully resolve the crisis in Yemen".

Saudi warships evacuated dozens of foreign diplomats from Aden hours before the kingdom launched the air strikes on the advancing rebels, state television said on March 28.

Riyadh has vowed to do "whatever it takes" to prevent Mr Hadi's overthrow.

But experts say the Saudis will be reluctant to send in ground troops for fear of getting bogged down in a protracted conflict.

The Huthis are backed by army units loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who stepped down in 2012 after a year-long popular uprising and is accused of supporting the rebels.

In a televised speech on March 28, Saleh urged the Arab League to help end the crisis "peacefully", saying the "problem will not be solved with strikes".

Gulf diplomats said the bombing could last up to six months, and accused Iran of providing "logistical and military support" to the rebels.

"According to estimates, there are 5000 Iranians, [members of the pro-Tehran Lebanese movement] Hezbollah and Iraqi militia on the ground in Yemen," said one Gulf official, who did not want to be named.

It was not possible to independently verify the claim.

The Gulf officials said Riyadh and its allies had decided to intervene after satellite imagery in late January showed the movement of Scud missiles north toward the Saudi border, with the capacity to strike a large part of the Kingdom's territory.

A coalition spokesman told reporters Saturday that "most" of the Huthis' missile capabilities were believed to have been destroyed in the air strikes. - AFP

WASHINGTON

## Strained relations: US and Israel

THE White House has made clear its relationship with Israel has been fundamentally altered, with US President Barack Obama's sustained criticism of re-elected President Benjamin Netanyahu's election rhetoric has led to allegations of a vendetta and even a touch of presidential petulance.

Mr Obama has rebuffed Mr Netanyahu's efforts to row back his election-time opposition to a Palestinian state.

An outright apology for anti-Arab comments was barely acknowledged.

"It's been a continuously running soap opera between Netanyahu and Obama," said Aaron David Miller, a former advisor to Republican and Democratic secretaries of state.

The Obama administration has hinted it would consider a UN resolution - long opposed by Israel - that would lay out the contours of a peace agreement and the creation of Palestinian state.

But, at least publicly, the White House is stopping short of outright support.

"We have not yet actually seen the text of a resolution, so I'd reserve comment on a hypothetical resolution at this point," said White House spokesperson Josh Earnest.

The inflection point may be the creation of Mr Netanyahu's government.

Negotiations to form that government are already advanced. It seems likely to include hardline right-wing and ultra-Orthodox parties.

Perhaps more important will be the document that binds Netanyahu's multi-party coalition.

If Mr Netanyahu's pre-election

anti-Palestinian rhetoric is codified, concrete action is sure to follow.

"The coalition agreement, which they actually have to vote on at the Knesset, will either have to say 'we support a two-state solution' or it won't," said Jeremy Ben-Ami, founder of J Street, a left-leaning lobby group based in Washington.

"It is a very, very clear signal if that coalition agreement, if they can't even get the words out of their mouth."

The White House has made it clear that security ties will not be affected, but from there everything else seems to be in play.

Settlement building could be met with measures to halt the flow of financing to those individuals and organisations involved.

"Are they trying to force the Netanyahu government into more compliant positions on the peace process? Are they trying to change the nature of the relationship? Are they trying to pacify the Palestinians so that there won't be an explosion on the West Bank?" asked Mr Miller.

On the diplomatic circuit, there is speculation that Mr Obama may also, in part, want to warn Mr Netanyahu off further opposition to a seemingly imminent nuclear deal with Iran.

After all, the latest tensions between the two leaders came before the Israeli elections, when Mr Netanyahu secretly arranged to address a joint meeting of the Republican-controlled US Congress where he openly tried to scupper the agreement.

"I think that's a real possibility that the administration is seriously contemplating. This will not make the

Israelis happy," said Edward Djerejian, a former US ambassador to Israel.

"The parameters a final settlement would be outlined and approved by the international community. Putting [it] on the record that the two-state solution is the one way to go."

A similar resolution was defeated in December, largely thanks to the US desire to avoid seeing Israel isolated.

It went as far as setting a deadline for Israeli forces to withdraw from Palestinian territories.

While few agree that a dictated peace would work, it may help keep frustrated Palestinians from acting unilaterally.

"I think that the White House concretely wants to see that the government of the state of Israel stop undermining the chances of a state for the Palestinian people and for peace in the region," said Mr Ben-Ami.

"Because if they don't this will ultimately blow up and this country - which has very deep interests in the Middle East - will be drawn into a very very awful conflict."

Even before the creation of his government, Mr Netanyahu has started making overtures beyond the rhetorical.

A settlement plan in East Jerusalem will reportedly be frozen.

The Israeli government has also said it will release hundreds of millions in tax funds it has withheld from the Palestinian Authority.

The Obama administration has welcomed that latter move, but it will take much more to repair ties or even avoid a new flashpoint at the United Nations. - AFP

LAUSANNE

## Guarded optimism as Iran talks reach endgame

WORLD powers appeared to be narrowing in on a deal to stop Iran acquiring a nuclear bomb over the weekend, with marathon talks stretching into the evening as Iran's foreign minister voiced confidence the final hurdles can be overcome.

"We're moving forward," Mohammad Javad Zarif told reporters after meeting separately with his German and French counterparts who flew into Lausanne, Switzerland on March 28 to join the negotiations.

"I think we can in fact make the necessary progress to be able to resolve all the issues and start writing them down in a text that will become the final agreement once it's done," Mr Zarif said.

Iran and six world powers aim by tomorrow to agree the main contours of a deal reducing Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief and ending a more than decade-old standoff. A full agreement is due by June 30.

France's top diplomat Laurent Fabius, the most hawkish in the P5+1 group of countries negotiating with Iran, said he wanted a "robust deal" with close oversight to ensure no violations.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said the talks had entered their "endgame" but also warned this would also be the hardest stage.

Russia's chief negotiator, Sergei Ryabkov, was quoted by the RIA Novosti news agency as saying the chances of a deal were "more than 50-50".

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, who arrived in a rainy Lausanne late on March 28, said negotiators "have never been so close to a deal" but added there remained "critical points" to resolve.

The powers want Iran to shrink its nuclear program and impose unprecedented inspections in order to make any covert dash to a bomb all but impossible.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Chinese counterpart Wang Yi were reportedly due to join the talks yesterday. Britain's Philip Hammond was on stand-by.

"It was important that ministers began to arrive ... We expect the pace to intensify," a senior US official said.

"The brinkmanship in these negotiations will no doubt continue until the eleventh hour," said Ali Vaez, an expert at the International Crisis Group.

"Everything is linked. If all the technical issues are resolved and the questions tied to the sanctions are not, then there is no deal," said Iran's nuclear chief Ali Akbar Salehi.

Late week he went into a third meeting of the day with US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz working out the technical nuts and bolts of how a deal might work, Mr Salehi's deputy said.

The sequence of sanctions relief and Iran's development of faster machines called centrifuges to make nuclear fuel - but which can also produce the core of a bomb - are proving particularly thorny.

- AFP

TIKRIT

# Offensive needs 'major sacrifices': Iraq

RETAKE the city of Tikrit, where jihadists have rigged streets and buildings with explosives, will require "major sacrifices" on the part of Iraqi forces, a senior intelligence officer said on March 29.

Iraqi forces and allied paramilitaries have been fighting to retake the city since March 2, but halted ground operations for more than a week in what officials described as a bid to curb human and material losses before pushing forward again.

"The task of liberating Tikrit requires major sacrifices and street fighting, and our forces are ready for these sacrifices," the officer told AFP on condition of anonymity, indicating that the pause in operations only deferred the inevitable cost.

The Islamic State (IS) jihadist group has planted bombs in streets, rigged houses and other buildings with explosives, and built defensive works including berms and tunnels, also booby-trapped, the officer said.

IS spearheaded a sweeping offensive last June that overran much of Iraq's Sunni Arab heartland, and the operation to retake Tikrit is Baghdad's largest to date against the militants.

A US-led anti-IS coalition began carrying out air strikes in the Tikrit area on March 25, a move that increased available firepower in the air but has at least temporarily curbed it on the ground.

Key Iranian-backed militia forces that have done much of the heavy lifting in the drive to push IS back



A member of the Iraqi security forces watches clashes from over a blast wall in the city of Tikrit on March 28 during a military operation to retake the northern Iraqi city from Islamic State group jihadists. Photo: AFP

suspended offensive operations after the strikes began, commanders told AFP.

The Pentagon conditioned its intervention on an enhanced role for regular government forces and on

March 27 hailed the withdrawal of "those Shiite militias who are linked to, infiltrated by, [or] otherwise under the influence of Iran".

Iran had been the most prominent foreign partner in the

operation, but Baghdad eventually requested the US-led strikes after the drive stalled.

The battle has continued in the absence of the militia forces, with an army colonel saying there was heavy

fighting on the southern outskirts of the city.

The advance was slow due to bombs planted by IS but security forces have gained some ground, the colonel said. - AFP

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DUESSELDORF

# Helpless pilot shouted 'open the damn door!'

THE captain of a passenger jet that investigators believe was deliberately crashed into the French Alps, killing all 150 aboard, shouted at the co-pilot to "open the damn door" as he made desperate attempts to return to the locked cockpit, according to a German newspaper yesterday.

French officials say the plane's black box voice recorder indicates that Andreas Lubitz, 27, locked the captain out of the cockpit of the Germanwings jet and deliberately flew Flight 4U 9525 into a mountainside.

They believe that the more senior pilot tried desperately to reopen the door during the flight's eight-minute descent after he left to use the bathroom.

Germany's mass-circulation *Bild* reported yesterday that data from the cockpit recorder showed that the captain shouted; "For God's sake, open the door," as passengers' screams could be heard in the background, moments before the fatal crash.

The pilot could then be heard trying to smash the door down with an axe, and then screaming to a silent Mr Lubitz to "open the damn door".

*Bild* said that before leaving the cockpit the captain could be heard explaining to his colleague that he

had not had time to go to the toilet before they left Barcelona.

German prosecutors believe Mr Lubitz hid an illness from his airline but have not specified the ailment, and said he had apparently been written off sick on the day of the crash.

As investigators race to build up a picture of Mr Lubitz and any possible motives, media reports emerged saying he had suffered from vision problems, adding to earlier reports he was severely depressed.

Mr Lubitz's ex-girlfriend, identified only as Maria W, told *Bild* Mr Lubitz had told her, "One day I'm going to do something that will change the whole system, and everyone will know my name and remember."

"I never knew what he meant by that but now it makes sense," it quoted the "shocked" flight attendant as saying on March 28.

*Bild*, which showed a photo of the ex-girlfriend from behind to conceal her face, said she had flown with Mr Lubitz on European flights for five months last year and that he had had another girlfriend since her.

She said he could be "sweet" but got agitated talking about work conditions, such as pay or the pressure of the job, and was plagued by



This photo taken on March 26 and released by the French Interior Ministry on March 27 shows a Gendarme from the Air Transport Gendarmerie (left) working at the crash site of the Germanwings Airbus A320 near Le Vernet, French Alps. Photo: AFP

nightmares. "At night he woke up and screamed, 'We're going down!'" she recalled.

If Mr Lubitz did deliberately crash the plane, it was "because he understood that because of his health problems, his big dream of a job at Lufthansa, of a job as captain and as a long-haul pilot was practically impossible", she told *Bild*.

She split up with him because it became "increasingly clear that he had problems", she said.

German police found a number "of medicines for the treatment of psychological illness" during a search at his Duesseldorf home, newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* weekly said, quoting an unnamed high-ranking investigator as saying he'd been treated by several neurologists and psychiatrists.

The *Bild* weekly and the *New York Times*, which cited two officials with knowledge of the investigation, said Mr Lubitz had sought treatment for problems with his sight.

A former colleague told the newspaper Mr Lubitz handled the plane well and "therefore I also left him alone in the cockpit to go to the toilet".

French police investigator Jean-Pierre Michel told AFP that Mr Lubitz's personality was a "serious lead" in the inquiry but not the only one.

The investigation has so far not turned up a "particular element" in the co-pilot's life which could explain his alleged action in the ill-fated Airbus plane, he said.

German prosecutors revealed that searches of Mr Lubitz's homes netted "medical documents that suggest an

existing illness and appropriate medical treatment", including "torn-up and current sick leave notes, among them one covering the day of the crash".

Lufthansa CEO Carsten Spohr has said that Mr Lubitz had suspended his pilot training, which began in 2008, "for a certain period", before re-starting and qualifying for the Airbus A320 in 2013.

The second-in-command had passed all psychological tests required for training, he told reporters.

Germany is to hold a national memorial ceremony and service on April 17 for the victims of the disaster, half of whom were German, with Spain accounting for at least 50 and the remainder composed of more than a dozen other nationalities.

- AFP

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GET YOUR FINGERS ON IT

the pulse

## A burning



Farmers burn off fields near Mae Chaem in northern Thailand. The government has a strict no-burning policy which many hill tribes ignore. Photos: Bangkok Post

## CHAIYOT YONGCHAROENCHAI

Every day, Sai makes her way to a local fresh market in Chiang Mai's Omkoi district, where she runs a small stand selling vegetables. For much of the year, it's the 58-year-old's sole source of income, bringing in less than 300 baht (K1900) per day.

But once a year, as the annual haze of the dry season settles over the North, Sai's revenue receives a boost.

"I go into the forest around my village and collect red ant eggs," Sai said.

Finding the eggs, a northern culinary delicacy, is not easy, which helps explain their high price. On a good day, Sai can earn up to 1500 baht (K9500).

But her methods of collection can have unintended, and potentially devastating, consequences.

When Sai finds an ant nest, she places it on a threshing basket, which she shakes until the red ants flee and only the eggs remain.

"But sometimes it is too slow to shake and wait, so I throw some dry leaves into the basket and light them on fire to scare the ants away," she explained.

When she's done, she intentionally throws the burning leaves onto the ground and covers them with dried forest litter before walking away.

Sai said she is fully aware that a fire will follow, but she doesn't care.

After all, something even more valuable than ant eggs is lurking beneath the foliage on the forest floor.

"All I really want is *hed thob*," Sai told Spectrum, using the northern term for *hed pho*, a small, bulbous black mushroom which grows only during the dry season.

Locating the prized fungus is a difficult but highly lucrative endeavour - some villages can earn as much as 1 million baht (K31,740,000) from a single season.

The mushrooms grow on the forest floor and are difficult to spot beneath the thick layer of dried leaves which blanket it. The easiest way to find them is to simply set fire to the undergrowth, then search the cleared ground.

"What else can we do? The easiest way to make money quickly

is to burn the unwanted foliage to get what I want," Sai said.

While harvesting the mushrooms only requires burning a small patch of land, Sai admitted the fires can easily grow out of control, contributing to the perennial haze problem which afflicts residents of the North.

If that happens, Sai said she and other mushroom foragers would not report the blaze to the local fire department, as doing so would lead to their arrest.

Usually, she just runs away, hoping the fire will die out naturally. Sometimes, it doesn't.

Besides the million-baht mushroom, many villagers like Sai believe that fire can help stimulate the growth of certain types of vegetables, such as *pak wan* or star gooseberry, bamboo shoots and other mushroom varieties.

"It's only once a year that these types of plants grow, and it's the only time of the year that I can actually make money," Sai said.

The haze crisis that grips large swathes of the North during the dry season - commonly called the "burning season" by local farmers - is worsening each year, bringing with it a raft of health and economic problems.

The Fire Control Division, part of the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP), has long imposed a ban on all burning as it looks for ways to solve the problem. Rewards of 5000 baht (K158,000) are also offered to anyone who can provide information leading to an arrest.

According to statistics from the Fire Control Division, the three provinces that bear the brunt of the problems are Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son and Lampang.

The data also shows that the leading cause of forest fires in those provinces was locals hunting for mushrooms. In Chiang Mai it happened 754 times, in Mae Hong Son 84 times, and in Lampang 216 times.

But Decho Chaitup, the manager of the Chiang Mai-based Sustainable Development Foundation, said burning for mushrooms and other plants is only a tiny part of the bigger picture, and that the official data is flawed.

He said there are 2066 villages in Chiang Mai province, about

1600 of which are situated in forest areas. But he said burning for mushrooms contributed to less than 18 percent of the North's haze problem.

Mr Decho identified four primary causes of haze: forest fires, agricultural burn-off, pollution from cities and industrial estates, and similar problems happening in bordering countries like Laos and Myanmar.

"Quantity wise, forest fires are the number one cause of haze," Mr Decho said. "Among all 10 million rai [1.6 million hectares] of land in Chiang Mai, there are four million rai [640,000ha] of dry deciduous dipterocarp forest, which is prone to fire.

"The agricultural industry takes up only 20pc of that overall land."

Hunting is also a problem, as hunters often burn forest land to clear the way for the creation of open grass fields, which attract wildlife and allow animals to be trapped or killed more easily.

The Fire Control Division said 9,606 rai (1536ha) of forest land in Chiang Mai was burned in the first three months of this year. But according to research conducted by Mr Decho and an academic from Chiang Mai University, that figure is closer to 2 million rai (480,000ha).

"The official number recorded by Fire Control Department is based on the cases for which arrests are made. Then they use that record to determine the cause of haze, which is wrong," Mr Decho said.

Though forest fires occur naturally, many researchers believe they are being increasingly driven by human activity. Assistant professor Watcharapong Tachajapong, a lecturer and researcher from the Faculty of Engineering at Chiang Mai University, said many fires are started by the crop rotation methods local farmers employ.

"Many locals rotate their farm plots, which means they have to burn plots each year to get them ready for the next harvest," Mr Watcharapong said. "The small embers from those farmland fires can often fly out and fall into the forest."

With a zero burning policy, the forest floor collects up to 2 tonnes of dry leaves and other litter per rai per year - if a fire does break out, it will be almost impossible to contain.



# desire for wealth

As the seasonal smoke worsens, the forest fires caused by a lucrative mushroom trade and other foragers are only exaggerating the problem

"When a fire eventually does come through and burns all those leaves, the temperature might be high enough to kill all of the trees," Mr Watcharapong said.

He warned the effects of climate change would likely worsen the situation in coming years, saying he has noticed changing wind patterns in recent years.

While the law forbids anyone from burning forest land, for members of the Karen communities and other hill tribes which populate the mountains around Chiang Mai, belief is more important than legislation.

Jonni Lukusao, a 72-year-old Karen man who lives in Chiang Mai's Samoeng district, told *The Bangkok Post* that tradition teaches his people to bond with nature from the moment they are born.

"We Karen believe that the spirit comes from the seed of the tree. So when a child is born, the parents will have to cut part of the umbilical cord and tie it to a tree," he said. "No one can then harm that tree since it has a holy spirit and spiritual belief."

"We live with the forest, we eat food from the forest, when we die we return our bodies to the forest. How can anyone accuse us of burning the forest to find mushrooms and sell them for money?"

But Mr Jonni said that since government-backed logging companies invaded the forest and cut down the spiritual trees several decades ago, local beliefs began to slowly die out.

The villagers' reliance on the land has slowly waned, as members of the younger generation move to towns and cities for jobs, returning home only occasionally. Spiritual

*'We live with the forest, we eat food from the forest, when we die we return our bodies to the forest. How can anyone accuse us of burning the forest to find mushrooms and sell them for money?'*

## Jonni Lukusao

Karen man

belief has little value in their increasingly capitalist world, and Mr Jonni said younger people are now more willing to burn down forest land in a short-sighted pursuit of money. "Preu", a Hmong man from Nan province, is working hard to save money for the things he wants to buy.

"I want to have a motorcycle to ride around on, I want to buy a new mobile phone to keep in touch with friends, and I want to have a lot of money to do the things I want," he said.

Preu employs slash-and-burn methods of crop rotation, and also hunts for mushrooms and other plants in the forest. He said he is willing to remove anything from the forest that will earn him the cash he needs for consumer goods.

"I won't lie and say that I haven't burned the forest," he said. "I intended to burn only small areas just to find mushrooms. I would put 10 incense sticks on the ground and walk away."

"One time there was a big fire which took many days to die out."

"Da", a Hmong woman, also uses the fiery farming methods.

She said the technique saves a lot of time and money. For many, it is the only economically viable way of farming in the steep, mountainous terrain.

"Not only I can get rid of the leftover trees from that plot of land, I can also get free high quality fertiliser to use on my next crops," she said.

People who live in forest areas often protect the land as part of their home, and have been forced to manage fires long before government departments stepped in to take over.

But this connection has slowly been severed as ethnic groups have been forced from their traditional lands. Prayong Doklamyai, vice president of the Northern Development Foundation, explained that 100 years ago the government granted logging concessions to Thai and foreign companies in the North's mountainous areas.

"When local tribal people saw how the government allowed these companies to come to their village and cut down the trees they had tried to protect for generations, they felt as though they had been betrayed," Mr Prayong said.

When all the large trees were gone, the concessions stopped. But the locals lost faith and felt like the forests had been opened up for exploitation. Some no longer wanted to protect the forest.

Mr Prayong said burning can have benefits, so long as it is controlled.

"If we allow the local community to manage the problem by themselves legally, forest fires will no longer exist."

Chiang Mai University's Mr Watcharapong has been conducting research in Chomthong district of Chiang Mai, which covers Doi Inthanon and the Op Luang area, since 2009.

He explained that Thailand has adopted its fire management system from Western countries, imposing a blanket ban on all burning activities. But it has failed to implement Western strategies of effective backburning and fire containment.

Locals who abide by the no-burn law say that when a natural fire forest does occur after years of no burning, it arrives with far greater ferocity.

"They told me the fire was big and it was unstoppable. This type of fire can do more harm to the trees and the ecology," Mr Watcharapong said.

He said that when no burning activity occurs, dry leaves and other forest litter will pile up higher, providing an ideal environment for fires.

"Early burning works very well, because we burn the forest when there are less dry leaves. Then when the dry season does arrive, there will be less fuel for the fires to consume, so there is less smoke and less damage," Mr Watcharapong said.

"What is more difficult to manage is people's attitudes," he said. "If officials and people in the cities try to understand the nature of forest fires and locals' lifestyles, they will then realise that controlled burning is necessary."

— *Bangkok Post*



Fire in the Chiang Mai hills.



The much sought-after hed thob mushrooms.



Vendors selling wild mushrooms typically make less money the rest of the year.

# The internet causing ADHD?

CAITLIN DEWEY

**T**ELL me if this scenario sounds familiar to you. You get into work. You're feeling productive. You've powered through approximately three emails/order forms/whatever qualifies as progress in your particular industry when – BAM – your best friend signs onto Gchat and sends you a video of a dachshund puppy getting pushed around in a tiny shopping cart.

No big deal! – you think. You will return to emails in approximately five seconds, right after you check Facebook and answer that email your mom sent you about the date of your cousin's wedding. But on Facebook, someone has posted a really interesting article about J Crew, which reminds you (about two sentences in) that you wanted to check J Crew's site real quick to see if it was spring sale time yet, which – oh hey!! Push notification from Instagram!

It's no secret that the internet presents a bevy of distractions. Many of us have grudgingly accepted perpetual scatterbrain as a hallmark of modern life, as unavoidable as Facebook and the Kardashians. But in a lecture at SXSW last week, University of Chicago psychologist Michael Pietrus floated a provocative hypothesis: Maybe these aren't just internet-age annoyances but something approaching an actual pathology. Maybe the Internet is giving us all the symptoms of ADHD.

"We are not saying that internet technologies and social media are directly causing ADHD," Pietrus cautions. But the internet, he says, "can impair functioning in a variety of ways ... that can mimic and in some cases exacerbate underlying attention problems".

ADHD, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, is one of the great spectres of 21<sup>st</sup>-century psychology. For parents of children who have it – and more than one in 10 do, per the CDC – ADHD is a behavioural scourge, making their kids impatient, restless, impulsive and easily bored. For adults who have it – an estimated 4.4 percent – the disorder can make it difficult to concentrate on one thing for any period of time. Adults with ADHD, unlike kids, usually aren't "hyperactive" in the conventional sense. But they can be compulsive, easily distracted, easily bored. They lose interest halfway through reading an article or completing a task.

They're "hardwired for novelty seeking", Pietrus said – much like your average internet junkie, opening 150 tabs at a time and clutching his smartphone in jittery hands.



Researchers say internet use is impacting on our attention spans. Photo: Aung Khant

After all, when you think about it, the internet essentially promises two things: instant gratification and an endless, varied, hyper-stimulating buffet of entertainment and information options.

The internet, it turns out, incentivises the exact types of behaviours and thought processes that characterise ADHD.

the past 10 years: from 7.8pc of kids in 2003 to 11pc in 2011, the last year the CDC measured.

And while we tend to think of attention or discipline as a sort of constant, a matter of individual personality, Pietrus points out that the brain can change – and it can change in response to how we use technology.

"But which way the arrow of

ADHD is believed to have a range of underlying genetic causes, things you couldn't just "catch" from a computer screen. And as Pietrus himself points out, there isn't yet enough research to comment on causality.

There's even some research, in fact, that the internet could actually help people with attention disorders. Last June, a team of Swedish researchers trialled an online therapy program for adults with the disorder; adults in the program saw a sharp reduction in their symptoms, even though – or perhaps because? – the therapy was administered online.

Whatever the exact relationship between the internet and ADHD, Pietrus says it is important to realise that pushing back against these symptoms requires a careful, intentional strategy. There's a lot of research that suggests mindfulness and meditation could help people sustain their attention, even online; Pietrus also suggests techniques like expressive writing or "chunking", which helps short-term information stick in your mind.

"The biggest thing is to increase awareness and understanding of what social media and technology are doing to us," he said. "Once we acknowledge the potential effects on our brains, we can make better-informed choices about our actions and behavioural patterns." – *The Washington Post*

*"Once we acknowledge the potential effects on our brains, we can make better-informed choices about our actions and behavioural patterns."*

**Michael Pietrus**

University of Chicago psychologist

The question now is whether the symptoms of compulsive Internet use and the symptoms of ADHD share any deeper commonalities.

ADHD rates, much like internet use, are also inexplicably up over

causality flows is the important question," explained Peter Killen, a former behavioural neuroscience researcher at Arizona State University who has written extensively on ADHD.

MAKUHARI

## World's first 'Otaku' summit opens in Japan

HARUMI OZAWA

JAPAN opened what organisers are billing as the world's first *Otaku* summit on March 28, drawing visitors from around the world as the country looks to boost the international fan base for Japanese comic books and anime.

So-called *Otaku* – usually translated as "geeks" – from at least 18 countries and territories, many dressed as their favourite anime characters, were converging on the Otaku Expo at a convention centre near Tokyo for the two-day event.

The expo is part of a special comic book fair held every five years, which attracts about half a million visitors, but this year's event marks the first time that groups from outside Japan are invited. About four dozen overseas *Otaku* groups were expected to attend.

Briton Katie Carter, 23, was dressed as Usagi Tsukino, a character from the popular *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon*.

"This is amazing. There are so many people of different cultures are coming together," she said.

The culture of *Otaku* has grown into a major industry in Japan.

The term is commonly used in the country to refer to people obsessed with Japan's unique take on comics and animation.

While it once carried a negative connotation, many *Otaku* are now proudly displaying their love for two-dimensional heroes – while the number of foreign fans is also soaring.

"The number of foreign visitors has been increasing over recent years," said co-chief of the organiser, Comic Market Committee, Kahoru Yasuda. *Otaku* culture is spreading worldwide "like a big snowball picking up a pace", Carter said.

"In my country, Italy, currently it's a very big thing," said expo visitor Valentino Notari, 28, about the *Otaku* culture outside Japan.

"It used to be much smaller. We used to be sort of outcasts when we started back then about 10 years ago, and now it's becoming massive," said Notari.

"It's quite fun and nowadays everybody accepts it." – *AFP*

## What's on

Got an event?  
List it in What's On!  
[whatsonmt@gmail.com](mailto:whatsonmt@gmail.com)

### 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. 50<sup>th</sup> Street Bar, 50<sup>th</sup> Street (lower block) 8pm  
Burmese Boxing Class. Institut Francais de Birmanie. K5000. 6:30-8:30pm

"Future of Wearables" panel discussion. MobileMonday Yangon. Phandeeyar (Mac Tower Building, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor) 561 Merchant Road. 6:30-8:30pm

### TOMORROW

"Myanmar, Fragments of Reality"  
Meet Frédéric Debomy and Benoit Guillaume, authors of the work-in-

progress comic book "Myanmar, fragments of reality," to talk about their work. Institut Francais, 340 Pyay Road, Sanchaung 6pm

"Tuesday snippets." Gallery conversation and drinks. Pansodan Gallery, 289 Pansodan Street, Kyauktada, 7pm-late  
Wine tasting. Mojo Bar, 135 Inya Road, Bahan. K15,000. 7-9pm

## EDITOR'S NOTE

The Myanmar Times would like to apologise to readers of our *Weekend* magazine for a printing error in our March 27 issue.

Some special features were replaced with pages from the previous week's edition. To ensure you can enjoy the features as intended we will be printing them in full in our Friday April 3 edition.

WASHINGTON

# Citizen journalists empowered

**W**HEN three buildings collapsed and ignited a blaze in New York last week, a smartphone app brought the live video feed to anyone online wanting to watch.

The disaster took place, coincidentally, the same day as the launch of Twitter's new livestream app Periscope, which became a window for the breaking news event.

The event showed how Periscope and rival app Meerkat, which can deliver live video through Twitter to anyone online, could become an important tool for citizen journalism.

By feeding live video through Twitter to anyone online, these apps eliminate the need to upload to YouTube or transfer to broadcasters like CNN to get a wide audience.

While social media has empowered citizen journalism for years, the use of live video could become a powerful tool for these reporters and change the way people get news.

"It's not just that you can upload your video, but you can upload it to the social network, which is vastly more powerful than the Web because of that network of relationships and the virality," said Jeff Howe, a Northeastern University professor who specialises in media innovation.

"This offer a great advantage to citizen journalists."

Howe said some earlier



The use of live video could become a powerful tool to change the way people get news. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

streaming video applications like Bambuser helped spread information during the Arab Spring and Occupy protests, but that he sees "a more real-time, immediacy aspect" to the new apps like Meerkat and Periscope.

"When something newsworthy is happening where it is

unexpected, the odds that a professional journalist holding a camera or video camera are small. But the odds that a regular person will be there are close to 100 percent," said Dan Gillmor, Arizona State University journalism professor.

Although technology for live streaming has been available for years, the widespread use of smartphones, improved networks and the integration with Twitter could make these tools more potent, analysts say.

"There's nothing quite like live video to put people in the moment when it comes to breaking news," said Josh Stearns, who follows citizen journalism at the Geraldine R Dodge Foundation.

And Stearns said the apps offer a "more intimate connection" because "they allow people to interact, to ask questions, to get a different view. They aren't just passively watching." A key question is whether these new technologies will help the flow of information in countries with repressive regimes such as North Korea and Cuba.

Gillmor said he believes that activists who stream live video from one of these countries would be "dumb, given that mobile networks are either part of the government or intertwined with it."

But Howe said the technology will eventually bring more abuses to light, "because it's going to become harder to shut down the information flow". - AFP

# Artists depict the Yangon experience in new exhibition

**NANDAR AUNG**

nandaraung.mcm@gmail.com

THE joy and pain, pain mostly, of everyday life in Yangon is on show this week at the River Ayeyarwady gallery. The works, in acrylic and watercolour, depict a wide range of experiences of the city's public transport, its political and educational systems, the demonstrations that enliven its streets, the food vendors who work there, and the unfortunates forced to call those streets home.

The "We Live in Yangon" exhibition showcases eight artists - Aung Naing Soe, Min Thurein, Myo Swe Thein, Naw Naw, Sue Htet Aung, Yan Naing Tun, Yee Nan Theik and Zoncy.

Zoncy, the sole female of the group, displays five mocking paintings in ink and watercolour depicting people who

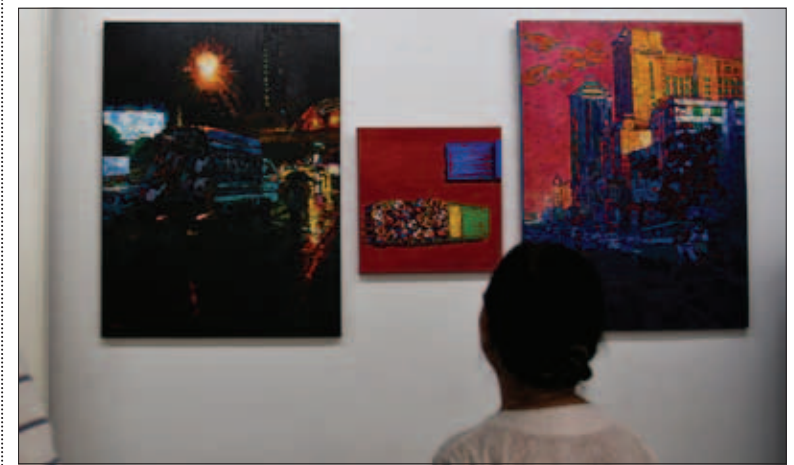
devour the heads of others.

The daily grind of commuting is the subject of four startling acrylic paintings by Yee Nan Theik, 31, a director turned painter who won a prize at the Human Rights Human Dignity International film festival in Yangon in 2013 with a feature-length documentary about the political prisoner San Zaw Htway.

"I drew these four paintings starting in 2009, before my first solo show in 2012," he said.

Min Thu Rein, 32, skewers the educational system, shows a demonstration, and offers paintings of street-dwelling people with mental illness in Yangon.

"We Live in Yangon" can be seen at River Ayeyarwady, 134 35<sup>th</sup> Street, Kyauktada township, from March 25 to 31.



Some of the work on display at the We Live in Yangon exhibition. Photo: Thiri Lu

## You can meet the founder of the Free Software Movement

Harvard graduate, veteran of MIT's Artificial Intelligence lab and president of the Free Software Foundation, **Dr Richard Stallman**, developer of the GNU/Linux free operating system, will speak to educators, students, computer professionals and anyone interested in protection from internet surveillance about the importance of software and internet freedom.



# FREE AS IN FREEDOM



6-8pm, Tuesday, April 2, Phandeeyar, the Myanmar Innovation Lab, 11<sup>th</sup> floor, MAC Tower, 561 Merchant Road, Yangon

Dr Richard Stallman is one of the world's foremost authorities on how people can protect themselves from surveillance on the internet. His arrival in Myanmar is aimed at helping people understand the meaning of FREE Software and how FREE Software can benefit Myanmar people's lives. The event is free of charge and those who would like to donate to covering the cost of Dr Stallman's visit may purchase FSF stickers and other items. A special fundraising dinner will also be offered the following night for those who want to meet Dr Stallman. Interested organisations and individuals may contact Stuart Alan Becker at *The Myanmar Times* at [stuart.becker@gmail.com](mailto:stuart.becker@gmail.com) or by telephone on 09-975027347





FORMULA ONE

# Vettel stuns Mercedes



Sebastian Vettel jumps for joy in front of the Mercedes pair of Lewis Hamilton (left) and Nico Rosberg. Photo: AFP

**S**EBASTIAN Vettel stunned Mercedes' world champion Lewis Hamilton yesterday with an audacious Malaysian Grand Prix victory which set the Formula One season alight.

The Ferrari man took advantage of an early safety car as he hit the front and held off Hamilton and Nico Rosberg after pitting only twice, compared to three for the Mercedes pair.

The four-time world champion now has 40 career wins but it is his first with Ferrari, and breaks a dry spell stretching back to 2013.

Few of his wins can have been as satisfying. He shattered assumptions of Mercedes' unassailable superiority in 2015, after they dominated the season-opener in Australia.

"Fantastic, fantastic!" he screamed down the radio in Italian.

"Yes boys, can you hear me? Thank you, thank you. Forza Ferrari!"

Further back, there were also celebrations for Max Verstappen as the 17-year-old finished seventh, becoming the youngest points-scorer in Formula One history.

Hamilton got away smoothly from pole and Vettel aggressively defended second from a charging Rosberg, helped by a nudge against the Mercedes as they battled round the first corner.

Kimi Raikkonen and Pastor Maldonado were quickly hit by punctures, and Sauber's Marcus Ericsson lasted just three laps before he spun off on Turn 1, prompting the safety car.

Vettel chose not to follow Hamilton into the pits during the intervention and had built up a healthy lead by the time the Briton weaved from sixth to second by lap 11.

When Vettel finally pitted after lap 17, he re-emerged behind the two Mercedes but he set the day's fastest lap so far and scorched past his fellow German at the end of lap 21.

Vettel was on Hamilton's tailpipe when the Briton made his second stop at the end of lap 25, dropping back behind the Ferrari driver and Rosberg.

Rosberg pitted to promote Hamilton to second, and the Briton floored it with a pair of fastest laps as he set about whittling away Vettel's big lead of more than 20 seconds.

Vettel and then Hamilton pitted on consecutive laps and the Briton complained, "This is the wrong tyre!" as he resumed on the hard compound.

"I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing!" he shouted, after hearing perplexing chatter on the radio which appeared to suggest a third stop. - AFP

FORMULA ONE

# Embattled Renault threatens to quit F1

ENGINE-MAKER Renault said it was considering quitting Formula One on March 27 after its previously successful partnership with Red Bull descending into mud-slinging.

Managing Director Cyril Abiteboul said it was weighing up several options, including buying a team and walking away, a move which could have severe repercussions.

Renault is one of only four engine suppliers in F1, and Red Bull warned it could also be forced out of the sport if the French manufacturer leaves.

"I can confirm that we're looking at a lot of options, including heading out of Formula One," Abiteboul told journalists at the Malaysian Grand Prix.

"Honestly, if Formula One is that bad for Renault's reputation, if we see that we struggle with the current formula, if Formula One is not delivering the value that it costs to Renault.

"Bearing in mind that when you are an engine supplier you have no financial incentive to develop and to fund engine development."

Red Bull also threatened to quit F1 after this month's disappointing season-opener in Australia, when Daniel Ricciardo placed sixth and Daniil Kvyat failed to start.

Frustrated Renault and Red Bull traded insults after the race, with Abiteboul reportedly calling the team's chief designer a liar over comments about the French engine.

Abiteboul tried to play down the row, claiming he was misquoted.

"What goes on tour stays on tour. It's not what I said. Let's leave that behind," he said.

Abiteboul and Horner pledged to work together, but they also traded some testy barbs as tension cracked between them at a regular F1 press conference.

"It's getting better - so Cyril keeps telling us," said Horner, in response to a question about the Red Bulls' straight-line speed.

And Abiteboul shot back, "I'm not sure that Christian will confirm that there's a lot of Red Bull in the engine that was in Melbourne."

The Frenchman added that there wasn't "a lot of enthusiasm from the corporate offices" at Renault after the Melbourne flop.

But he said Renault could also decide to invest further in F1, including buying a team, if it decides it wants to continue as a "credible player" in the sport.

Toro Rosso, which also has Renault engines, is openly courting an offer from the French company with team boss Franz Tost calling it a "fantastic opportunity".



Red Bull on track in Malaysia. Photo: AFP

Red Bull and Renault dominated F1 between 2010 and 2013, winning the drivers' and constructors' titles four years in a row, before Mercedes hit the front last season.

Abiteboul admitted Renault had been guilty of some complacency as Mercedes took the lead with F1's new, hybrid engines and left the competition standing.

Horner said, "As with any company Red Bull reviews its return on investment - is Formula One delivering for Red Bull as a brand?"

"And there are some worrying signs when we see races like we see in Melbourne. Hopefully that's one chapter in a long story, and there's a long season ahead of us." - AFP

## AFC U23 Championship Qualification

(also acts as the first round of 2016 Olympic qualification)

Pos	Team	Pld	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
1	Australia	2	2	0	0	10	0	+10	6
2	Myanmar	2	2	0	0	5	1	+4	6
3	Hong Kong	2	0	0	2	1	8	-7	0
4	Chinese Taipei	2	0	0	2	0	7	-7	0

<b>Australia</b>	<b>6 - 0</b>	<b>Hong Kong</b>
Amini 10', Pain 21' 79' Maclaren 76', 90+1', 90+5'		

<b>Myanmar</b>	<b>3 - 0</b>	<b>Chinese Taipei</b>
Hlaing Bo Bo 26', 69', Nay Lin Tun 90+3'		

<b>Hong Kong</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>	<b>Myanmar</b>
Leung Nok Hang 32', Zon Moe Aung 53', 62'		

<b>Chinese Taipei</b>	<b>0 - 4</b>	<b>Australia</b>
Brillante, Taggart, Sotorio 55', Smith		

31 March 2015			
14:30	<b>Australia</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>Myanmar</b>
National Stadium, Kaohsiung			
17:30	<b>Chinese Taipei</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>Hong Kong</b>
National Stadium, Kaohsiung			

FOOTBALL

# Ten-man Myanmar are comeback kids

MATT ROEBUCK

ZON Moe Aung captured a second half brace that saw Myanmar U23s show steel and determination to come back from a first-half deficit despite playing for an hour with only 10 men and win 2-1 against Hong Kong in their second Group F AFC U23 Championship qualifier in Taiwan on March 29.

The game brings Myanmar six points from two games, with a goal difference of +4 after their opening game 3-0 win against hosts Chinese Taipei. With just one game remaining the Young White Angels have therefore given themselves every chance of advancing.

Myanmar had already made a substitution when Leung Nok Hang put the opposition ahead on the 32<sup>nd</sup> minute.

Only two minutes later a Myanmar comeback looked in jeopardy when Hlaing Bo Bo received his marching orders.

Ten-man Myanmar steadied the ship and after going in at half-time behind, they came out on the attack, with Zon Moe Aung levelling the scores in the 53<sup>rd</sup> before netting his second to give his team a lead in the 62<sup>nd</sup>.

The nation's final group games will be against favourites Australia, who beat Hong Kong 6-0 in their opener and therefore only need a draw to top the group on goal difference after they beat the hosts 4-0.

A draw or even a narrow defeat may be enough for Myanmar too as five second-place teams from the 10 qualifying groups will also go to next January's tournament, to be held in Qatar.



Nay Lin Tun, Shine Thuya (20) and Zon Moe Aung (17) celebrate the comeback goal. Photo: MFF/Facebook

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# Sport

## No relaxed Sunday drive for Lewis Hamilton

SPORT 30



CRICKET WORLD CUP FINAL

# Clarke's final flourish

**M**ICHAEL Clarke hit 74 in his last one-day international to lead Australia to their fifth World Cup title with a seven-wicket win over New Zealand in a disappointing final yesterday.

A record crowd of 93,013 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground saw power-packed Australia bowl out the Black Caps for 183 and then gallop to victory in the 34<sup>th</sup> over.

Clarke, who announced his retirement from the one-day format on the eve of the final, added 112 runs for the third wicket with his likely successor Steve Smith, who returned unbeaten on 56.

The emphatic win was set up by the left-arm fast bowling trio of Mitchell Starc, James Faulkner and Mitchell Johnson who shared eight wickets after the Kiwis elected to bat on a good pitch.

New Zealand messed up their maiden appearance in the title clash of cricket's showpiece event, falling like nine pins against the hostile Australian bowling.

Inspirational captain Brendon McCullum fell off the fifth ball of the innings for a duck and two other frontline batsmen, Corey Anderson and Luke Ronchi, also failed to score.

South Africa-born Grant Elliott top-scored with 83, sharing a fourth-wicket stand of 111 with Ross Taylor (40) after New Zealand had been reduced to 39 for three in the 13<sup>th</sup> over.

The massive crowd, which broke the MCG record of 91,112 on the opening day of the Boxing Day Test against England in 2013, saw New Zealand lose their last seven wickets for 33 runs.

New Zealand crumbled after going into the final as the only unbeaten team in the 14-nation tournament, their eight wins including a one-wicket success over Australia in a low-scoring pool-stage thriller.

Australia's previous titles came in 1987, 1999, 2003 and 2007, with coach Darren Lehmann, a two-time World Cup winner as a player, celebrating another success off the field.

New Zealand raised hopes of repeating their amazing win in the league when they removed Aaron Finch for a duck in the second over, Trent Boult taking an easy return catch as the ball lobbed off the batsman's bat and pad.

Left-hander David Warner slammed seven boundaries in his 45 off 46 balls, adding 61 for the second wicket with Smith.

But the pugnacious opener was unable to build on his fine start as he pulled seamer Matt Henry down Elliott's throat at deep square-leg.

Smith, who scored a century in the semi-final against India in Sydney, continued his good form to help Clarke take charge of the match.

Clarke was bowled by Henry when just nine runs remained for victory and was given a standing ovation by teammates and fans as he returned with his bat raised.

Smith sealed victory by pulling Henry for a boundary, spark-



Michael Clarke acknowledges the crowd after scoring a fifty in the World Cup final, his last ODI for Australia. Photo: AFP

ing jubilant scenes in the stands as Clarke and the rest of the team ran onto the field to embrace Smith.

Starc's two wickets in the innings took his tally to 22, enabling him to emerge with Boult as the joint highest wicket-takers in the tournament.

Martin Gupthill surpassed Sri Lankan Kumar Sangakkara's 541 runs to become the tournament's leading run-getter when he reached 10, but he managed to add just five runs more.

The tall opener, who hit a World Cup record score of 237 not out against the West Indies in the quarter-finals, was bowled trying to cut Glenn Maxwell's second delivery.

Taylor and Elliott settled in to build a strong partnership and had taken the total to 150-3 when the batting powerplay began after the 35<sup>th</sup> over.

Both sides fielded unchanged teams from their semi-final wins where Australia beat India and New Zealand downed South Africa in a penultimate-ball thriller.

But come the powerplay it was Faulkner - a different sort of left-arm seamer from both Starc and Johnson - who struck rather than the batsmen.

Prepared to experiment with slower deliveries, Faulkner had Taylor caught superbly by diving wicket-keeper Brad Haddin and then two balls later skittled Corey Anderson's stumps for a duck as he too demonstrated the enduring value of a yorker-length ball.

Starc followed up in the next over with former Australian international Luke Ronchi snapped up by home skipper Michael Clarke at slip for a four-ball duck as New Zealand slumped to 151 for six in the 37<sup>th</sup> over.

It was yet a further illustration of Australia's set plans and execution to take all the momentum away from the Black Caps, whose aggressive cricket has been a feature of this World Cup. - AFP

## Clarke to walk away from one-dayers after World Cup final

AUSTRALIA captain Michael Clarke made a shock announcement before yesterday's World Cup final against New Zealand at the Melbourne Cricket Ground: It would be his last one-day international.

Clarke, who turns 34 next month, said it was the right time to retire from one-dayers in order to prolong his Test career and give his successor as ODI captain the opportunity to prepare fully for the next World Cup in England in 2019.

Clarke, who replaced Ricky Ponting as ODI skipper four years ago, said his priority now was to play Test cricket, which he said was the pinnacle of the sport.

He announced his impending ODI retirement at the start of his pre-match media conference on

March 28 and said he had informed his teammates, Cricket Australia, chief selector Rod Marsh and coach Darren Lehmann before making his decision public.

"I think it's the right time for me and the Australian cricket team," Clarke told reporters.

"I was very fortunate to get the opportunity four years ago to captain this one-day team and that was really good preparation for me leading up to this World Cup and I think the next Australian captain deserves the same opportunity," he said.

"I don't think it's realistic that I will be fit and healthy and available to play in the next World Cup, so I believe it's the right time," added Clarke, who has struggled with back and hamstring problems. - AFP

## Final prompts PM questions

NEW Zealand Prime Minister John Key believes he has made the right decision to be in Melbourne for the Cricket World Cup final rather than attend the state funeral for Singapore's founding father Lee Kuan Yew.

Instead, Governor-General Jerry Mateparae represented New Zealand in Singapore.

"It was a difficult decision because obviously I want to go to both," Key told reporters before the game.

He described Lee as "a close and long-time friend of New Zealand" and said that Mateparae, as New Zealand's head of state, was more senior than the prime minister.

Key said he had decided before New Zealand's semi-final, when they beat South Africa with only one ball to spare, that if his nation made the final he would attend.

"I think that's the right call," he said.

"Our two countries [New Zealand and Australia] have a special rivalry. Over the years we have been treated to some truly exceptional sporting clashes and I expect this one will be no different."

However, his Australian counterpart Tony Abbott bypassed the cricket and joined other regional leaders in Singapore for Lee's funeral.

Lee "was a leading international statesman of his time, and laid the foundation upon which successive Singaporean and Australian governments have built a strong relationship", Abbott said in a statement last week.

Abbot has in the past been on the receiving end of some vociferous booing when he has attended Australian cricket matches. - AFP

## Australia's next ODI skipper



George Bailey



David Warner



Steve Smith

Led Australia in 29 of his 57 ODIs with a 55-percent winning ratio. Captained the team in their opening World Cup pool game against England while Clarke recovered from hamstring surgery.

Averages 42 with the bat, he is personable and comfortable with the media, but age is not on his side as he will be 36 by the time of the next World Cup.

An outside choice given his on and off-field indiscretions with officialdom, but his forceful presence may be option.

Dynamic opening batsman who dictates the scoring with his wide array of aggressive shots and is also an athletic fielder.

His temperament is likely to count against him, given the calmer persona of Smith and Bailey under game pressure.

Smith, who will be 26 in June, has age on his side and is favourite following his role as stand-in skipper in Clarke's injury absence for the last three Tests against India this season.

Smith has been in outstanding batting form following his four centuries in the four-Test India series with four consecutive scores above 50, highlighted by his last start 105 off 93 balls in the World Cup semi-final victory over India. - AFP