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An automatic weapon hangs from a bamboo pole in a Karen National Liberation Army camp in Kayin State earlier this month. Photo: Si Thu Lwin

BBC reporter to meet police over officer assault claims

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THE BBC said yesterday that one of its reporters in Mandalay was "helping police with their inquiries" following a report that he had been charged with assaulting a police officer during a student-led protest in the city on March 27.

"A BBC correspondent Ko Nay Lin was reporting on a student demonstration on motorbikes in Mandalay on Friday. He is helping police with their inquiries following an incident involving the police and students," the BBC said in a brief statement.

Police in Mandalay told *The Myanmar Times* on March 29 that the reporter had been charged under section 332 of the penal code, which can carry a jail sentence of up to three years.

Police alleged that Ko Nay Lin punched a police officer during a dispute in which the reporter accused the police of knocking over a motorbike.

Ko Nay Lin's whereabouts are not clear. U Min Din, president of the Independent Journalists Union, said the BBC correspondent intended to report today to the Mandalay police station that pressed the charges.

During the protest, students rode around five townships on motorbikes demanding that those arrested at Letpadan be freed.

IN DEPTH 2

Love, politics, loss: The life of a student activist

Ma Phyo Phyo Aung has quickly emerged as the face of the student movement - but she is no newcomer to activism, or the sacrifices it demands.

BUSINESS 9

Solar Impulse 2 departs Myanmar

The solar-powered plane on a round-the-world mission takes off from Mandalay bound for Chongqing, 11 days after touching down in Myanmar.

Six decades of conflict to end with ceasefire

Negotiators from the government and armed ethnic groups to sign nationwide ceasefire today, but agreement will still need final approval from leaders on both sides. **NEWS 3**



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Love, politics and separation

Ma Phyo Phyo Aung has been one of the more visible faces of the student movement – but her activism has come at high personal cost

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ON the evening of March 9, Ma Phyo Phyo Aung made a phone call from Letpadan. It was clear in her voice that she believed trouble was brewing.

“I don’t know what will happen tomorrow, but I am so worried for my students,” she said in a small voice. Her usually determined speech seemed clouded with worry.

The next day, however, Ma Phyo Phyo Aung showed little anxiety as she took charge of negotiations with the police, who had surrounded the student protesters just outside a monastery.

When it became clear that no compromise could be reached, tensions rose quickly. The young general secretary of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions looked increasingly worried as students launched a futile attempt to break through police barricades.

When the order was finally given to forcefully end the protest, Ma Phyo Phyo Aung ran with her colleagues from the raised batons of the officers. The students had no means to defend themselves against the frenzied attack, and many were severely beaten.

Initially Ma Phyo Phyo Aung managed to get away, fleeing to a nearby monastery with about 80 activists and Letpadan residents. Realising they were surrounded with nowhere to go, however, they decided to surrender. One by one they walked outside and were arrested.

On March 25, the township court in Letpadan – a small town in Bago Region, about 145 kilometres (90 miles) north of Yangon – charged her and 79 other activists under five sections of the penal code. If convicted she could face up to nine-and-a-half years in prison.

It is not an unfamiliar prospect for Ma Phyo Phyo Aung, who spent more than four years in prison for her involvement in protests in 2007 dubbed the Saffron Revolution. Freed in 2012, she was, like many former political prisoners, barred from returning to university, but continued to be involved in politics. She joined other students and activists in calling for changes to the recently enacted National Education Law in November 2014, during US President Barack Obama’s visit.

Politics is a family pursuit. Her father, U Nay Win, has done two stints behind bars. On the day of the crackdown, he went to work as usual, as he could not afford to take the day off.

“I didn’t go [to Letpadan] because I didn’t think they would crack down like this,” he said.

Some student who were imprisoned with Ma Phyo Phyo Aung but later released said the guards had gossiped that she was rich and famous –



Ma Phyo Phyo Aung, general secretary of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions, speaks on the phone from Letpadan. Photo: Aung Khant

“like an actress”, her father says.

He relates this anecdote from his small, mosquito-infested wooden house on the fringes of Yangon, which stands as evidence to the contrary. This “fame” seems to stem from the many friends abroad that she made during a trip to the George W Bush Centre in Washington last year. Some of these – including George W Bush himself – are now pressuring the government to release her.

It has shown no sign of relenting, and Ma Phyo Phyo Aung’s parents worry about how she will survive a second stint behind bars.

“Burmese prisons are the worst in the world. Prisoners here are lower than animals,” U Nay Win says.

He knows what he is talking about. When Ma Phyo Phyo Aung was just 10 months old, U Nay Win was sentenced to nine years in prison for political activities. The sentence was later extended to 14 years after he was accused of continuing his political activities in prison. It was a difficult time for the young father, who missed the chance to see his only daughter grow up.

Three months after U Nay Win’s arrest, his wife, Daw Thandar, brought Ma Phyo Phyo Aung to see him in prison. The little girl, then just over a year old, did not recognise him.

“I did not say anything to her because I thought that if she recognised me, she would cry. I did not want to do that to her,” U Nay Win said.

Years of suffering followed. U Nay Win says he was tortured and deprived regular visits from his family. Once he was not allowed visitors for 18 months. Later, when he was trans-

‘I don’t know what will happen tomorrow, but I am so worried for my students.’

U Nay Win

Father of Ma Phyo Phyo Aung

ferred to Myitkyina Prison in the country’s far north, his wife could not afford to visit him, as she spent most of her income looking after sick relatives and raising Ma Phyo Phyo Aung.

Despite the lack of contact, Ma Phyo Phyo Aung has a close relationship with her father, Daw Thandar says. “I taught her to respect her father,” she

told *The Myanmar Times*. “We always talked about him.”

It was this respect that in part led to Ma Phyo Phyo Aung’s first period in jail. When Cyclone Nargis devastated parts of the Ayeyarwady delta in May 2008, U Nay Win asked his daughter to help him collect and bury the bodies of the dead, which had been left to rot by the military authorities. Both were in hiding at the time, wanted by the authorities for their involvement in the 2007 protests.

The safe option would have been to keep their heads down. However, they felt unable to stand by when such a large part of the country was suffering and decided to travel to the delta.

Both were arrested and shortly separated again: her father sent to Hpa-an Prison in Kayin State, while Ma Phyo Phyo Aung spent her early 20s in Mawlamyine Prison in Mon State.

Before she was arrested in the delta, Ma Phyo Phyo Aung had fallen in love with Ko Lin Htet Naing, a fellow student activist.

They eventually married in December 2014. It was politics that brought them together. It has now separated them again, just months after their wedding.

Ko Lin Htet Naing is now in hiding, wanted by the government for his alleged involvement in student protests in Yangon.

He has anxiously followed the trial following her arrest at Letpadan. On March 25, the morning of Ma Phyo Phyo Aung’s second court appearance, Ko Lin Htet Naing received a phone call that has made his confined existence slightly more bearable. It was his wife calling from outside the courthouse.

“I am too, too happy,” he later wrote on his Facebook page.

Later in the day, however, Ma Phyo Phyo Aung and the other students were charged with holding an unlawful assembly, continuing the assembly after being told to disperse, rioting, hurting or disturbing a public servant and disturbing public tranquility. Photos of Ma Phyo Phyo Aung handcuffed to her friend Honey Oo were circulated on social media together with messages calling for their release.

Her parents say they are not optimistic that the charges will be dropped.

“I think they won’t be released – they’ll be sentenced,” said her father. “The government sees the students as the enemy.”

Fugitive student activist transferred to prison

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A student union activist arrested last week was taken to Tharyarwady Prison yesterday after being charged in Letpadan court on five counts related to his role in student protests against the National Education Law.

Ko Nanda Sitt Aung would also be charged as a fugitive under section 512 of the penal code, police Lieutenant Colonel Aye Thein of the Tharyarwady district told *The Myanmar Times* ahead of the court hearing.

The 35-year-old was one of four

activists in hiding charged in absentia after the Letpadan protest on March 10. A total of 66 students and activists have been detained in Tharyarwady Prison following the March 10 police crackdown which ended attempts to march from Mandalay to Yangon in protest against the National Education Law passed last year.

Ko Nanda Sitt Aung was arrested on March 27 in Lanmadaw township after he took part in another student protest in central Yangon. The activist faces charges of unlawful protest for each of the townships participating in the student-led rallies.

Yangon Police yesterday transferred him to Letpadan township where he was previously listed as one of four fugitive activists wanted for arrest. The remaining three are still in hiding.

U Htay, father of Ko Nanda Sitt Aung, said he had met several times with his son in police custody. His son told him that he did not know how many charges he might face in the courts for taking part in the rally that went through many townships and jurisdictions.

His son had been scheduled to appear before Kamaryut court yesterday,

where U Htay and others had waited in vain to see him, but the hearing was cancelled while he was transferred to Letpadan.

“I am so disappointed with the action of the police. They didn’t give any exact information to me as a parent. I really didn’t know what was happening to my son,” U Htay told reporters.

Ko Zay Ye Lwin, president of the student union at Yangon Economic University, said they had called for the immediate release of student protesters from prison during public hearings of the bill committee of the Amyotha

Hluttaw, or upper house, earlier this month.

“We told the parliament about this but they said it directly concerned the government so they could not do it [release the students]. The government didn’t keep its promise, as we had agreed, not to take actions against the student protesters,” he said.

U Htay told the Media in front of the Kamaryut court after long waiting his son “I am so disappointed to the police action, they didn’t give any exact information to me as a parents, I really didn’t know what my son has been going on”

Negotiators agree to sign landmark ceasefire

After almost 18 months of negotiations, peace teams edge closer to deal that would end decades of conflict

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MARATHON ceasefire talks between negotiators for the government and armed ethnic groups concluded last night with a provisional agreement to be signed in Yangon today.

"We have reached agreements over the whole draft. At 10am we will meet again to finalise the draft and then we will sign it in the afternoon," U Hla Maung Shwe, a senior official of the Myanmar Peace Center, which hosted the talks, told a press conference at the end of the seventh day of the seventh round of talks held since November 2013.

Negotiators of the National Ceasefire Coordination Team representing 16 ethnic groups – some of them fighting wars dating back to independence in 1948 – stressed that the agreement still had to be endorsed by their leaders who would call a joint conference, probably in April.

"I want to say explain clearly that the signing is just an agreement between the NCCT and the [government] Union Peace-making Work Committee. It is not the final agreement," said U Naing Han Thar, leader of the NCCT.

He said the NCCT did not have the authority to approve the national ceasefire agreement immediately because leaders of the armed groups were scattered across the country. "As NCCT we can approve it over 95 percent but our leaders can approve 100pc," he said.

The draft consists of seven chapters and 33 sections with an agreed "program for the transitional period". Officials conceded that they had been able to reach a draft ceasefire agreement by shunting the most controversial issues into the future.



Peace negotiators hold a press conference at the Myanmar Peace Center. Photo: Thiri

President U Thein Sein has made agreement on a nationwide ceasefire a key plank of his government's reforms ahead of parliamentary elections set for November. The ceasefire talks have been punctuated and interrupted by outbreaks of fighting, most recently in Kachin State and in the Kokang region of northern Shan State bordering China.

The NCCT and the UPWC resumed talks yesterday after adjourning on March 22 following six days of intense talks.

Negotiators from the NCCT agreed to sign the draft accord with government negotiators as a demonstration of their commitment to a nationwide ceasefire even while reaffirming that the accord would not take effect without the participation of ethnic armed groups that are not represented by the NCCT. These groups include the United Wa State Army, the Shan State

Army-South and the National Democratic Alliance Army, better known as the Mong La group.

"We couldn't say it is a nationwide ceasefire agreement without

'We will try as much as we can to discuss with other ethnic groups to enable them to participate in signing the national ceasefire agreement.'

Salai Lian Hmung
NCCT

the participation of non-NCCT members. So we will try as much as we can to discuss with other ethnic groups to enable them to participate in signing the national ceasefire agreement," said Salai Lian Hmung, NCCT member.

Both sides confirmed they had reached agreement on forming committees to discuss the framework for future political dialogue, setting out military codes of conduct and security sector reform. But no details were given to reporters. Officials only said they had agreed to discuss detailed points of these issues in the political dialogue.

"We think it doesn't matter how we reached the agreement. It is important sending a message to the people that we agreed the whole draft. It is first stage of the peace process. Many steps are left to implement it," said Salai Lian Hmung.

Government says it will 'confirm' identity of enslaved fisherman in Indonesia

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AFTER an Associated Press investigation last week alleged that Myanmar slaves are being abandoned on remote Indonesian islands, the Myanmar government is struggling to play catch-up.

Yesterday the Labour Ministry said it is working to "confirm" whether the enslaved fishermen are in fact Myanmar.

"If they are surely our citizens then we, the government, will not neglect them," U Aye Myint, the minister of labour, employment and social security said during a press conference on March 30.

"But first we need proper information and then we will make the plans for [the workers'] needs ... Now, we have information only via a news report. Sometimes in the past, [articles] claimed that [the victims] are Myanmar but it is not true.

There are a lot of cases like that outside of the country. So we need confirmation."

But when pressed by *The Myanmar Times* about how such confirmation will be undertaken, U Aye Myint declined to elaborate.

Most of the dozens of fishermen interviewed in the March 25 AP report were Myanmar migrants who had spent years of forced servitude

'If they are surely our citizens then we, the government, will not neglect them.'

U Aye Myint
Minister for Labour

on Thai trawlers plying the Indonesian waters. Several of the men experienced torture, whippings and forced captivity, and had seen other workers murdered onboard their ship.

Often trafficked onto the boats and lacking any official paperwork, the fishermen were made to carry counterfeit seafarers books bearing Thai names to mask their identity and serve as an informal travel visa.

But Ko Sein Htay, director of the Migrant Worker Rights Network said if the Myanmar government went to talk to its citizens it could quickly see through the paltry fake identities.

"If the government tries to ask for the workers back the bosses will say that they are not Myanmar. But if the government tries to meet and speak with [the workers], they will get their answer easily. I don't know why they don't try it," he said.

According to Ko Sein Htay, the

government is well aware that thousands of its citizens are languishing as enslaved workers on the Indonesian waters.

"If the media does not cover it, the government will neglect [the workers]. The Myanmar government already repatriated some of the fishermen in 2013 and 2014; perhaps it was about 100 people. I met some of them at the airport in Bangkok. So the government already knows what's going on," he told *The Myanmar Times*.

According to AP, some 4000 men, including Myanmar, Cambodian and Thai nationals, are stranded in Indonesia's remote eastern islands. Ko Sein Htay compared them to countryless refugees.

"The Indonesia government can't send them back to their home country because they don't know which country is theirs," he said.

"I urge the Myanmar government to take rapid action."

IN BRIEF

Dozens of migrants arrested on train to southern Thailand

Thai police said yesterday they had charged 70 migrants from Myanmar and six Rohingya Muslims with illegal entry after they were arrested on a train bound for a southern province bordering Malaysia.

The migrants were taken off the train from Bangkok at around 4:30am in Nakhon Si Thammarat province when they failed to present valid travel documents, said local railway police sub-inspector Kraisor Boonlum.

"All of the 76 were charged with illegal entry. The Myanmar ones will be deported back to their country, the six Rohingya must first have their nationalities identified," he said.

Mr Kraisor said the migrants claimed not to know one another and to have boarded the train bound for Narathiwat province at different stations along the route.

"The Myanmar ones said they wanted to find jobs in the south of Thailand but the Rohingya said they wanted to enter Malaysia," he said.

Thousands of Rohingya – a Muslim group not recognised as citizens in Myanmar – have fled deadly communal unrest in the country's western state of Rakhine since 2012. Most have headed for mainly Muslim Malaysia.

The six Rohingya migrants, all men in their 20s, and the Myanmar nationals – mostly adults and a handful of children – are being held at an immigration centre in Meuang district in Nakhon Si Thammarat.

The authorities are investigating whether the Rohingya are victims of trafficking.

"The Rohingya said, via a translator, that their relatives in Malaysia paid around 70,000 baht [US\$2150] each to Myanmar agents [for their passage] – but the Myanmar ones said they did not pay anyone," Mr Kraisor added. – AFP

President proposes election commission expansion

President U Thein Sein has requested parliament's assent to the nomination of eight new ethnic-minority members to the Union Election Commission. In a letter dated March 24, announced to Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on March 30, he said the proposal was to create a 15-member commission to supervise elections throughout the country in November.

The commission now has only seven members.

The president named U In Zaw Naw, U Sai Kham Win, U Saw Ba Hlaing, U Har Kee, U Maung Maung Kyi, U Sai Non Taung, U Sai Tun Thein and U Sai San Win as the additional members.

Announcing the proposal, Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann said any objections should be registered by April 2. – Htoo Thant, translation by Thiri Min Htun

Statement of regret

The Myanmar Times is deeply sorry for the cartoon which was printed in the March 25, 2015, edition of our Myanmar-language edition. This cartoon was inappropriate and not in good taste. It characterised the contribution of the brave soldiers and families of the Tatmadaw in a poor light. No offence was intended.

The Myanmar Times is taking disciplinary action against those involved. It is also strengthening internal controls to prevent this type of action in the future.

On behalf of all staff at *The Myanmar Times*, we wish to confirm our support for the sacrifices made by members of the Tatmadaw in defence of the integrity of the country.

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Members of the Myanmar Red Cross Society branch in Kunlon pay tribute to fallen colleague U Moe Kyaw Than, who died on March 27. Photo: Supplied/MRCS

Hundreds attend service for Red Cross volunteer

U Moe Kyaw Than died from injuries sustained in an attack on a Red Cross convoy in the Kokang region



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A MYANMAR Red Cross Society volunteer who last week died from wounds inflicted while helping displaced people flee conflict in the Kokang region was laid to rest on March 29 in his home village.

U Moe Kyaw Than was entombed near Kunlon township's Aung Mingalar village, in a ceremony at 1pm, MRCS said in a statement posted on Facebook yesterday.

More than 250 people, including members of the Kunlon township branch of the Red Cross society, former soldiers and residents, attended

the ceremony.

In accordance with Myanmar custom, Police Major U Saw Myo Thant, the head of Kunlon Red Cross branch, read an order releasing U Moe Kyaw Than from his duties with the society.

"I can't find the words to show my sorrow because we lost a person who had a strong social conscience," a fellow volunteer was quoted as saying in the statement.

U Moe Kyaw Than died from his wounds on March 27 in Mandalay General Hospital, the statement said.

Clashes between the Tatmadaw and Kokang rebels in early February sent tens of thousands of civilians fleeing across the border into China and southwest toward Lashio.

U Moe Kyaw Than was helping ferry civilians out of conflict-ridden Laukkai in late February when the convoy came under fire. Both U Moe

Kyaw Than and driver Ko Zaw Min Soe sustained injuries in the attack, according to the Red Cross. It remains unclear who was responsible. The government has blamed ethnic Kokang rebels, but the Kokang fighters said the area where the attack occurred was under Tatmadaw control.

'We lost a person who had a strong social conscience.'

Kunlon MRCS member

Four days after the incident, another convoy bearing the Red Cross insignia was ambushed, hospitalising

one aid worker and a journalist.

The United Nations resident and humanitarian coordinator expressed her condolences in a statement yesterday.

"This tragedy serves as a sober reminder of the dangers faced by humanitarian workers and of the bravery of national staff in particular. I take this opportunity to again call on all parties to the conflict to ensure the safety and security of all civilians and humanitarian staff. People simply should not have to risk their lives to help others," Renata Lok-Dessallien said.

Fighting continues to rage near Kokang region's border with China, even as the government reconvenes negotiations with ethnic minority groups over a national ceasefire draft. The insurgents in Kokang are not part of the talks.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun

Labour council members call for tougher penalties after employers flout rulings

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WITHOUT the fear of a prison sentence, employers will continue to ignore the decisions of Yangon Region's Arbitration Council for labour disputes, a tribunal member warned yesterday. Ko Ye Naing Win, the labour representative on the council, said the fear of imprisonment would ensure greater compliance with the rulings.

He spoke as the Yangon Regional minister for labour, U Zaw Aye Maung, said stiff penalties were in store for employers who spurned the council's

judgments. Instructions to companies to rehire dismissed staff were often ignored, he said. "We must impose strict penalties on those who do not comply," he added.

U Maung Maung Win, a lawyer with the Arbitration Council, said it had ruled on more than 200 labour disputes since last August but in most cases the tribunal's decision had been ignored.

"In February alone the tribunal issued nine rulings, of which the employer violated six, by refusing to rehire workers we had ordered them to take back," he said.

Workers' rights groups have

condemned employers' refusal to abide by the rulings, attributing it to the weakness of the penalties.

Ko Ye Naing Win said, "Employers could be violating the decisions because there is no provision for imprisonment. The council doesn't have the power, so most employers don't care about its rulings."

Labour minister U Zaw Aye Maung said further measures might be considered under the foreign direct investment law or the penal code.

One garment factory owner whose labour force went on strike last month, and who requested anonymity, said he did not want to

rehire "troublesome" workers even when ordered to do so.

"We negotiated with workers and they accepted our offer of compensation for not rehiring them," he said. "I don't want to ignore the ruling, but I want a stable workplace."

According to the labour disputes law, refusal to comply with rulings of the Arbitration Council, which is the highest authority for resolving labour disputes, is punishable with a maximum fine of K1 million.

Between June 2012 and August 2014 there were 2470 industrial disputes, according to U Maung Maung Win.

Crackdown investigation to miss deadline



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THE commission of inquiry set up by President U Thein Sein to investigate the violent dispersal of demonstrators by a quasi-official civilian force says it might not be able to complete its report in time.

Secretary U Saw Tun Aung Myint, who is also Yangon Region minister for Kayin ethnic affairs, told *The Myanmar Times* that the commission might not meet the president's deadline, which is today.

"We need more time to complete the report and we thought we should request the president [to extend the deadline]," he said, adding that the commission had taken evidence from the men wearing the red armbands.

A protest calling for the amendment of the National Education Law in front of Yangon City Hall on March 5 was broken up by a group of men in civilian clothes wearing red armbands emblazoned with the word "duty". The group is thought to be Swan Arr Shin, a paramilitary force previously used by the military regime to crack down on civilian protests. It has also recently attacked striking garment workers.

The president asked the commission to establish whether the security forces acted properly in dispersing the protesters and whether the authorities

acted in line with legal procedures, as well as to propose measures to prevent such cases in future.

The three-person commission is chaired by Brigadier General Kyaw Kyaw Tun, deputy minister of home affairs, and sits in the premises of Yangon Region government.

Independent MP Daw Nyo Nyo Thin has requested the speaker of Yangon parliament to convene a debate "on why thugs-for-hire have been back on the streets attacking demonstrators".

The use of the untrained civilian auxiliaries triggered a public outcry. Following the attacks and a swelling of social media postings, a President's Office official, director U Zaw Htay, admitted on Facebook that the government had organised the civilian force, posting an image of the section of the colonial-era Code of Criminal Procedure that permits it to raise a male civilian force to maintain law and order.

Meanwhile, three journalists who witnessed the March 5 incident and were interviewed by the commission about what they saw said their testimony was not recorded properly.

Ko Nyan Hlaing Lin, editor-in-charge of *Pyithu Khit* (The People's Age), said he and journalists from *The Voice* and Myitmakha news agency were interviewed in the commission's office. He said most parts of the interview were not transcribed correctly.

"I asked the commission to rewrite the testimonies and let me read them again. I checked three times to correct it and then I signed to approve it as my testimony," said Ko Nyan Hlaing Lin.



A child sits in a house built illegally beside the Ayeyarwady River in Mandalay. Photo: Mg Zaw

MCDC reveals affordable housing plan

MG ZAW

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MIGRANT workers whose homes were demolished to prettify the city of Mandalay in advance of the visit of the King of Norway last December are to be rehoused in low-income flats built exclusively for them.

Mandalay City Development Committee has announced that the 1440 flats, in 20 six-storey buildings, will be completed by October and let only to the migrants working at the Ayeyarwady

River jetty. Construction began last week, U Thet Naing Tun, secretary of MCDC, told *The Myanmar Times*.

The flats are located on a 7-acre plot between 10th and 12th streets in Nyaung Kwe ward, Aung Myay Thar San township. Each flat will measure 20 by 10 feet, including toilet and shower room.

"We will collect the names of the workers to ensure that only they get access to these homes," said U Thet Naing Tun.

"I'm really grateful for this housing. I hope all the workers on

the jetty will be able to live there," said Ko Min Lwin, a migrant worker on the jetty.

MCDC says the rent will be cheaper than the market rate.

The city forced about 200 residents to demolish their homes and move away from the bank of the Ayeyarwady River late last year, three days before the arrival of King Harald V and his queen, Sonja. The king later said he was "very sorry" about the evictions and that it showed Myanmar's reforms still had a long way to go.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun

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Dated: 31st March, 2015

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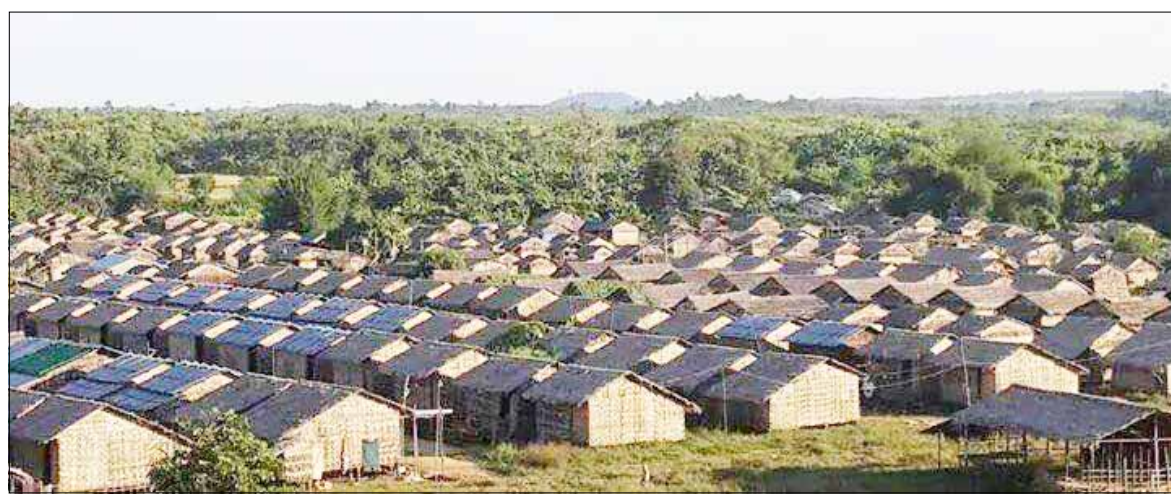
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Phone: 372416

Dated: 31st March, 2015

A village at Thit Ni Pin in Hlegu township, Yangon Region, already shelters 300 formerly homeless people. Photo: Supplied

New villages emerge as sayadaw offers homes to the needy

While non-denominational, admission to Sayadaw U Uttama's two villages – in Thanlyin and Hlegu townships – require a commitment to regularly meditate

**CHERRY THEIN**

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A VILLAGE for the homeless will be completed by 2016. The village, at Thit Ni Pin in Hlegu township, Yangon Region, is being built on 78 hectares (180 acres), will contain 512 homes, of which 150 have already been completed. More than 300 people, including 80 schoolchildren, already live in the village, and a school, markets, a clinic, water pumps and a road are under construction.

The project is the brainchild of a leading religious figure in Vipassana meditation, U Uttama, of the Thabawa Thayar Yeikthar meditation centre in outer Yangon's Thanlyin township.

A spokesperson for the centre, U Aung Than Htay, told *The Myanmar Times* that this was the second village for the homeless.

"Hlegu is a long-term project. There are still many things to be done, such as levelling the ground and digging wells."

He said U Uttama had organised a similar village at the Thanlyin meditation centre in 2012, when he allocated 225 square feet of land to families who had been displaced.

Known as Saytanar village, the 80-acre site started with 50 people, and now accommodates 8750 people in 2450 houses. U Uttama provides capital grants to help residents start businesses.

U Aung Than Htay said the village accepts poor families regardless of race and religion, on condition that they take a 10-day meditation course before moving in.

'I felt close to suicide. My husband was ill. We had debt, and couldn't afford the rent [elsewhere].'

Daw Tin Win

Thanlyin Saytanar resident

"This is not a way of converting people to Buddhism, but we need some kind of limitation because demand is outpacing supply," he said.

In the Thanlyin Saytanar village, most families are starting to enjoy a better life, setting up small shops, repair garages, hairdressing salons. They are required to meditate every

day. Families without enough food can ask for more at the centre, and a clinic provides free medical care.

Daw Tin Win, who runs a stall, said she was grateful to have somewhere to live. Her family faced a desperate situation in 2012.

"I felt close to suicide. My husband was ill. We had debt, and couldn't afford the rent. There was no food to feed my children," she said. "I felt thankful for the accommodation and the food, and later I started to take meditation. I gave up the misery, anger and sorrow."

Thanlyin centre volunteer Daw Htay Htay told *The Myanmar Times* that the residents were once "helpless, homeless and hopeless".

"They were angry, sad and crying. They asked for food at the centre. The sayadaw felt pity and gave them land to live on. Most families can't afford to build a cottage. There again Sayadaw helped," she said.

However, she said, gambling, drinking and fighting were not uncommon in the village. "Some people don't behave – they are bad as ever, despite Sayadaw's support. Some cheat to get free space or housing, but Sayadaw says that under dhamma, all people are responsible for their own actions," she said.

The Thanlyin meditation centre was established in 2008 and has branches throughout the country.

Fellows program expands to Kachin

CHERRY THEIN

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THE civil society leaders of tomorrow are to be empowered through the expansion of a program into Kachin State from late April.

The Youth Fellowship program was launched in 2006 by ActionAid (Myanmar), Shalom (Nyein) Foundation and Metta Foundation, training young people to play a greater role in Myanmar's economic and social development. To date more than 150 fellows have received training from Shalom, including three batches in Mon State and two in Kayah State.

The project aims to develop selected young people as potential civil society leaders to facilitate community development, respond to emergencies, and organise and facilitate capacity-building at grassroots level, he said. In particular, the focus will be on women,

ethnic minorities and internally displaced people.

Fellows, as they are known, form groups of residents in their targeted areas to identify the community's needs and ways to address them.

Shalom program manager for youth empowerment and community development U Min Aung Htoo said the programs in Kachin and Kayah states would begin next month.

The latest group of trainees, from Mon State, started work last December.

The fellows have already undergone one month of training and completed a two-month placement in their communities.

From March 17 to April 10 they visited Loikaw in Kayah State for further training and the opportunity to meet senior fellows.

Ma Zin Win Mon of Takun Taing village in Mudon township, Mon State,

told *The Myanmar Times* that the training was helping her develop the skills she needs to make a difference in her community.

She said the major issue in Mon State is migration, with a large proportion of able-bodied adults leaving their communities.

"People here consider only physical development, but neglect spiritual values. Most villagers want to migrate to Thailand and get rich, but they have no idea about their losing their traditions, culture and heritage," she said.

Another Mon fellow, Ko Min Thantzin Phyto, said migration was linked to the smuggling and use of illicit substances, which also has a large impact on communities. "I don't have accurate figures, but you can read about [the drug problem] in any newspaper. People should be aware of all the impacts of development," he said.

Views



U Aung Naing Oo participates in a press conference following peace talks in Yangon on March 19. Photo: Thiri Lu

Peace, hope, optimism: ingredients for peace



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THOSE who are not familiar with the workings of a peace process perhaps do not appreciate the role hope and optimism play in securing peace. These are, in fact, critical.

Friends, journalists, diplomats and others often ask me why I am always so optimistic about the prospects for peace in Myanmar.

They cite multifarious reasons for pessimism. They have pointed out the purported lack of commitment on the part of some key stakeholders in the peace process. They often mention raging fires on the borders during peace talks. Others have explained their negativity by emphasising the intractability and complexity of the peace process.

Given the protracted negotiations and other heavy odds against peace, people may come to a quick conclusion that I am crazy. They may think that I am so blinded by my close proximity to the peace process that I cannot see clearly.

Worse still, they may feel the whole of the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) is unrealistically positive about the prospects of peace in Myanmar.

Criticisms and cynical views abound. Following my recent article regarding the latest round of negotiations – “End in sight for nationwide ceasefire”, published in these pages on March 24 – an ethnic activist told me it was a good piece. But he said this while grinning at the scathing criticisms on my Facebook page against me, and the way the peace process has evolved.

While laughing, I told him that of those criticisms, two stood out. One questioned whether I had gone mad because of the gap he believed existed between the peace talks and what was happening on the ground. The other accused the MPC of being puppets

doing the bidding for the powers-that-be.

We in the peace process value criticism. No one likes to be criticised, but we understand criticism highlights that which we must pay attention to. Likewise, we do not simply dismiss cynical views on the peace process. We feel their pain, especially those who have suffered due to the conflict, regardless of which side they are loyal to.

At the same time, we know we must possess certain peacemaking qualities – developing a thick skin, and having stamina, tolerance, an ability to listen to grievances and an understanding of the workings of the peace process.

Of these qualities, adopting a positive attitude and having hope are the ones we cannot do without. It is the right way to go about the peace business.

This is my message to the doubters: hope and optimism are indispensable ingredients in a peace process.

Without hope, the peace process would not have happened in Myanmar. Without optimism, the peace process would have long ago been dead and buried. Without them, the alternative could be the persistence of conflict.

A positive attitude regarding all things in peace and conflict is a requirement for all peacemakers. So the rule is very simple: if one is pessimistic about the chance of securing peace – no matter how slim that may be – or is not hopeful, he or she may think more than twice before entering the ring.

An ethnic leader recently complained to chief negotiator U Aung Min about the problems in his state. The Union minister replied, “I understand your challenges but I am very proud of the fact that no fighting has occurred in your state since the ceasefire was signed three years ago ... even if you are not.”

That is the attitude that has kept the minister sane. As chief negotiator he has regularly been bombarded with unconstructive criticism and

contemptuous attacks. His position is unenviable – constantly trying to build trust with ethnic armed groups while at the same time toeing the government policy line.

But with peace dividends derived from bilateral ceasefires and the belief that he is saving lives through his work, U Aung Min has used, just like us, hope and optimism to soldier on. In many ways, it is his hope and optimism for peace and the future of our country that has kept us going.

There is another reason we need hope and optimism, however.

The history of Myanmar is complex and getting involved in endeavors such as peace or politics requires absolute or large amount of optimism. Because Myanmar has a habit of disappointing those with hope for a better future, I used to hear people say “TIB” or “TIM” – “This Is Burma” or “This is Myanmar” – in depressing tones.

One, therefore, has to be prepared. The only way for such preparedness is to adopt optimism and hope. Otherwise, one should not be in the business of peace or politics.

Of course, we are human and sometimes express our frustrations out loud. But we always try our best not to be optimistic.

Sometimes I also receive fan messages, including, recently, from a foreigner living in Yangon who reads my articles regularly.

She thanked me and said they provided a valuable perspective on the peace process. Above all else, she said, “I appreciate your sense of hope.”

In the end we must not forget that Myanmar is our country. If we, the people of Myanmar, lose hope, there will be no one else but us who has to suffer. We must therefore hold on to hope and optimism while keeping our eyes on the ultimate prize – peace in Myanmar.

Aung Naing Oo is associate director of Peace Dialogue Program at the Myanmar Peace Center. The opinions expressed here are his own.

Constitutional change: What are we waiting for?

The government, USDP and military are joining forces to stall the amendment process



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ON March 20, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann repeated his earlier statement that the constitutional amendment process will be completed by the end of the current parliamentary session. He has previously promised that a referendum on constitutional change will be held in May, and parliament has already passed a law enabling it. Why, then, with these looming deadlines, is constitutional change still very much off the parliament agenda?

According to the Speaker, the secretary of the Constitutional Amendment Implementation Committee U Aye Mauk, and other MPs, parliament is waiting for six-party talks to take place. They say there may be difficulties if they start the process before these talks are held.

This is a sensible position. The constitution requires at least 75 percent of MPs to support a proposed amendment for it to become law. In many cases, the changes also need to be approved at a national referendum.

The parliament is dominated by the Union Solidarity and Development Party and military representatives. No section of the constitution can be changed without their approval. The demands of the public, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy, and ethnic minority groups have little impact on the parliamentary process.

The Constitutional Amendment Implementation Committee has accepted recommendations on amendments from each political party, as well as other organisations. The USDP and military representatives have suggested only minor changes but resisted amending the key points demanded by the opposition, public and ethnic minority groups: for example, section 59(f), which prohibits Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from becoming president, and section 60, which potentially enables the USDP and military to elect the president and form cabinet with just one-third of elected seats.

Both USDP and military representatives don't accept other important proposed changes, such as to section 436, which gives the military a veto over constitutional change.

They've also shied away from changing section 261, which currently gives the president the right to appoint state and region chief ministers, who then form the state and region governments, cutting regional parliaments out

of the process completely.

Constitutional change would almost certainly be rejected if a vote was held now. That's why parliament has proposed the six-party meeting, which includes leaders of the government, USDP, military, ethnic minority groups and opposition. Parliament seems to believe that the six-party meeting will lead to constitutional change.

However, the president and the commander-in-chief have not confirmed their participation yet. Meanwhile, President U Thein Sein and Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker U Khin Aung Myint have said that constitutional change should wait until after the political dialogue process with ethnic armed groups is complete, so that any agreements made can be implemented.

In short, they want to push back the process of amending the constitution.

Coincidentally, Brigadier General Tint San, a military representative in parliament, submitted an urgent proposal on March 20.

While quite long, his proposal basically said regions and states have not received all the powers they should under the 2008

The president and commander-in-chief have not confirmed their participation [in six-way talks] ... They want to push back the process of amending the constitution.

constitution. He called for the enactment of laws to ensure power is shared properly.

Critics say the military doesn't want to make changes to the constitution but is willing to give the regions more authority.

Meanwhile, nationwide ceasefire talks are taking place in Yangon. The signing of a ceasefire should give some impetus to the amendment process. If talks do conclude, however, don't be surprised if we start hearing the USDP and military say that there's no need to rush the amendment process.

Sources in parliament say that the current session is drawing to a close. The next session is scheduled for after Thingyan.

This means we will soon know whether the process will actually get under way, whether it will proceed as people really want and whether Thura U Shwe Mann's promise to hold a referendum in May will be met.

– Translation by Zar Zar Soe

Business



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INCOME from natural gas exports could decrease by US\$1.5 million a day as an international price slide hits home, according to a senior official from the Ministry of Energy (MOE).

Gas prices have not experienced the same sudden drop as crude oil, with benchmark Brent crude falling to US\$56.41 per barrel yesterday, down half in about nine months. Still, natural gas has declined on international markets, from about \$4 per million British thermal units (MMBTU) nine months ago to \$2.60 yesterday.

Myanmar is one of the area's largest exporters of natural gas, with an estimated 70 percent of its output pumped to Thailand. It is also the country's largest export commodity, proving a crucial revenue driver for national coffers.

While gas traded at \$2.60 on international markets, the way local contracts are structured and transportation is calculated means the price is much higher from domestic production – though still on the decline.

Myanmar adjusts its gas prices on a quarterly basis, using regional prices as a reference.

The price of gas exports was \$11.7321 per MMBTU in the third quarter, dropping to \$11.6516 in last quarter of 2014, according to data from the Ministry of Energy's Energy Planning Department. It has now dropped to \$10.90 and likely to drop further, a MOGE official said.

These prices include transportation costs. Wellhead prices, which do not include transportation, are closer to \$7 per MMBTU for Yadana, Yetagun and Zawtika, which are primarily oriented toward Thai exports. Shwe Gas, which exports to

Grey skies for natural gas prices



A natural gas flare burns in the American state of Texas. Natural gas prices around the world are on the decline, and Myanmar is no exception – though the economy is heavily reliant on gas exports. Photo: AFP

China, has somewhat higher wellhead prices. "The income from gas exports will decrease by \$1.5 million a day," he said.

Natural gas has been a significant growth driver for the economy.

The country is currently producing more than 2 billion cubic feet per day of natural gas, of which

about 90pc is shipped to Thailand or China.

Local experts say natural gas is crucial for the domestic economy.

"Natural gas represents around 30 or 35pc of our country's total revenue, and it's been at that level for many years," said U Kyaw Kyaw Hlaing, chief executive officer of Smart Group of Companies. He added the decline in gas prices will impact the economy to an extent, particularly as the foreign-currency earnings are important to balance the economy.

U Kyaw Kyaw Hlaing also cautioned against comparing local prices and international prices for gas, saying with the different price structures it is difficult to compare like to like.

'Natural gas represents around 30 or 35pc of our country's total revenue, and it's been at that level for many years.'

U Kyaw Kyaw Hlaing
Smart Group of Companies

"The price for gas exports depends only on contracts," he said. "Both buyers and exporters agree how much to take and how much to supply. There is also compensation if they fail in the sales agreement."

The Asian Development Bank noted last week that receipts for natural gas exports had expanded to

\$2.1 billion in the first half of 2014, representing a \$400 million rise.

Natural gas is becoming a key driver of the country's export growth, but its success brings new challenges, the World Bank said in a November 2014 report.

Myanmar has large proven reserves of 23 trillion cubic feet, equivalent to 46 years of current production – and the sector is the main destination for foreign direct investment.

Along with other resource industries, they are highly capital-intensive, and their growth is not likely to contribute to poverty reduction unless revenue proceeds from the sector promote growth in labour-intensive sectors and assist other programs.

"In addition, world prices for commodities are generally much more volatile than manufacturers. This may create a risk of macroeconomic volatility to the extent the one commodity, in this case, natural gas, dominates," the November report said.

There are currently four large offshore projects in the production stage – Yadana, Yetagun, Shwe and Zawtika. All are primarily oriented at export, though some of the production is aimed at meeting local needs.

Currently Yadana, operated by French giant Total, is the largest export of gas, at about 720 million cubic feet per day (MMCFD). Next is Petronas-led Yetagun field and PTTEP's Zawtika at about 580 MMCFD, followed by Daewoo's Shwe Gas at 400 MMCFD.

There is also some onshore production, though it is much less significant than the roughly 2 billion cubic feet per day produced by the four offshore platforms.

An official said the various owners of the platforms benefit in proportion to their ownership – Myanma Oil and

Gas Enterprise has production sharing rights of 15pc in Yadana, 20.45pc in Yetagun, 15pc in Shwe and 20pc in Zawtika.

While Shwe and Zawtika only started in 2013 and 2014 respectively, Yadana and Yetagun have been large historical revenue generators, beginning in 1998 and 2000, the Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise official said.

He added the Yadana project generated \$1.7 billion from exports and \$370 million from domestic supply in 2013, the same year Yetagun generated \$1.7 billion.

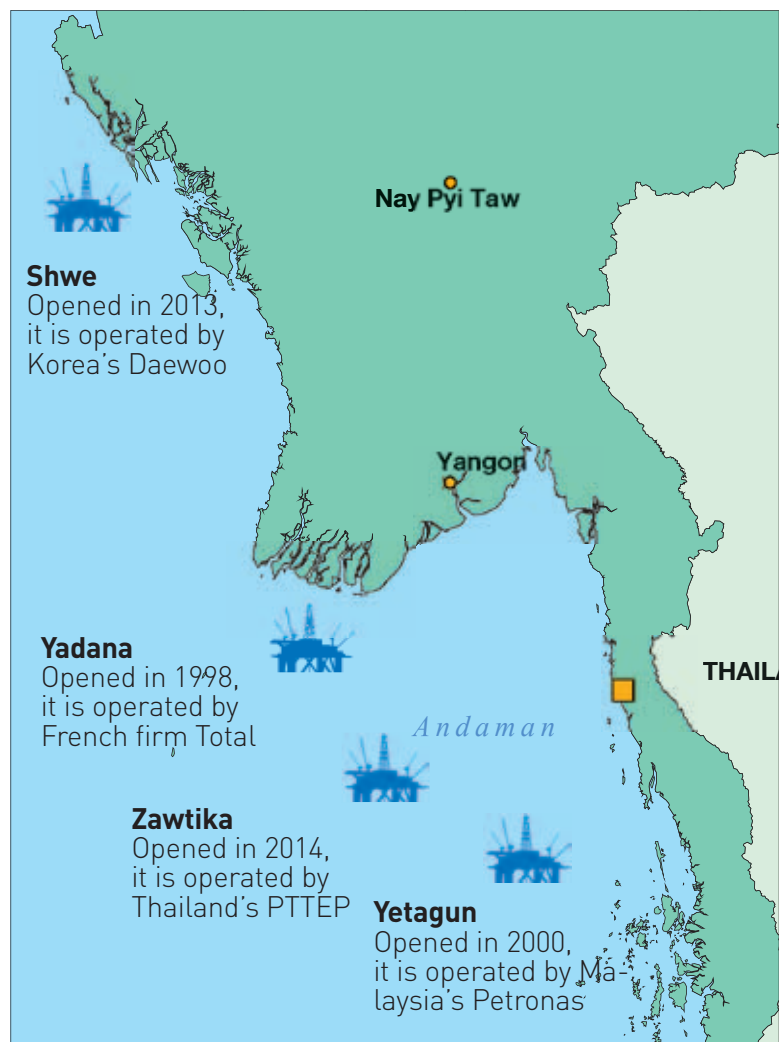
While most of the gas has been for export, local industries and state-owned factories are able to purchase some. Private businesses pay \$7 per MMBTU while state-owned factories pay \$5 per MMBTU.

Parami Energy chief executive officer Ken Tun said that of course Myanmar suffers with the reduction in price.

He recommended changes in three areas to help reverse the situation. Sales of subsidised natural gas distort price exploration, and ending the subsidised sales could make it more obvious which industries are successful.

Another possibility is renegotiating contracts with offtakers to improve the domestic economy, and a third is volumes may increase with more production expected in a few years' time, overcoming the price downturn.

The government has also been attempting to bring in more interest to Myanmar's oil and gas sector. It held a high-profile tender in 2013 for offshore and onshore blocks, with 14 onshore Production Sharing Contracts now signed and two more to go, while 13 offshore Production Sharing Contracts have been signed with firms including super majors Chevron, Shell and Total.



China moves to boost housing market to revive economy

BUSINESS 10



Japan factory orders show a larger-than-expected decline

BUSINESS 14

Exchange Rates (March 30 close)

| Currency | Buying | Selling |
|------------------|--------|---------|
| Euro | K1135 | K1140 |
| Malaysia Ringitt | K280 | K284 |
| Singapore Dollar | K750 | K755 |
| Thai Baht | K31.5 | K32 |
| US Dollar | K1065 | K1070 |

Solar Impulse 2 leaves Myanmar airspace on around-the-world journey



CATHERINE TRAUTWEIN

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SOLAR Impulse 2 (Si2), the solar-powered plane bent on circling the earth on the sun's energy, took off from Mandalay yesterday morning to take on its toughest flight leg yet - a long hop from Myanmar to Chongqing, China.

The stop in Chongqing, the plane's fifth in its solar-powered world tour promoting clean tech, might be a quick one. Depending on the aircraft's energy levels, Solar Impulse 2 could take off again for Nanjing, China, after a few hours on the ground and a pilot switch-off, according to a statement.

But before the aircraft can hopscotch across China, its pilot - Bertrand Piccard for the Mandalay to Chongqing leg - must complete what the organisation is calling the plane's most challenging flight so far.

The trip will cover 1375km and take about 19 hours. Good weather is anticipated in China, though wind at speeds reaching up to 40 knots may complicate the aircraft's travels.

Mr Piccard, flying in an unpressurised cockpit, will have to use oxygen for an extended period and endure temperatures as low as -20 degrees Celsius (-4 degrees Fahrenheit), a statement said. And a mountainous crossing early in the flight will require him to quickly bring the plane up to about 7300 metres (23,950 feet), where it will stay for most of the trip.

Flying through the cold on no fuel has demanded the Solar Impulse team look for ways to beat challenging conditions. Both of the plane's pilots have said solutions can apply closer to home than the clouds, with technology able to

make a landing in everyday life. "It's a very small home, but it's a beautiful home. It protects us against the harsh environment which is outside," Mr Piccard said at a press conference in Mandalay following the plane's landing on March 19. "The message clearly is with renewable energies and energy efficiency, we can achieve incredible things. And if we can do it in the air, of course we can do it on the ground."

"All the technologies built in this airplane, everything which we developed, can be used immediately on the ground," co-pilot André Borschberg said. "We have insulation materials to protect batteries [and] the pilot, which can be used in refrigerators, houses."

'All the technologies built in this airplane, everything which we developed, can be used immediately on the ground.'

André Borschberg
Solar Impulse 2 pilot

After Solar Impulse 2 lands, mission director Raymond Clerc must decide if the plane has enough gas in the tank - or battery power left over - to run on to Nanjing. Injury to one solar cell of the plane's more than 17,000, which occurred in Mandalay, has cut by 2 percent Si2's ability to bag solar energy, according to a statement.

The plane has traversed more than 4500km of its 35,000km journey. After landing in Chongqing,



Solar Impulse 2, the world's only solar powered aircraft, on its way out of Myanmar yesterday. Photo: AFP

the Solar Impulse 2 will have gone about 17 percent of its way around the world. In all, the trip will take about five months.

Solar Impulse 2 first touched down in Mandalay, the fourth stop on its world tour, on March 19. The aircraft had been scheduled to leave Myanmar after about two days, but extended its stopover into a 10-day stay.

Weather plays an enormous role in dictating when the plane departs, and unfriendly skies have delayed it out of the gate in India and Myanmar.

Its trip has also been held up by bureaucratic challenges, as a lack of "stamps" kept the plane from leaving Ahmedabad, India, according to AFP.

After China, the plane will embark on its trip across the Pacific. The organisation expects this longest leg yet to take 5 full days, with the pilot logging more than 8000km on his flight from Nanjing to Hawaii, USA.



Swiss pilots Andre Borschberg (left) and Bertrand Piccard speak to the press before taking off on Solar Impulse 2, the world's only solar powered aircraft, from Mandalay International Airport yesterday. Photo: AFP

CDSG, Mitsubishi in \$200m tie-up

JEREMY MULLINS
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LOCAL conglomerate Capital Diamond Star Group and Japan's Mitsubishi Corporation will form a joint venture for food manufacturing and distribution, according to a press release.

The new joint venture, called Lluvia Limited, aims to invest US\$200 million over the next three years in new and existing businesses in Myanmar's food value chain, and eventually compete on a regional scale.

"Lluvia aims to expand aggressively in the region and aims to be one of Myanmar's first homegrown regional companies with a view toward being one of the leading food companies in Asia," the press release said.

The venture will be formed out of Capital Diamond's existing businesses

in brands including Premier milk powder, Premier coffee, Tea Master tea mix, and Blue Rocket and Diamond Star wheat flour.

Lluvia will work closely with farmers to facilitate access to capital and enhance farming techniques through knowledge transfer with Mitsubishi Corporation on the upstream side, while also improving food safety and reducing Myanmar's reliance on imports on the downstream side.

Capital Diamond Star Group is headed by Myanmar entrepreneur U Ko Ko Gyi.

The firm also has businesses in agricultural commodity trading, fertilizer and retail, including the Capital Hypermart and Grab and Go convenience stores, as well as construction project such as the Myaynigone flyover, which had a soft-launch on March 27.

Mitsubishi is one of Japan's largest

companies, claiming a long history in food businesses from raw material sourcing to the distribution and retail end.

The two firms are expected to release more information on the agreement at a press conference later this week.

The food business looks set to become increasingly competitive, as a number of foreign companies are entering and local firms planning to expand.

Last September, Swiss giant Nestlé announced it plans to begin making its 3-in-1 coffee products at a Yangon-area factory, making an initial \$25 million investment, with further spends to come.

Other household names like Coca-Cola and Pepsi have expanded their reach inside the country, while brewers Carlsberg and Heineken are also to launch local beer production.

Toshiba Corporation wins hydropower order

MEGAWATTS

77

Size of the order won by Toshiba for the Upper Yeywa hydropower project

JAPANESE firm Toshiba Corporation has won an order to supply four 77-megawatt hydropower turbines and generators for a Myanmar energy project.

Its Chinese subsidiary Toshiba Hydro Power (Hangzhou) will begin delivery to contract, Zhejiang Orient Engineering Co, starting in March 2016, it said in a press release yesterday.

The turbines are headed to Myanmar state-owned Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise's Upper Yeywa hydropower project, it added.

"Hydroelectricity is currently Myanmar's primary source of electricity, accounting for approximately 75 percent of the country's power supply," it said in the press release. "There are plans to build more power plants in Myanmar to meet

growing energy needs triggered by the country's strong economic growth."

The deal is the second in Myanmar for Toshiba Group, which previously supplied a turbine for the 28.4MW Sedawgyi hydroelectric plant in 1989. - Staff

SHANGHAI



Workers produce hygiene supplies in a factory in Hangzhou, east China's Zhejiang province. The Chinese economy is said to be slowing, leading to government moves to boost business. Photo: AFP

Economic boost trumps housing bubble fears

CHINA'S central bank yesterday lowered minimum down-payment levels on second homes nationwide, scrapping a key policy originally aimed at controlling housing prices as it seeks to boost the economy.

The People's Bank of China (PBoC), the central bank, said the minimum deposit for individuals buying additional housing would be set at 40 percent, according to a statement on its website.

The level was previously 60pc to 70pc, China's official Xinhua news agency said.

The PBoC said the move was aimed at "supporting residents' home ownership and improving housing demand".

The announcement rolls back a four-year-old policy first introduced to try to cool the then red-hot property market as rocketing prices put homes out of the reach of many, raising worries over social unrest.

The move comes as China's growth falters, leading to wide-

spread expectations that the country's policymakers will have to boost the world's second-largest economy through further moves aimed at monetary loosening.

China's gross domestic product grew 7.4pc last year, the slowest in nearly a quarter of a century.

The central bank has already cut interest rates twice since November and in February it also lowered the bank reserve ratio - the percentage of funds banks must hold in reserve.



Property investment is a key driver for China's economy, while land sales are a major source of revenue for cash-strapped local governments, which have been feeling the pinch as the economy has slowed.

"The cut [in down payments] will strongly support the property market ... especially in first- and second-tier cities," said Le Jiadong, a property analyst working at Guangfa Securities.

"Introducing this policy at this time fits the situation of the property market's development," he said.

Le Jiadong added expectations had been for the government to cut the down-payment level to about 50pc.

China's housing prices fell in February, with the average price of a new home in China's 100 major cities edging down 0.24pc from January to 10,539 yuan (US\$1682) per square metre, according to the China Index Academy. - AFP

SHANGHAI

Swiss and Canada currencies overtake the yuan

CHINA'S yuan has dropped to seventh place among the world's payments currencies, global transactions organisation SWIFT said yesterday, even as Beijing tries to push greater international use of the unit.

The yuan - also known as the renminbi - held a 1.81 percent share in world payments based on value in February, SWIFT said in a statement on yesterday, down from 2.06pc in January, when it stood in fifth place.

The Swiss franc and the Canadian dollar overtook the Chinese currency last month, SWIFT data showed.

It attributed the weaker showing to the "seasonal effect" of the Chinese New Year, when business slows because of a week-long holiday.

But the demotion also comes amid mounting worries over China's slowing economy, though officials have denied strong capital outflows.

China keeps a tight grip on the value of the yuan out of concerns that unpredictable currency in-flows and outflows could harm the

economy and weaken its financial control.

At the same time, Beijing is seeking to make the yuan used more internationally in line with its standing as the world's second-largest economy. Some analysts predict the unit will one day rival the US dollar.

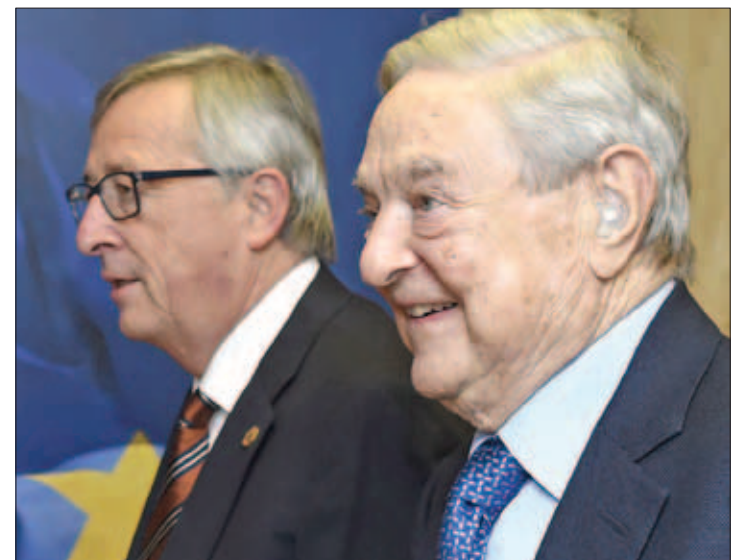
Although the yuan is not freely convertible, China is in talks with the International Monetary Fund for the Washington-based institution to add the yuan to its basket of reserve currencies.

Hong Kong, a special administrative region of China which is considered the business gateway to the mainland, handles more than 70pc of global payments in yuan, SWIFT said, but the share of other countries is growing.

"Broader support by more countries beyond Hong Kong, underlining its international use, suggests the potential for future clearing centres and further development of the currency," Michael Moon, head of payments for Asia-Pacific at SWIFT, said in the statement.

- AFP

VIENNA



EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker (left) greets George Soros, (right) founder and chair of Open Society, ahead of their bilateral meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels earlier this month. Photo: AFP

Soros pledges \$1 billion for Ukraine - with strings attached

US financier George Soros said yesterday he was ready to invest US\$1 billion in Ukraine if the West promised to help the embattled country.

"Ukraine is defending the EU from Russian aggression" and helping its development will weaken Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Hungarian-born philanthropist said in remarks published in German by the Austrian daily *Der Standard*.

He said Ukraine needed 50 billion euros (\$54 billion) to get itself back on its feet, and said he was prepared to pump \$1 billion into agriculture and infrastructural projects.

Ukraine is at the edge of bankruptcy hit by the triple whammy of the war in its industrial east, a

deep economic recession and the record devaluation of its currency. Its public debt likely to reach 94 percent of its GDP in 2015.

Mr Soros said his investments "should make a profit", which would go to his foundation rather than him personally.

"The West can help Ukraine by making it more attractive to investors by giving them insurance against political risk," he said.

"That could take the form of financing very close to the European interest rates, which are very close to zero."

Ukrainian investment analysts ICU only predict a return to growth in 2017, and a sharp drop in GDP of 7.6pc this year.

- AFP

BANGKOK

Thailand admits urgent need to improve airline safety

THAILAND admitted yesterday it "urgently" needs to improve airline safety procedures as several carriers face bans on new international flights after a UN aviation agency raised concerns.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a United Nations body, reported "significant safety concerns" to Thailand's Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) after an audit earlier in the year.

In response Japan last week blocked new flights from Thailand in a move affecting charter services by budget carriers Thai AirAsia X and NokScoot as well as Asia Atlantic Airlines, the DCA said, adding existing flights would not be impacted.

Flag carrier Thai Airways, in a statement on its Facebook page on March 28, said two charter flights

'The ICAO has warned us since 2005 about our aviation management and asked us to improve our systems.'

Prajin Juntong
Thai transport minister

scheduled to depart for Japan next month had been affected.

Transport Minister Prajin Juntong said Thailand must quickly improve airline safety.

"The ICAO has warned us since 2005 about our aviation management and asked us to improve our systems," he told reporters yesterday in Bangkok.

"I understand we have to improve urgently."

The DCA did not give details of the UN body's concerns but said it would provide new training for its staff and increase airline inspections as part of its overhaul.

The ICAO headquarters in Montreal could not immediately be reached for comment.

- AFP

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disc drives; semi-conductors; packaged semi-conductors; integrated circuits containing programming used for audio, video or computer data processing; rechargeable batteries; audio and video data processors and converters; data transmission cables; protective helmets; magnetic encoded identification bracelets; electronic tickets, encoded; tickets in the form of magnetic cards; contact lenses, receptacle for the cleaning and storing of contact lenses”. (International Class 9)

“Bicycles; motorbikes; motor scooters; automobiles; trucks; vans; caravans; buses; refrigerated vehicles; aeroplanes; boats; hot-air balloons, airships; tires, inner tubes for tires, rubber tread patterns for use in retreading of tires, material and kits for the repair of tires and inner tubes, adhesive rubber patches for the repair of tires and inner tubes, valves for tires, tire inflation apparatus, non-skid devices for vehicle tires, namely, spikes and snow chains; wheels, wheel rims, wheel rim bands, hubcaps, tire covers, alloys for wheels; automobile accessories, namely, sun screens, roof racks, ski racks, bicycle racks, seat covers and cushions; car covers (vehicle accessories); headlight shields; taillight covers; convertible tops; spoilers; sun roofs; grill guards; airbags; fog lights; steering wheels; plate frames; license plates; car security systems; seat-belt cushions; wing mirror covers; carpets, rugs, mats (also for cars); car dusters; tool boxes; prams; strollers; car seats for babies or children; engines for land vehicles”. (International Class 12)

“Clothing; footwear; headgear; shirts; knitted garments; jerseys, pullovers, tank-tops; T-shirts; vests; singlets; dresses; skirts; underwear; swimwear, bikinis; tankinis; bath robes; shorts; pants; sweaters; bonnets; caps; hats; scarves; headscarves; sashes for wear; shawls; visors; peaked caps; warm-up suits; sweatshirts; jackets; sports jackets; stadium jackets; blazers; rainwear; coats; uniforms; ties; wristbands; headbands; gloves; aprons; bibs (not of paper); pyjamas; toddler and infant playwear; sleeping bags for babies (clothing); socks and hosiery; suspenders; belts; braces; sandals, thong sandals; athletic footwear, namely outdoor shoes, hiking shoes, basketball shoes, cross-training shoes, cycling shoes, indoor sports shoes, classic shoes, running and track-field shoes, flip-flops, football shoes (indoor and outdoor), football boots, canvas shoes, tennis shoes, urban sports shoes, sailing shoes, aerobic shoes; sports apparel, namely fleece tops, jogging suits, knit sportswear, sport casual pants, polo-shirts, sweatshirts, sweatpants, soccer-style shirts, rugby-style shirts, socks, swimwear, premium quality towels, tights and leg warmers, tracksuits, functional underwear, singlets, bra tops, leotards, wristbands, headbands, gloves, snow suits, snow jackets, snow pants”. (International Class 25)

“Games and playthings; sport balls; board games; tables for table football; stuffed dolls and animals; toy vehicles; puzzles; balloons; inflatable toys; playing cards; confetti; articles for gymnastics and sport, appliances for gymnastics; football equipment, namely footballs, gloves, knee, elbow and shoulder pads, shin guards and football goals; football goal walls; sport bags and containers adapted for carrying sports articles; sport bags with wheels; kit bags; party hats (toys); hand-held electronic games adapted for use with television receivers only; video games; video game machines; gaming consoles; hand-held game machines with liquid crystal displays; hand-held electronic games other than those adapted for use with television receivers only; gamepads; steering wheels for video games and dancing mats for video games; foam hands (toys); toy robots for entertainment; arcade games; replica models of aircraft; toys for pet animals; scratch cards; kites; roller skates; scooters (toys); skateboards”. (International Class 28)

“Soft drinks; concentrates, syrups and powder for making soft drinks; mineral and aerated waters; other non-alcoholic beverages; energy drinks, isotonic drinks, hypertonic drinks, hypotonic drinks; fruit and vegetable drinks and juices; teas; coffees; diet beverages; sports drinks; iced fruit drinks, non-carbonated, non-alcoholic frozen flavoured beverages; beverages enriched with added vitamins not for medical use; beers; ales; non-alcoholic beer”. (International Class 32)

“Telecommunication services; communications by telephone and mobile telephones; electronic communications services by telephone; communication by radio; communications by facsimile; paging by radio; communications by teleconferencing; television broadcasting; radio broadcasting; press and news agency services; leasing of telephone sets, facsimile and other communication equipment; broadcasting of a commercial website on the Internet

or on wireless electronic communication device; radio and television programming and broadcasting services provided via satellite, cable or wireless networks; electronic messaging; providing access to a blog, chatroom, bulletin board or discussion service; providing online chat rooms and electronic bulletin boards for the transmission of messages, comments and multimedia content among users for social-networking; providing access to web sites containing maps, information about driving directions and the location of businesses; transmission of messages and images via computer; providing access to home and office shopping and ordering services via computer, a global computer network and/or interactive communications technologies; telecommunication of information (including web pages), computer programs and any other data; electronic mail services; providing information on-line from a computer database or from the Internet, related to sports or sporting events; providing telecommunications connections to the Internet or databases; providing access to digital music web sites on the Internet or on wireless electronic communication device; broadcasting of radio and television programs related to sports and sporting events; providing connections to computer installations (telecommunications services); providing access to a centralized computer and computer databases (IT service); providing access to the Internet via a global computer network or via wireless electronic communication device (IT service streaming of video and audio material from the Internet; video, audio and television streaming services; providing access to internet search engines”. (International Class 38)

“Education; training; providing training courses; entertainment; entertainment services provided at or relating to sports events; entertainment services in the form of public viewings of sports events; providing sporting and cultural activities; organisation of sporting and cultural events and activities; organisation of lotteries and competitions; organisation of sporting competitions and events in the field of football; providing sports facilities; fun park services; health and fitness club services; rental services for audio and video equipment; production, presentation, publication and/or rental of films, sound and video recordings; publication and/or rental of interactive educational and entertainment products, namely films, books, compact discs, DVDs, mini-discs, CD-ROMs; publication of statistics and other information on sports performances; radio and television reporting of sporting events; production and editing services for radio and television programmes; photography services; photography, audio and videotaping production services; production of animated movies; production of animated television programs; seat booking services for entertainment and sporting events; ticket reservation services for entertainment and sporting events; sports ticket agency services; timing of sports events; recording of sports events; organisation of beauty contests; interactive entertainment; gambling services; providing of raffle services; online game services; providing online entertainment in the nature of game tournaments; organization of computer game competitions including online game competitions; information relating to entertainment or education, provided on-line from a computer database or the Internet or on wireless electronic communication device; electronic games services provided by means of the Internet or on wireless electronic communication device (entertainment); publication of books; publication of electronic books and journals on-line; entertainment services in the form of chat rooms on the Internet or on wireless electronic communication device; entertainment services in the form of cinema performances; translation services; interpreter services; providing provision of entertainment infrastructures, namely, VIP lounges and sky boxes both on and off site sports facilities for entertainment purposes; hospitality services, namely customers reception services, including provision of tickets for sporting or entertainment events”. (International Class 41)

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(For IP Hub Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore)
Dated. 31st March, 2015

RIO DE JANEIRO

Low costs give Brazil's food producers the advantage

DEMAND from China, rising domestic purchasing power and cheap land and labour have helped Brazilian giants earn themselves a healthy slice of the international food sector, as shown by the Heinz-Kraft merger.

HJ Heinz's owner 3G Capital, billionaire Jorge Paulo Lemann's investment fund, will have a 51 per cent stake of the new group under an agreement with Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway to create North America's third-largest food and beverage conglomerate.

The move comes after Brazilian group JBS, the world's market leader in meat, became the world's number two global food producer by revenue after Nestle.

Brazil has another big-hitter in the shape of BRF, already the world's number one exporter of poultry, which in November inaugurated a 130 million euros (US\$140 million) production facility in Abu Dhabi.

The companies have different profiles but local analysts argue that they have one thing in common: They came up the hard way, learning to be efficient while US and European agribusiness

got fat on state subsidy.

"The low cost of land and labour give Brazilian foodstuffs producers key comparative advantages," explains Maria de Albuquerque David, professor of economics at Rio University.

"A few decades ago we had little freedom in Brazil owing to the military dictatorship. We suffered from the 'Tupiniquim complex' - the Amerindian who doesn't venture far from his beach," adds another economist, Gilberto Braga.

"But with democratisation and the

'The low cost of land and labour give Brazilian foodstuffs producers key comparative advantages.'

Maria de Albuquerque David
Economics professor



Fishermen untangle a net on their boat at Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro. Photo: AFP

end of the East-West standoff these barriers have lifted," says Mr Braga.

Jorge Paulo Lemann, Brazil's richest man, built his empire on beverages. His AB InBev, the fruit of a series of mergers, today brews some 20pc of beer worldwide with a stable of global brands such as Stella Artois, Corona and Budweiser.

His 3G Capital fund then wolfed down fast-food chain Burger King, the Heinz group and then Canadian coffee chain Tim Horton's, and now the trio of fund members controls investments worth \$260 billion. Buoyed by Chinese demand for meat and soy, of which Brazil is the world's second-largest producer, and with Brazilians' purchasing power on the rise, the sector has racked up large surpluses.

"If agribusiness is so dynamic it

is because it is present on two fronts - Brazil and exports, leaving the less attractive aside depending on the period," says Mr David.

BRF exports poultry to 110 countries and has 10 industrial sites spread across Argentina, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

JBS, which started off as a butcher's chain in central Brazil and in which a public investment bank has a 25pc stake, today sees foreign operations account for 80 per cent of sales, from Australia to the United States.

Mr Braga says he sees no risk these mega-firms will go the same way as that of fallen icon Eike Batista, the one-time multi-billionaire and oil magnate whose empire crumbled in just a few months in 2013.

"There is no risk. Batista was a

seller of dreams with immature projects. In agribusiness we are talking about long-established firms with experience and profound knowledge of their market," Mr Braga insists.

There are, however, latent threats to their well-being, including high debt, a slump in prices of raw materials, prohibitive transport costs and the high cost of investment owing to high interest rates.

"This is a critical time, when we are going to see if they really are good managers," says Mr David.

"3G Capital has made draconian spending cuts and cut back on production. Maybe the meat giants will do likewise."

JBS announced in early March that it did not envisage making any acquisitions this year. - AFP

PARIS

Europe's dairy farmers ready to milk end of quota

EUROPEAN dairy farmers are facing the end of three decades of milk quotas tomorrow with a mixture of anticipation and angst as it will allow them to serve growing demand in emerging markets, but could also cause a crash in prices.

Starting April 1, farmers will be allowed to churn out as much milk as they want.

While the quotas had been increased in recent years - growing 1 percent a year between 2009 and 2013 - the complete liberalisation of the market is seen as a game-changer for producers.

In northern Europe, farmers have hailed the move as a chance to cash in on the growing global thirst for milk, particularly in China.

Ireland has already announced plans to boost its milk output by 50 percent by 2020. The Netherlands and Germany, Europe's largest producer, are gearing up for increases of 20pc.

"We're happy the quotas are being scrapped. We're prepared," said Karl-Heinz Engel, president of the German dairy industry association, MIV, insisting that the sector was "export-orientated and competitive".

But many farmers in France, Europe's second-biggest milk producer, have adopted a wait-and-see approach, preferring to wait for the demand to pick up before ploughing money into boosting their output.

The quotas were introduced in the mid-1980s to staunch the infamous milk lakes and butter mountains that had built up on the back of generous EU production subsidies.

"The quotas were introduced because there was too much milk on the market compared with demand but the situation has changed greatly since then," said Rene van Buitenen, a



Dairy cows are milked on a rotating "milking carousel" at the Heideland dairy farm in Kemberg, some 100 kilometres (62 miles) south of Berlin. Photo: AFP

spokesperson for the Dutch dairy association NZO.

The upshot of the quotas had been to give "the United States and New Zealand an advantage" in the global market, he complained, calling the lifting of the quotas an "incredible opportunity".

That opportunity is China, where since a tainted milk powder scandal in 2008 left six dead and more than 300,000 sick, Chinese consumers have preferred imports, particularly for baby formula.

Chinese companies have sought to

cash in on the European reputation for quality, teaming up with dairies in France and Denmark to invest hundreds of millions of euros into milk drying towers to produce powdered milk and baby formula for export.

And prices have been rising internationally recently, with the price of powdered milk picking up by 500 euros over the past month to 2350 euros per tonne.

But a surge in production could easily push down prices, and in Germany many farmers already receive no more than a paltry 0.28 euros per

litre (1.06 euros per gallon).

"Twenty-eight cents is the equivalent of being on life-support. I'm for a price of, say, thirty-five cents," said Richard Reiss, who runs the 1200-cow Heideland farm 100 kilometres (62 miles) south of Berlin.

Heideland has invested 8 million euros over the past few years to modernise and expand its facilities, including a milking carousel and a machine to massage the cows to ensure peak performance.

Germany has over the years developed lots of large farms, where

efficiency can help them survive thin margins, and can serve processor orientated toward exports.

But in France, many dairy farmers are opting for the opposite strategy: generating higher margins on value-added products from consumers willing to pay more for quality and traditional methods.

In the land of a thousand cheeses, there are strict rules governing location and production methods to ensure the quality of the delicacies under the Protected Designation of Origin (AOC) label.

"We don't produce milk here, we produce *comte*," said Richard Moyotte, as he prepared to milk by hand his 24 ochre and white Montbeliarde cows in the pastures above the village of Lozay.

The breed is native to the eastern region along the border with Switzerland, and each cow must have a hectare (2.5 acres) of grass to make *comte*.

The strong, slightly sweet hard cheese made from unpasturised cow's milk is one France's most popular AOC-label cheeses.

Farmers in the region who meet the strict *comte* criteria can fetch 0.50 euros per litre, compared to the national average of around 0.35 to 0.38 euros.

"You could say our ancestors had a good nose for business," said Damien Pobelle, a farmer and head of the Groupement, one of the 165 cooperatives in the Franche-Compte region that makes *comte*.

"We aren't interested in increasing volume, but increasing value," said Patrick Rouleau, head of the Sevre cooperative, one of the dairies producing Echire AOP butter in the Poitou-Charentes region in western France.

- AFP

TOKYO

Japan's factory output tumbles

JAPANESE factory output fell by a worse-than-expected 3.4 percent in February, data showed yesterday, adding to the gloom enveloping the world's third-largest economy as it struggles to overcome last year's sales tax rise.

The latest month-on-month figures missed economists' median forecast of a drop of less than 2pc and reversed a 3.7pc rise in January.

The data come days after separate figures showed inflation stalled last month with a key measure of prices flat for the first time in nearly two years - dealing another blow to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's bid to conquer deflation and revive the sluggish economy.

"Today's figures confirm that the economy slowed in the first quarter of 2015," Marcel Thieli from Capital Economics said in a note after the industrial production data was published.

"We stick to our forecast that Japan's GDP will be flat this year rather than expand by 1.0pc as expected by the consensus."

Commenting on the factory output data, Japan's industry ministry left its tepid view unchanged.

"Industrial production shows signs of increase at a moderate pace," it said in the February report.

Some economists pointed to the week-long Chinese New Year holiday as another factor that dampened demand for Japanese imports.

A survey of manufacturers' output projections released with the data suggested their production would fall by 2.0pc in March before picking up 3.6pc in April.

But "these forecasts tend to overestimate the future level of output, so the actual results may be even weaker", Mr Thieli said.

On March 27, government figures showed that inflation stalled in February, weighed by a plunge in oil rates and weak consumer spending, after



Journalists check the engine room of Japanese auto giant Honda Motor's new compact sports car "S660" at the Honda headquarters in Tokyo. Photo: AFP

Japan limped out of a brief recession in the last quarter of 2014.

volatile fresh food prices, rose 2.0pc in February, a benchmark measure used by the BoJ that strips out the impact of an April sales tax rise came in flat from a year ago.

That reading was far short of the bank's goal of sustained 2.0pc inflation and marks the first month of zero growth since May 2013, just after Tokyo launched its high-profile bid to kickstart the economy and conquer deflation.

Inflation is a key gauge of Mr Abe's plan to end years of stagnant or falling prices that have been blamed for holding back economic growth.

While deflation may sound good for Japanese consumers, it means people tend to put off buying because they do not expect prices to rise and hope they might even get goods cheaper down the line.

That, in turn, hurts producers and holds back their expansion and hiring plans, which is bad news for the wider economy. - AFP

While core inflation, excluding

The dismal price figures come after Bank of Japan chief Haruhiko Kuroda acknowledged this month that dragging the country out of years of deflation was proving to be "very challenging", and he warned that inflation may temporarily fall to zero.

While core inflation, excluding

PERCENT
3.4

Decline in Japan's factory output in February, according to data released yesterday

FRANKFURT

Greek finance minister pleads to end spat

FINGER-POINTING between Germany and Greece will only play into the hands of Europe's enemies, Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis said yesterday, pleading for the two countries to bury the hatchet.

"The only ones who profit from this toxic blame game are Europe's enemies," Mr Varoufakis wrote in a leader column in the business daily *Handelsblatt*.

Athens and Berlin have been engaged in a bitter war of words recently over plans by the new Greek government under Alexis Tsipras to renegotiate the terms of its massive international bailout.

European paymaster Germany has been leading the push for austerity in Europe, with Greece complaining that the punishing budget cuts demanded were damaging its economy and threatening to force it out of the eurozone.

Tensions came to a head earlier this month in a spat over a disputed video clip in which Mr Varoufakis was shown raising his middle



Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis. Photo: AFP

finger to Germany.

But the minister insists the video was doctored.

"This must stop," Mr Varoufakis wrote. "Only then can Greece, with support of its partners, focus on implementing effective reforms and growth-orientated policy strategies," he said.

- AFP

Swiss plan duty-free giant

SWITZERLAND'S Dufry group will acquire majority stake in chief rival World Duty Free (WDF) in a US\$3.8 billion (3.6 billion euro) deal to create the biggest travel retailer in the world.

The Basel-based company will shell out 10.25 euros per share for 51.1 percent share in airport tax- and duty-free retailer WDF, owned by Italy's Benetton family.

Dufry also made a mandatory offer for the rest of WDF and will launch a share offer to fund the acquisition, targeting what it called

"some key investors and banks". Dufry, which operates some 1650 stores in airports, cruise liners, railway stations and department stores around the world, employs 20,000 people in 60 countries.

The company last year acquired Zurich-based Nuance Group, a former Swissair subsidiary, for \$1.6 billion. Nuance is the sixth-largest player in the sector. The acquisition helped Dufry to register a record turnover of 4.2 billion Swiss francs (\$4.3 billion) last year - a 17.5pc rise over 2013. - AFP

LATAKIA

Syria starts cigar business as war rages

IN Syria's northeastern province of Latakia, workers roll the country's first locally made cigars, a new product being launched despite the devastating civil conflict now in its fifth year.

The workers are employed by Syria's state-run General Tobacco Company, which has decided to branch out into cigars in a bid to create desperately needed jobs and boost revenue. At the end of February, the firm's director

general said the initiative would create some 1000 new jobs in the country, which has seen its economy ravaged by the conflict. "The company will start selling the products on the local market very soon and then begin trying to export to friendly countries," says Salman al-Abbas, the company's deputy director-general.

Syria's conflict, which began with anti-government protests in March

2011 before spiralling into a brutal civil war, has taken a massive toll on the economy and killed more than 215,000 people. Before the war, the General Tobacco Company was among the country's most prosperous state-run enterprises, generating millions of dollars.

But, like many state companies, it has been under European Union sanctions since 2012, its assets frozen after accusations that it helped finance

the government's bloody crackdown against unrest.

The company has decided to press ahead anyway with production of the first locally made cigars.

"We decided to develop a new product without foreign expertise with the hope of supporting the economy," says Shadi Mualla, the plant manager, criticising what he termed "the economic war waged against Syria" by the West.

'2015 is the best year of my life because it's the year that we announced the start of production.'

Um Ali
Factory worker



Syrian employees work at the production of Syria's first locally made cigars at a factory in the northeastern Latakia province. Photo: AFP

The project has been three years in the making, with workers learning to hand-roll cigars "in accordance with international standards" at the factory in coastal Latakia. The province is a stronghold of the government of President Bashar al-Assad, whose father was born in the region, and is a heartland for the Alawite minority sect to which the president belongs. It has been largely insulated from the conflict and is where the tobacco for the cigars is grown.

Among those working at the factory is Um Ali, a woman in her 50s who wears a white headscarf.

She began in 2011, in the early days of the conflict, and says it has taken three years to master the subtle art of rolling cigars. "At first, I didn't even know what a cigar was," she says.

"One day, Hussam, an engineer here, said to us, 'Ladies, you're used to making [local delicacy] stuffed vine leaves, so try to roll cigars the same way,'" she adds. But Ms Ali says she went online to get additional tips, watching videos about cigar production in Cuba to pick up the best way to produce the luxury item.

Boasting that the cigars will be "100 percent Syrian", Ms Ali says "2015 is the best year of my life because it's the year that we announced the start of production".

At the moment, the factory employs some 130 workers, just six of whom are men, and produces 400 to 500 cigars a day. They are still in the testing phase, with part of production distributed to individuals who carry out taste tests and verify the quality.

Ms Ali and her colleagues work in a large hall under photos of Mr Assad and his father Hafez, sorting brown tobacco leaves to be rolled.

She can produce around 15 cigars on a good day, up from the five to 10 she was able to roll when she started.

"They have the flavour of Syrian tobacco, and they are made by Syrian workers," she says, taking a puff on one.

- AFP

World

WORLD EDITOR: Kayleigh Long

WASHINGTON

Thai police begin crackdown in anti-trafficking drive

THAI police are digging deeper into 1300 human trafficking cases in the latest drive to break up sophisticated networks and seek justice for the victims.

In an exclusive interview with the *Bangkok Post*, deputy national police chief Aek Angsanant said he has instructed state agencies to go over the cases with a fine-tooth comb and decide which ones need to be investigated further.

The 1300 cases date back to the day the 2008 Anti-Human Trafficking Act was introduced, he said.

"I've ordered another look into these cases. If the police think they can expand the investigation into any of these cases, they must proceed," said Pol Gen Aek, who has been assigned by national police chief Somyot Pumpunmuang to head the anti-human trafficking crime drive.

Police decided to review the cases after the government declared it was taking a zero-tolerance stance against trafficking.

However, non-governmental organisations are adopting a "wait and see" approach.

Police have been ordered to pay special attention to 280 human trafficking cases which took place last year and 50 cases which have occurred since January this year, according to Pol Gen Aek.

Police hope to gather systematic information to break up the human trafficking networks, bring the perpetrators to justice and ensure justice for the victims.

Authorities have started keeping systematic records of human trafficking cases only recently, he said.

The cases are being placed into four groups — prostitution, forced labour, organised begging and the smuggling of Rohingya people to a third country.

"We expect to get things in order by next month. We have drawn a timeline and set a clear goal in our operations," he said.

The Royal Thai Police Office (RTPO) has also tried to raise awareness about human trafficking among its officers and train them on how to detect when a person is being trafficked, according to Pol Gen Aek.

He said officers are using mobile chat applications to update operations related to human traf-

'We are doing all this not because of the TIP report, but we are aware of a need to improve the police's understanding and handling of the human trafficking problem.'

Aek Angsanant

Deputy national police chief

ficking to commanding officers at the RTPO.

Police Region 8 Bureau, in charge of the southern region which is identified as a transit hub for smuggled Rohingya, has gone a step further by engaging the community in helping combat the problem.

"They send police to schools to talk about the problem of human trafficking and how the community can act as eyes and

ears for police," Pol Gen Aek said.

Most victims of forced labour and illegal migrant workers who travel to the inner provinces come through border checkpoints in the northern and western regions, especially in Tak and Kanchanaburi.

Northeastern provinces have been identified as a transit point for the trafficking of women from Laos and Sa Kaeo's Aranyaprathet district is popular for organised begging.

The trafficking of Rohingya asylum seekers happens mainly in Ranong.

Based on intelligence information, police have identified 10 networks which are involved in the trafficking of Rohingya asylum seekers.

Arrest warrants have been issued for nine people suspected of trafficking Rohingya.

They will also face charges of money laundering.

He said the core agencies in charge of suppression and prevention are the Metropolitan Police Division 1-9, Provincial Police Region 1-9, and Southern Border Provinces Police Operation Centre.

The Anti-Human Trafficking Division, which is under the Central Investigation Bureau, acts as a supporting agency and is also responsible for expanding any investigations into existing cases.

"We work with NGOs, the private sector, and other agencies with good understanding. We have initiated projects where they can join hands, not only the NGOs but also those in the fisheries industry," he said.

Pol Gen Aek said he hopes the United States gives Thailand a fair assessment when it prepares the next annual global Trafficking in Persons report.

The US downgraded Thailand from Tier 2 to Tier 3 of the TIP report in June last year.

"We are doing all this not because of the TIP report, but we are aware of a need to improve the police's understanding and handling of the human trafficking problem," he said.

It is impossible for the police to prevent illegal activities, but when they do happen, we have to respond effectively and strengthen our preventative measures."

Meanwhile, deputy government spokesperson Maj Gen Sansern Kaewkamnerd said on March 28 that six more fishing workers are expected to return home from Indonesia on April 1.

He said their release is part of the government's efforts to seek the repatriation of Thai fishermen who have been arrested or left stranded in Indonesia.

Maj Gen Sansern said Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha is pushing for long-term solutions to a wide array of problems in the fisheries sector.

Under the prime minister's directive, authorities are compiling a list of fishing trawlers and operators with records of illegal activities such as illegal fishing and forced labour.

— *Bangkok Post*



IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP

South Korean Marine amphibious assault ship Ulsan is seen during a joint landing operation by US of Pohang on March 30. The drill is part of the combat readiness of the US and South Korea on the Korean Peninsula.

DHAKA

Atheist blogger

ANOTHER blogger was hacked to death in the Bangladesh capital yesterday, with police arresting two suspects after the latest attack targeting independent writers.

Three men attacked Washiqur Rahman, 27, near his home in the morning, just weeks after an American atheist blogger was murdered with machetes in Dhaka, a crime that triggered international outrage.

"Blogger Washiqur Rahman was brutally hacked to death this morning ... just 500 yards [460 metres] from his home at Dhaka's Begunbari area," said deputy police commissioner Wahidul Islam.

"They hacked him in his head and neck with big knives and once he fell on the ground they then hacked his body."

A fellow writer said Mr Rahman was an atheist blogger who wrote against religious fundamentalism on Facebook using a pen name, although this could not be confirmed by police.

"He is a friend of mine and a fellow warrior. He was an atheist and a believer in humanism," fellow blogger Asif Mohiuddin, who survived a brutal attack by Islamists in January 2013, told AFP from Berlin.

Islam said two suspects, who were students of Islamic schools, were arrested as they tried to flee the scene but a third escaped. Police have recovered three large knives from the site.

"They are around 20 years old and are being interrogated. One of them

is a student of a madrasa in Hathazari, Chittagong and another a student of another madrasa in Dhaka," he said.

Mr Rahman is the fifth writer attacked since 2004, including two atheist bloggers who were murdered in the Muslim-majority country in the last two years.

The killing of American Avijit Roy last month sparked uproar abroad and at home, where hundreds of secular activists held protests for days to demand justice.

'He [was] a friend of mine and a fellow warrior. He was an atheist and a believer in humanism.'

Asif Mohiuddin

Blogger and attack survivor

They also slammed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's secular government for not doing enough to protect humanist writers.

Fellow bloggers and secular writers reacted sharply to news of the latest attack, with secular activists

2014'S WAR ON TRAFFICKING

Snapshots of measures to combat trafficking in persons and legal proceedings in 2014

1 Reduction in arrests due to:

- Improvement of system to register migrant workers
- Inspection and monitoring of employers/operators at sea and on shore
- Strict law enforcement

2 Legal proceedings against offenders in 2014

- 280 arrested in human trafficking cases
- Handled by police: 205 cases forwarded to prosecutors, two cases dropped, 73 cases under investigation
- Handled by prosecutors: 155 cases indicted, four cases dropped, 48 cases under review
- Handled by court: 47 cases ruled, 108 cases on trial

3 Expanded investigation into human trafficking rings in 2014

- 3.1 Human trafficking
 - Two prostitution networks
 - Three forced labour networks
 - One Rohingya/money laundering network



3.2 Smuggling of people

- Five Myanmar, Rohingya, Muslims with unknown nationality networks

3.3 Cases related to human trafficking

- 58 cases: procurement for lewd conducts
- 734 cases: procurement for prostitution
- 491 cases: smuggling of illegal migrants
- 940 cases: providing shelter to illegal migrants
- 5,350 cases: working without permits

Total 7,573 cases

Source: The Royal Thai Police Office

POSTgraphics

Sierra Leone ends three-day Ebola lockdown

WORLD 18



ult vehicles fire smoke shells to land on the seashore and South Korean Marines in the southeastern port of the annual joint exercise Foal Eagle to enhance South Korea supporting forces in defense of the Korean

hacked to death

calling for protests later yesterday.

“He was murdered because we have a culture of impunity here. He was a progressive free thinker and was against religious fundamentalism,” Imran Sarker, head of Blogger and Online Activists Network in Bangladesh, told AFP.

“We condemn this attack and have urged bloggers to join protests,” he said.

Mr Sarker said it appeared that Rahman used to write using a pen-name Kutshit Hasher Chhana (Ugly Duckling).

Police have arrested one suspect over the death of Bangladesh-born Roy, who was also the author of a series of books.

His best-selling *The Virus of Faith* was hugely contentious in Bangladesh, an officially secular state where around 90 percent of people are Muslim.

Witnesses said Roy and wife had been returning from a book fair when they were both hauled off their rickshaw on a busy street by at least two attackers who then slashed them with machetes.

A court this month ordered seven university students and a Muslim cleric to stand trial for the 2013 machete murder of atheist blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider, whom the suspects claimed had defamed Islam.

— AFP



A relative of slain blogger Washiqur Rahman grieves by his body. Photo: AFP



Syrian forces regroup after Islamists seize Idlib City

WORLD 17

NAURU

Details emerge on refugee deal

REFUGEES who met with Cambodian immigration officials last week on the Pacific island of Nauru were told they would be given permanent visas and travel documents but would have to pay for English-language education and would lose all but emergency financial support after a year, a refugee said.

Two men attended the meeting where Cambodia explained how the resettlement program signed between Australia and Cambodia in September 2014 would work, but according to a refugee in the meeting, attendees only went out of curiosity and were not interested in moving to the Kingdom.

“We are traded like slaves between two corrupted governments. One wealthy but obsessed by the boats, the other one hungry enough to commit any crime [for] money”, the refugee, who cannot be named for security reasons, said.

“These two [countries] have created a great torture machine

to reach their nasty political, economic purposes and are blessed enough to have the support of the all international organisations like [the] UN.

“Many people have died. Many children [have been] sexually abused. Many women [have been] raped ... and everybody [is] calling for investigations instead of any real, practical help. We don’t need your investigation. We don’t need your sympathy. We don’t beg any fake respect. We just don’t want to be slaves anymore.”

According to the agreement signed by the two countries on September 26, Australia would cover all the costs of resettlement and later said it would also give Cambodia an additional US\$35 million in aid to sweeten the deal.

General Khieu Sopheak, spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior, and Kerm Sarin, director of the ministry’s Refugee Department, could not be reached for comment

yesterday.

The International Organisation for Migration, which has agreed to help facilitate the “voluntary” transfer of refugees from Nauru as long as a number of conditions are met, was also present at last week’s meeting, according to IOM’s Asia Pacific spokesperson Joe Lowry.

“We would have had no talks with anyone unless they had expressed an interest in relocating. That hasn’t happened, to the best of my knowledge,” he said.

A spokesperson for Australia’s minister of immigration could not be reached yesterday.

The refugee on Nauru said the community felt criminalised, as other groups who arrived by boat at the same time had been allowed to move to Australia.

“Being [a] refugee is not [a] crime ... We are [neither] criminals nor slaves. We are ordinary people who are fighting for their right to live.” — *Phnom Penh Post*

JAKARTA

Expert witnesses called for Bali Nine

LAWYERS fighting to save the lives of two Australian drug smugglers on death row returned to court yesterday to challenge the Indonesian president’s rejection of their pleas for mercy.

They presented an expert defence in an attempt to show that judges have the right to rule on the clemency issue, despite an earlier ruling to the contrary.

Myuran Sukumaran and Andrew Chan, the ringleaders of the so-called “Bali Nine” drug trafficking gang, were sentenced to death in 2006 for trying to smuggle heroin out of Indonesia.

Their appeals for clemency, typically the final chance to avoid the firing squad, were recently rejected by Indonesian President Joko Widodo, who has taken a hard line

against traffickers.

The men were moved this month from jail on Bali to Nusakambangan prison island off Java, where they will be executed along with several other foreign drug convicts.

In the latest attempt to save the men from the firing squad, their legal team has challenged Mr Widodo’s decision to reject the clemency pleas, arguing that he failed to assess their rehabilitation or give reasons for his decision.

The Jakarta State Administrative Court dismissed the bid last month. The Australians’ lawyers are now appealing that decision.

Yesterday Otong Rosadi, a law lecturer presented as an expert witness, argued the judges did have the right to rule on the president’s

decision after a constitutional amendment around 15 years ago, which states that public policies can be challenged in court.

“After that amendment, the president’s prerogative rights were no longer absolute,” he said.

Mr Rosadi, from Ekasakti University on Indonesia’s Sumatra island, also said that “the right place to contest that presidential decision is the Administrative Court”.

But he added that there had been no previous court cases relating to the president’s decision to reject a clemency plea.

Jakarta originally said the executions would take place in February, but has held off in the face of public outcry and last-minute appeal efforts.

— AFP

BANGKOK

Thai monks to pray in protest

SEVERAL thousand monks and lay people are expected to visit the Royal Plaza today for a protest against reform proposals set out in a National Reform Council (NRC) report.

The mass gathering has been called by Phra Methithammajarn, vice-rector of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and adviser to the Buddhist Association of Thailand (BAT).

The gathering comes after the NRC last week endorsed a report compiled by a now-defunct NRC panel for the protection of Buddhism chaired by Paiboon Nititawan.

The report, which was accepted by a vote of 186-7, contains recommendations for Buddhism reform and is expected to be forwarded by NRC chair Thienchay Kiranandana to the cabinet soon.

The prayer event – which is described as a ceremony to give moral support to the government in its attempt to protect Buddhism – is a gesture against the NRC’s decision to

accept the Paiboon report.

Early this month, BAT demanded Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha scrap the Paiboon committee or face a mass gathering by monks and lay people.

Those against the report said they were concerned the NRC panel was destroying Buddhism rather than protecting it. BAT called off the rally after the Paiboon panel unexpectedly disbanded itself.

The highlights of the reform proposals outlined in the report are: enactment of a law to govern and manage assets held by temples and monks; amendment to the Sangha Act to streamline the Supreme Sangha Council; setting up mechanisms to prevent distortion of Buddha’s teachings; and reforms of the education system for monks.

The panel found that assets belonging to temples and monks have never been scrutinised or declared publicly, and that several monks use their positions for personal gain. The

panel also found some monks and temples have violated the monks’ code of conduct and distorted the core teachings of Buddhism.

The committee’s report follows the scandal involving Wat Phra Dhammakaya and its controversial abbot Phra Dhammachayo. Some observers believe Wat Phra Dhammakaya and its abbot are the main targets of the NRC’s reform campaign.

Meanwhile, a source said the move by BAT should be watched closely because it may trigger a violent religious conflict, posing challenges for a government keen to maintain order.

According to the source, groups of monks and lay people have submitted petitions against the panel and are preparing for the protest.

The Paiboon committee’s supporters, meanwhile, have created a web page called the National Council for Buddhism Reforms as a tool to campaign for the reforms.

— *Bangkok Post*

LAUSANNE

Crunch time for nuclear talks

FOREIGN ministers from major powers pressed their Iranian counterpart yesterday as they sought to slot into place the final but trickiest pieces of a deal curtailing Tehran's nuclear program as today's deadline loomed.

Britain's Philip Hammond said as he became the last of the foreign ministers to arrive in a rainy Switzerland that they "believe a deal can be done". "But it has to be a deal which puts the bomb beyond Iran's reach," he said.

With time of the essence, US Secretary of State John Kerry, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, Hammond and the top diplomats of Russia, China, France and Germany are meeting for the first time since November.

They have set a deadline of midnight tonight to agree the outlines of a deal that they hope will put an Iranian

nuclear bomb out of reach and end a crisis that has threatened to escalate dangerously for the past 12 years.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said that after 18 months of negotiations, they were in the "endgame". Iran's lead negotiator Abbas Aragchi said they were in the "final phase".

But Mr Aragchi also said the talks were "very difficult" while Mr Steinmeier cautioned that the "final metres are the most difficult".

The framework deal, if it can be hammered out, is meant to be finalised by June 30. But opponents have already been lining up to say it stops short of ensuring Iran does not get the bomb.

These include US President Barack Obama's Republican opponents and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who on March 29 launched a blistering attack on the "dangerous" deal.



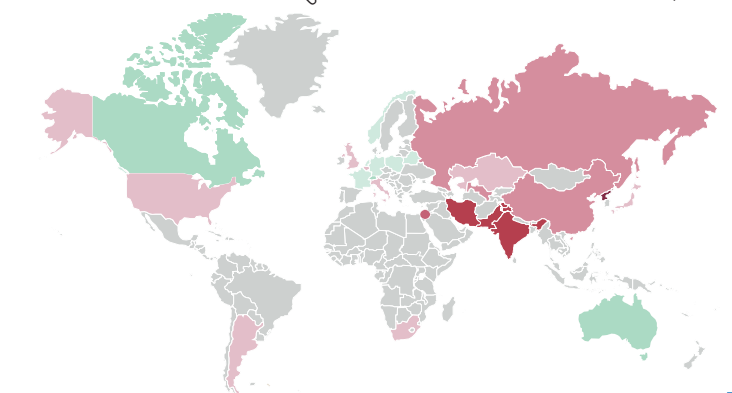
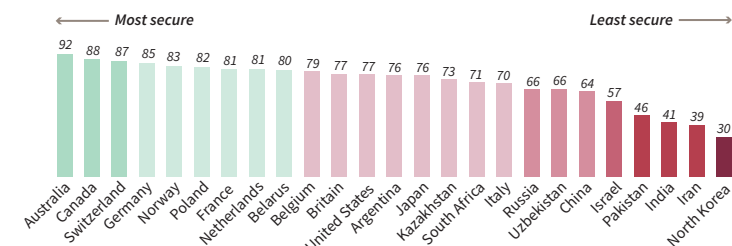
US Secretary of State John Kerry waits with others before a meeting with P5+1, European Union and Iranian officials at the Beau Rivage Palace Hotel in Lausanne, Switzerland, on March 30, 2015, during Iran nuclear talks. Photo: AFP

Nuclear materials security index

► Countries ranked for the security of their atomic materials in index developed by the Nuclear Threat Initiative and the Economist Intelligence Unit

► Assessment of 25 states that hold more than a kilo of weapons-usable nuclear materials

2014 NTI index scores



Source: NTI/EIU

AFP

"I just don't understand why we would sign an agreement with a group of people who in my opinion have no intention of keeping their word," US House Speaker John Boehner told CNN.

Israel is widely believed to be the sole, if undeclared, nuclear-armed power in the Middle East.

Western diplomats say that some areas in what would be a highly complex jigsaw puzzle of an accord are tentatively ready to be put into place. But they caution there is a long way to go.

One Western diplomat said Iran had "more or less" agreed to slash the number of its centrifuge enrichment machines from 20,000 to 6000 and to ship abroad most of its stockpile of low-enriched uranium.

This would make it a much more lengthy process to further purify these stocks to weapons-grade, were Iran to attempt to do so. Iran denies having any such aim, saying its program is purely peaceful.

Iranian officials dismissed the numbers as "speculation", with Mr Aragchi saying ruling out sending the stocks abroad, although he said "other options" were being examined.

"We have almost come to a solution, but it is out of the question to send the stocks abroad," Mr Aragchi said.

This could include diluting the low-enriched uranium or converting it to another form.

But nevertheless Iranian officials have expressed guarded optimism that a breakthrough may be at hand.

"Getting to an accord is doable. Solutions have been found for numerous questions. We are still working on two or three issues," Mr Aragchi said.

In addition to scaling down its nuclear program, the powers want the facilities that remain to be subject to an unprecedented level of inspections by the UN atomic watchdog to ensure there is no cheating.

Its underground facility at Fordo

would also likely be barred from uranium enrichment, diplomats said, although it might be kept open for research purposes.

One of the thorniest issues is the lifting of UN, EU and US sanctions that have choked Iran's economy by strangling its oil exports and banks.

Mr Aragchi said on March 29 there must be a "precise framework" for lifting sanctions. The duration of any deal - the US wants at least 10 and possibly up to 15 years - is also a point of contention.

"There are six [UN Security Council] resolutions that have to be annulled," Mr Aragchi said.

But a senior US official said all sides had agreed to a phased, step-by-step approach, although the exact formula had yet to be found.

Another difficult area is possible limits Iran's research and development of newer, faster centrifuges, which would in theory enable it to make material for a weapon much more quickly. - AFP

TASHKENT

Uzbeki elections a foregone conclusion

UZBEKISTAN'S President Islam Karimov looks certain to claim victory in presidential polls after all three of the 77-year-old's challengers endorsed his bid to extend his 25-year-rule.

As polls closed in the Central Asian state yesterday, officials claimed that 91 per cent of the country's registered voters had cast their ballots.

Since independence, Mr Karimov's presidency has been associated with lengthy presidential terms, landslide victories over low profile opponents and high turnouts at state elections.

Mr Karimov, accompanied by his wife Tatyana Karimova, cast his ballot at midday in the weakly-contested vote in the country of more than 30 million, where voting began at 6:00 am (0100 GMT) as snow fell in the streets of the capital Tashkent.

Mr Karimov, who won around 90 percent of the vote in 2007, is running for a five-year term following two seven-year stints.

Before those, the man who held onto his position when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 extended his post-Soviet rule by referendum in 1996.

While exit polls are prohibited under Uzbek law, many voters in Tashkent

said they had voted for Mr Karimov.

Burkhon, a 63-year transport mechanic who declined to give his surname, cited periodic unrest in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, as reasons for casting his vote for the longtime strongman.

"We haven't had such bad things, thanks to Mr Karimov, and we don't want them happening in the future," Burkhon told AFP.

Gulhoyo Khujanova, an 18-year-old student, told AFP: "I voted for our president, Islam Karimov. I am really satisfied with what he is doing for young people."

One voter, a taxi driver who requested anonymity, was undecided, saying: "I really wanted our respected President Karimov to retire, give the rule to someone younger and enjoy his happy retirement... But this is not going to happen, so I don't care now and I don't know who to vote for."

The ageing Mr Karimov stressed the importance of stability during the six-week campaign.

"What do Uzbek people need? We need peace and well-being," Mr Karimov told the crowd.

On March 25 he defended the need for "strong government", telling a small group of voters in comments aired by state media that otherwise "there will be chaos in society."

He added: "The time will come when we will give full freedom to our citizens, all human freedoms, and first and foremost, freedom of the media."

Mr Karimov has continually warned of the danger posed by Islamic radicals based in Afghanistan, some of whom are ethnic Uzbeks.

"If we retain stability in Uzbekistan, we secure order in the entire Central Asian region," Rafik Sayfullin, a political analyst based in Tashkent, told AFP. "Let these elections pass normally so that we can keep the same team."

Strategically located Uzbekistan provided support to the US-led military operation in its southern neighbour Afghanistan and maintains close ties with both Russia and China.

More than 300 international observers from 43 different countries are monitoring the vote. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are expected to issue its assessment of the ballot today.

- AFP

SYDNEY

G20 gaffe sees world leaders' details leaked

THE personal details of world leaders travelling to Australia for the G20 summit were mistakenly emailed to a member of the Asian Cup football local organising committee, a report said yesterday.

Australia's immigration department confirmed there had been a data breach, but gave no details and did not say whether the world leaders had been informed.

"The breach was immediately referred to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner," a spokeswoman for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said in a statement.

"The data was immediately deleted by the recipient and was not distributed further."

The Guardian reported that an Australian immigration official accidentally emailed the passport numbers, visa details and other information about world leaders including Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin to an Asian Cup

organiser on November 7.

Other leaders who came to Brisbane for the November 15-16 event and whose information was exposed included British Prime Minister David Cameron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Chinese President Xi Jinping, it said.

The Guardian said details obtained under Australia's freedom of information laws showed that data relating to 31 international leaders was mistakenly emailed to the wrong person due to human error.

The mistake arose after the immigration worker failed to check that the autofill function on the email system had addressed the email correctly, it said.

Australia hosted the Asian Cup in January.

The Australian immigration spokeswoman said the department had reviewed and strengthened its email protocols to limit and contain future breaches. - AFP



IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP

A member of the Iraqi security forces smokes a cigarette atop a damaged house in the southern entrance of the city of Tikrit on March 29 during the military operation to retake the northern Iraqi city from Islamic State (IS) jihadists. 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.

BEIRUT

Syrian forces regroup after Idlib assault

SYRIAN troops regrouped on March 29 after a coalition including al-Qaeda's local affiliate seized the city of Idlib, the second provincial capital to fall from government control.

The capture is a blow to the government and raises the prospect that Idlib will become the effective capital of territory held by al-Qaeda's Syrian wing, Al-Nusra Front, analysts said.

On March 29, the city in north-western Syria was largely quiet, after sporadic government aerial bombardment overnight, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said.

A security source in Damascus and Syrian media said government forces were regrouping outside the city.

"Forces are repositioning on the outskirts of Idlib in order to face the terrorist battalions ... and be in the best position to repel their attack," a security source in Damascus told AFP.

Al-Watan newspaper, which is close to the government, said troops had carried out a "successful operation regrouping south of the city".

"Army reinforcements were sent to start a military operation to regain control of the areas that were vacated after the evacuation of the local population to safe areas," the daily added, citing a source on the ground.

A coalition of Islamist forces overran Idlib on March 28, after an

operation that began just five days earlier and killed at least 170 opposition and regime forces.

The city becomes only the second provincial capital to fall from regime control after Raqa, in northern Syria, which was seized by rebel groups in March 2013.

Those groups were subsequently ousted from the city by the Islamic State jihadist group, which has made Raqa the de facto Syrian capital of its self-declared Islamic "caliphate" on Syrian and Iraqi territory.

The group that seized Idlib calls itself the Army of Conquest and includes Al-Nusra and the powerful Islamist group Ahrar al-Sham, as well as other smaller conservative Islamist rebel forces.

Ahrar al-Sham, which lost 40 fighters according to the Observatory, issued a call for Idlib's victors "to put partisan interests aside" and "give a good image of Islam in administering" the city.

The rebels touted their victory on social media, with Al-Nusra's Twitter accounts posting photos of its fighters in front of government buildings.

Al-Nusra also posted video of its forces entering a prison in the city, where they discovered the bodies of detainees apparently executed by government forces before their withdrawal.



Fighters from a coalition of Islamist forces walk on March 29 in the Syrian city of Idlib, the second provincial capital to fall from government control. Photo: AFP

The Observatory said at least 15 prisoners had been found dead at a military intelligence detention facility in the city.

The city's capture was praised by opposition forces across the spectrum of Syria's uprising, which began in March 2011 with anti-government protests before descending into a brutal war after a regime crackdown.

The opposition National Coalition, which is recognised by much of the international community, welcomed it as "an important victory on the road to the full liberation of Syrian territory".

Its statement made no reference to the composition of the forces that

seized the city, saying only that it had "confidence" they would protect civilians and abide by international law.

Analysts said Al-Nusra's role in Idlib's capture had put the Coalition and other "moderate" rebels in a difficult position.

"The capture of Idlib is a huge boost for the Syrian opposition, but it's one that once again will serve to underline the relative inadequacies of genuine 'moderates,'" said Charles Lister, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Doha Centre think tank.

Al-Nusra and its allies already control a large portion of Idlib province, after a November offensive in

which they ousted several Western-backed opposition groups.

And last year, the group announced plans to eventually establish an "emirate" that analysts say is intended to rival IS's "caliphate".

"Considering the posture established by Al-Nusra in Idlib over the last nine months, it seems pretty implausible that the city won't eventually end up representing Nusra's effective capital and stronghold," Lister said.

More than 215,000 people have been killed in Syria since the conflict began, and half the country's population has been displaced. - AFP

FREETOWN

Sierra Leone ends Ebola lockdown

SIERRA Leoneans are once again allowed to leave their homes after the government announced the end of a three-day nationwide lockdown aimed at preventing a resurgence of the deadly Ebola virus.

During the curfew period - which was ordered by President Ernest Bai Koroma and ran from March 27 until March 29 - some 26,000 volunteers went door-to-door to check for sick people and raise awareness about the disease.

Officials at the National Ebola Response Centre (NERC) said locals had overwhelmingly complied with the lockdown, the second time in six months the country's 6 million residents were told to stay indoors over Ebola concerns.

The focus this time was on hot-spots in the capital as well as areas in the north and west of the country.

"The campaign went well and we are pleased over the level of compliance," the head of NERC's Situation Room, Obi Sesay, told AFP.

Official figures detailing the results of the campaign will be

released on March 31, he added.

The latest lockdown was called over fears that the disease that has killed about 3700 in Sierra Leone was making a comeback in parts of the country.

It was disquieting news after World Health Organization officials declared in January the epidemic was finally declining in west Africa after sparking a global health scare.

Witnesses and local media said the quarantine period passed off peacefully with the exception of one incident in the Kaffu Bullom chiefdom in the northern district of Port Loko, where a group of health workers came under attack.

"Yesterday [March 28] we visited a quarantine house where we discovered a seven-year-old boy who was looking sick," medical worker Festus James said.

"We wanted to take him to the hospital for further checks when we were pelted with stones and water was thrown at us. We had to flee from the area together with our two security guides," he told reporters.

"It was all very terrifying."

In Kambia, also in the north near the border with Guinea, media reports said some people took refuge in the bush to avoid encountering the health teams.

Following the outbreak in December 2013 in neighbouring Guinea, the Ebola virus spread to Sierra Leone and Liberia, which have



Sierra Leone health officials check passengers transiting at the border crossing with Liberia in Jendema on March 28. Photo: AFP

3700

The estimated number of people believed to have died from Ebola in Sierra Leone

together seen over 10,300 deaths since, according to the WHO.

One of the deadliest viruses

known to man, Ebola is spread only through direct contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person

showing symptoms, such as fever or vomiting.

- AFP

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SANAA

Dozens killed in allied strikes

SAUDI-LED warplanes bombed Yemen's main international airport and a renegade troop base in the capital on March 29, as Arab leaders vowed to pummel Iranian-backed rebels until they surrender.

The raids on the country's main airport came just hours after UN workers were evacuated following deadly fighting that has sent tensions soaring between Tehran and other Middle East powers.

India and Pakistan also moved to airlift their citizens from the chaos-wracked country.

Yemen's President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi has urged his Arab allies to keep bombing until the Huthi Shiite rebels are defeated, branding them Iran's "puppet".

His Foreign Minister Riyadh Yassin said there could be "no negotiations and dialogue" with the rebels "until the legitimate government has control over all Yemeni lands".

Arab League chief Nabil al-Arabi said at a regional summit in Egypt the offensive would last until the rebels "surrender" their weapons and withdraw from areas they seized.

The Huthis and allied renegade military units have overrun much of Yemen and prompted Mr Hadi to flee what had been his last remaining refuge in the main southern city Aden for Saudi Arabia.

Dozens of people have been killed in

days of clashes in Aden, dimming prospects of Hadi returning any time soon.

At least 38 people were killed on March 29 near the oil region of Usaylan in southern Shabwa province after tribespeople attacked rebel positions, security and tribal sources said.

In the capital, witnesses reported three loud explosions and a large fire when Sanaa International Airport was bombed during a fourth night of Saudi-led air raids.

"This was the first time they hit the runway" since the campaign began, an aviation source said.

A civil aviation official at the airport later told AFP repair work on the runway had begun.

More than 200 staff from the UN, embassies and other organisations had been flown out from Sanaa on March 28.

A jumbo jet took off from Hodeida in western Yemen with nearly 500 Pakistanis on board, including Islamabad's ambassador, officials said.

India said it had received permission from the Arab coalition to airlift out its stranded citizens and would also send a ship.

Saudi-led air strikes on March 29 hit a hill overlooking the Sanaa presidential palace, held by Huthis and their allies, as well as several bases in the port city of Al-Makha, witnesses said.

Overnight strikes had hit the rebel Republican Guard headquarters at Al-Subaha base in Sanaa, killing 15



A woman weeps as evacuated relatives arrive at Benazir Bhutto International Airport in Islamabad yesterday. Photo: AFP

soldiers, a military official said.

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.

Saudi-led strikes also hit an airbase in rebel-held Hodeida, witnesses said.

Other raids targeted a base of the First Artillery Brigade in Saada, the Huthis' northern stronghold.

Spokesperson Ahmed Assiri told reporters in Riyadh the "coalition operations will increase pressure on Huthi militia" who will "no longer have a safe haven within Yemen".

He also said coalition forces had "ensured a safe corridor" by temporarily suspending operations around Hodeida to allow the Pakistani evacuation.

At the summit in Sharm el-Sheikh,

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said Arab leaders had "agreed on the principle" of creating a joint military force.

The proposal has taken on added urgency since the Huthis seized swathes of Yemen, although Saudi Arabia has said there are no immediate plans to send in ground troops.

The Sunni Arab coalition is said to have been spurred into action by the prospect of a Shiite Iran-backed regime seizing power in impoverished Yemen on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

Russia has voiced concern that the clashes could undermine nuclear negotiations between world powers and Iran in the Swiss city of Lausanne, although diplomats said a tentative deal was emerging.

In talks with Yassin in Egypt, Russian deputy foreign minister

Mikhail Bogdanov called on "all sides of the conflict to cease military action in the name of preserving the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen", his ministry said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a vociferous critic of Tehran, denounced the "Iran-Lausanne-Yemen axis which is dangerous for all of humanity and which must be stopped".

According to Saudi Arabia, more than 10 countries have joined the coalition defending Mr Hadi. Washington and the UK have pledged logistical support.

Late on March 29, anti-Huthi local fighters were reported to have retaken Aden airport with the loss of five men, and nine rebels killed.

Nearly 100 people are reported to have died in violence in Aden in recent days. - AFP

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Pageant contestants outstanding in their field



NANDAR AUNG

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WHAT kind of beauty contest does away with evening gowns, high heels and a catwalk? How about a pageant featuring work garb, rakes and slingshots?

Enter Miss Farmer 2015, Myanmar's very own agricultural-themed pageant.

Held over March 27-29 at the Myanmar Convention Centre, the contest – now in its third year – saw over 70 entrants from around the countryside, including Mandalay, Irrawaddy and Bago regions, and Kachin, Kayin, Shan and Mon states.

"This year the competition is different than the previous years because we let contestants wear their ethnic costumes," said U Soe Win, secretary of the Myanmar Paddy Producers Association. "We gave points based on their costumes and also their performances. This makes the competition much more alive. It is more than just beauty pageant competitions – there

are traditions."

With prizes totalling US\$10,000, Miss Farmer 2015 showcases the lives of farming women working behind the scenes in Myanmar's agricultural sector and honours them for the contribution they make.

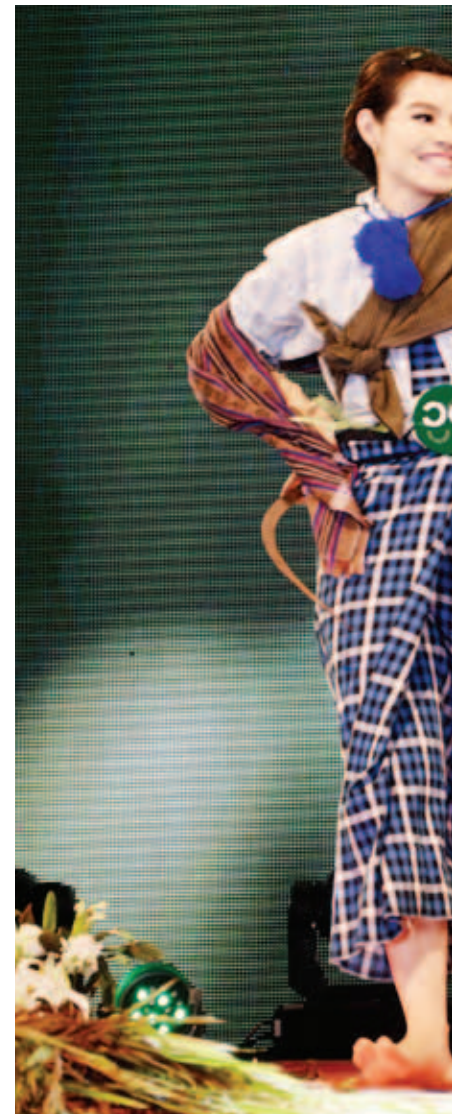
Barefoot and dressed in the traditional short longyi and blouse, contestants battled it out in front of giant screens displaying rural scenes. Competition rounds included questions testing their knowledge of agriculture and demonstrations of farming techniques such as rice-threshing and slingshot marksmanship.

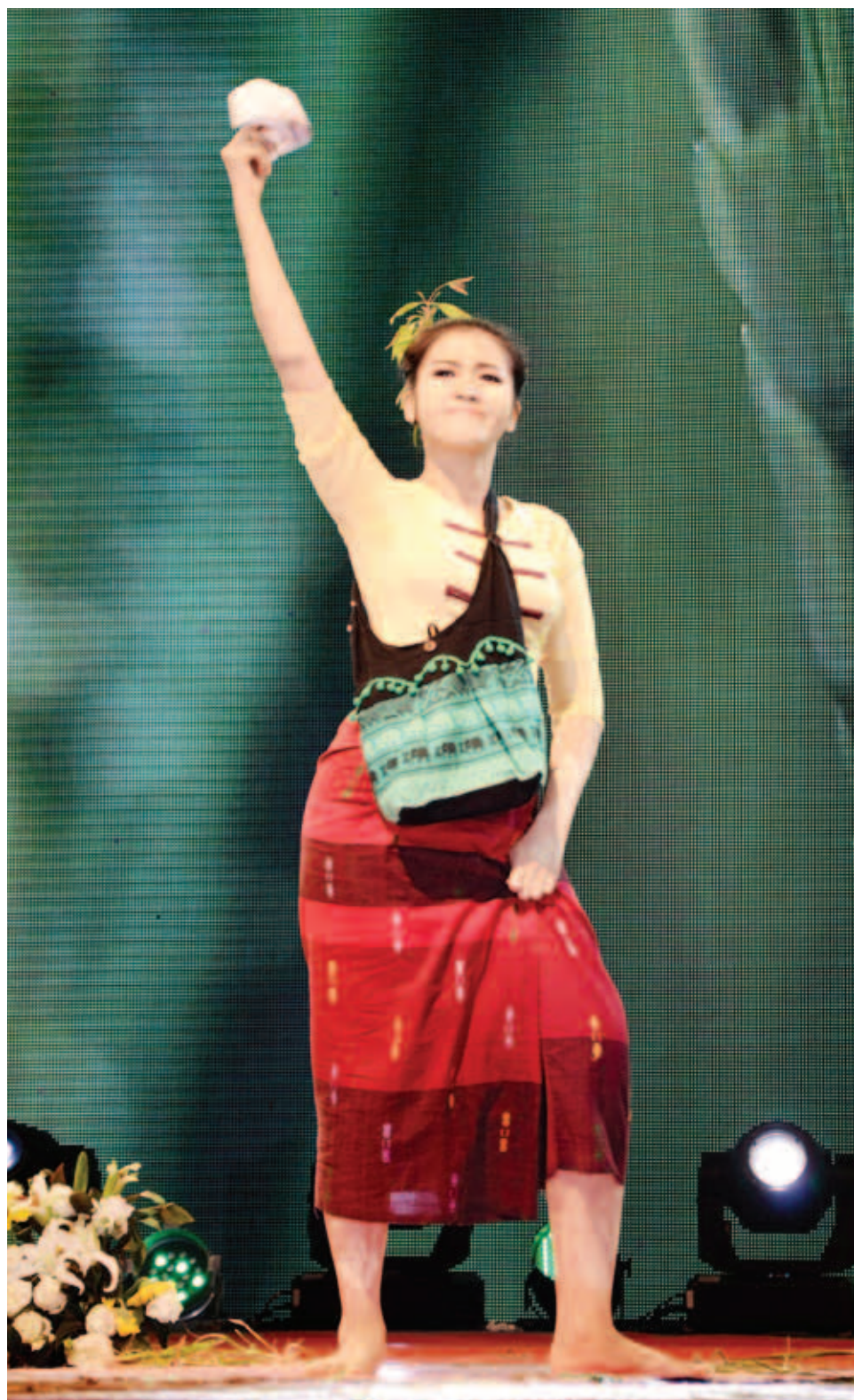
The Miss Farmer 2015 crown was won by Win Lae Phway, from Hlaing Tharyar township, who took away a prize of \$5000. First runner-up Khin Theint Theint Thu, from Kayin State, won \$3000, while L Mi Ko, from Ayeyarwady Region, won the second runner-up prize of \$2000. Awards were also presented for Miss

Member Choice, Miss Photogenic and Best Costume, awarded to contestants from Mandalay, Shan State and Kachin State, respectively.

Part of the Myanmar Agro-Tech expo, the Miss Farmer contest has been held annually since 2013 and is supported by the Myanmar Paddy Producers Associations. The competition is open to fit, healthy, single Myanmar women between 18 and 25 years old, measuring over 5 feet 3 inches (1.6 metres) tall and weighing at least 110 pounds (50 kilograms).

"I've seen similar pageants which are more in the Western tradition, with evening gowns, but this is not like those. All my friends wore the traditional clothes and so did I. I was so proud of that," said 24-year-old Win Lae Phway, winner of Miss Farmer 2015. "I prepared hard for this competition and I also got lots of experiences and learnt a lot from this competition. I am happy and proud of myself that I won this prize."





Miss Farmer 2015 contestants show off their farming skills on stage. Photos: Thiri Lu



Thai bird flies to Yangon

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AGE has not withered him, nor custom staled the infinite variety of Thongchai McIntyre. The Thai singer and actor, very big in Myanmar in the 1990s, looks no older now.

"Sabai Sabai" and "Kob Jai Jing Jing" were most popular songs in his repertoire. On March 29 Thongchai met first with fans at the airport, then with journalists at Taw Win Garden Hotel on Pyay Road to promote Thai-Myanmar friendship and to visit his fans. He also explained why he looks so young, at 57.

"I live for music and for love. I'm optimistic about life, and there is a power in optimism. I do a lot of sport, maybe that's another reason," he said.

Also known as Bird Thongchai, the singer was born in 1958 to a musical family. His debut album *Hard Sai Sai-Lom Song-Rao* was released in 1986, bringing him international fame. He was first singer from Thailand to be awarded an MTV award, in 1991.

"My parents were very poor, but they loved each other very much. My earliest memories are of my mother singing while my father played guitar," he said.

His father died when he was a child.

"We didn't know what wealth was,

but we could live in happiness even in poverty. My mother taught me to live happily without wealth. Love created happiness," he said.

His mother also taught him to be optimistic, and to lead a happy life.

"There were many days we didn't eat. But my mother always said love would create meals. It's true," he said.

Thongchai arrived in Yangon on the Fun and Friendship Experience Exchange Program sponsored by Taw Win Centre and Grammy Public Company, organised by Story Book Entertainment. During his trip, he will be photographed for *Praw* magazine.

"I will study Myanmar culture, visit Shwedagon Pagoda and other important places. On my return home, I will tell the Thai people about Myanmar and what I have learned here," he said.

During his stay, he will wear Myanmar traditional costume designed by designer Min Thet San.

"I want to wear a longyi. I want to see how Myanmar audiences support me wearing a longyi and dancing," he said.

Many of his songs were covered by singer and actor Yan Aung in the Myanmar language and became popular in the late 1990s.

"Sharing is good. But we should respect songwriters and composers. It is not easy to produce an idea and the original is rare and long-lasting," Thongchai said.



Thongchai McIntyre appears in Myanmar this week. Photo: Naing Wynn Htoon

Interfaith exhibition aims to improve attitudes

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BRINGING people together through art is the goal of a group of 11 students from the Theik Khar Myanmar Institute. Their exhibition, "Love Bombing", opens this afternoon in Hlaing township.

Ko Htet Arkar Latt, a spokesperson for the group, who are studying media literacy, told *The Myanmar Times* yesterday that the exhibition would include creative arts, poem recitals, painting, photography and articles related to co-existence between people of

different religions. The students are concerned about the role played by the media, particularly social media, in inter-religious conflicts, and specifically in shaping attitudes towards Islam.

"This is the first time such an event has been open to the public so that we can share our attitudes to interfaith. It is important to accept the interfaith ideology, especially nowadays, if we want to build a peaceful community," he said.

"I believe people love and appreciate art. We can convey feelings, ideas, philosophy and lessons learned through the creation of art to the rest of society," he said.

Organiser Ma Khin Zar Mon said,

'It is important to accept the interfaith ideology...if we want to build a peaceful community,'

Ko Htet Arkar Latt
Spokesperson, "Love Bombing"

"Local Muslims face discrimination from other religions. The main problem is the internet, especially Facebook. Some people believe everything they see on Facebook.

"We want people to understand that all religions are similar, and support peace," she said.

Ko Htet Arkar Latt said discrimination existed regarding difference and diversity, but it was important to spread awareness of the capacity for a change in attitude towards peaceful coexistence in the community.

"We have Rakhine students from Maungdaw and Muslims. At first they could hardly face each other, but later they learned how to coexist," he said.

The non-governmental institute Theik Khar Myanmar Institute was established in 2008 to share concepts relating to interfaith ideology for sustainable and peaceful development in the community.

Six interfaith documentaries from around the world will be screened during the event and some students will recite peace poems and sing peace songs.

The event will take place from 4pm to 8pm at 159, Sabei Chan 3rd Street, 11 quarter, Hlaing township. Entrance is free. Additional details are available from 09-458041396, 09-250644233 and 09-422218165, or by emailing lovebombingcampaign@gmail.com.



IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP / Noah Seelam

Young Indian women launch lanterns during an event in Hyderabad. The lantern festival was held to help empower women in industrial sectors – especially those working as labourers.

What's on

TODAY
"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
"Love Bombing" exhibition. Art related to coexistence and cooperation between

the different religions in Myanmar. Theik Khar Myanmar (Dignity Myanmar), 159, Sabei Chan 3rd street, 11 quarter, Hlaing Township. 4-8pm

TOMORROW
Mojito Night, The Lab, 70A Shwegoneading Rd, Bahan, 5:30-10pm
Girls night out. Mojo Bar, 135 Inya Road, Bahan 8pm
Jazz music and dinner. Rendez-Vous restaurant and bar, Institut Francais, 340 Pyay Road 7:30-9:30pm

Got an event? | List it in What's On! | whatsonmt@gmail.com

Myanmar startup steps into spotlight

CATHERINE TRAUTWEIN

YOU can't fit much into 90 seconds, the length of time allowed for final pitches on Channel NewsAsia's entrepreneurial reality show *Start-UP*, which recently aired its second season.

Winning competitor and founder of Myanmar startup Code2Lab, Ko Min Zeya Phyo, said he felt relatively over-prepared for his final shot at convincing financiers his business was investment-worthy. Short on time, he decided to rely on the argument that his restaurant management platform company hit a Goldilocks sweet spot: it had the right people in the right market at the right time.

But when he stepped into the spotlight, all thoughts vanished from his brain.

"The moment I got on that stage with all the lights and everybody started looking at me ... things just went blank," he said, laughing. "I basically panicked and then tried to recover from it."

The entrepreneur had come a long way for a deer-in-headlights moment. His company had taken first last year in a local Yangon start-up bootcamp held by Lithan University College. The win earned Ko Min Zeya Phyo US\$2000 and a spot on *Start-UP*, the reality-show competition from Channel NewsAsia.

Though having all lenses trained on him got overwhelming during pitch time, Ko Min Zeya Phyo - who calls himself camera-shy - nevertheless adjusted to their presence later. He said

after the beginning of the season, he came to ignore their glares.

However, it seems comfort with the camera didn't lead to moments of slander or scandal - a trope very much the standard on other, scummier shows whose names begin with *The Real Housewives*, for example.

While programs like *Big Brother* and *Real World* seem half-filled with smack talk, "overall we didn't really talk bad about each other", Ko Min Zeya Phyo said.

And though he admitted there were tense moments during filming, he also characterised the show as "a little bit tame".

But that doesn't mean his time went devoid of drama. The experience, while "rewarding" and educational, also took a toll on him and his work, he said - and the finale was fraught with emotional lows.

Before the winner was announced, the seven remaining start-ups waited together. Ko Min Zeya Phyo said his hopes had already been dashed.

But it was Code2Lab that was offered an envelope from *Start-UP* judge Leslie Loh, founder and managing director of venture capital firm Red Dot Ventures.

This time, it was Ko Min Zeya Phyo's face's turn to go blank.

"The problem with me is that I don't know how to put a facial expression on it," he said. "I didn't go crazy ... I guess everything just didn't gel."

Ko Min Zeya Phyo said only Code2Lab, the competition's overall winner, earned the chance at funding from Red Dot Ventures, the VC firm



Winning contestant Ko Min Zeya Phyo, second from left, poses with other Start-UP contestants and judges. Photo: Supplied

headed up by Leslie Loh. Loh, a mentor to fledgling high-tech startups, founded System Access in 1983, growing the company from a one-person outfit to a publicly-listed multinational with 500 staff in 10 offices worldwide.

The conditional deal Loh offered: S\$600,000 (US\$436,450) for 32 percent of the company.

Ko Min Zeya Phyo said some details need to be hammered out, and that he expects an "answer" in about 8 weeks time as to where his start-up and its potential investors are in the process.

"Now there's more stress," Ko Min

Zeya Phyo said. "The pressure is on."

Code2Lab is developing version 2.0 of its flagship product, SmartSales. Ko Min Zeya Phyo said it will evolve from a point-of-sale system into a platform, and targets rolling it out this summer.

"By the end of the year, we will have a consumer app, a platform and payment integration," he said.

The entrepreneur said the product could also branch out beyond Myanmar and head to Singapore, and its new iteration will be location-agnostic. The start-up show has helped him learn about the Southeast Asian region's

start-up ecosystem.

Off camera and back to reality, Ko Min Zeya Phyo said Code2Lab must ramp up its efforts.

"We really need to start sprinting instead of running," he said.

In the meantime, Ko Min Zeya Phyo has the happy challenge ahead of trying to take advantage of some attention. While he said the show hasn't made him a celebrity, it has attracted business contacts.

Much better than being known or notable for flipping a table, like some other reality stars.

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



YANGON: 6-8 PM, Tuesday, April 2, Phandeeeyar, The Myanmar Innovation Lab, 11th Floor, MAC tower, 561 Merchant Road, Yangon
MANDALAY: 6-8 pm Mandalay University Research Center, Mandalay University Campus, Mandalay.

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 or by telephone on 09-975027347

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DOMESTIC FLIGHT SCHEDULES

| YANGON TO MANDALAY | | | |
|--------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| Y5 775 | Daily | 6:00 | 7:10 |
| W9 515 | 1 | 6:00 | 7:25 |
| YH 909 | 1,2,3,5,6 | 6:00 | 7:40 |
| YH 917 | Daily | 6:10 | 8:30 |
| YJ 891 | 3,7 | 6:00 | 8:05 |
| YJ 891 | 4 | 6:30 | 7:55 |
| YJ 891 | 1,2,5,6 | 6:30 | 8:35 |
| K7 282 | Daily | 6:00 | 8:10 |
| W9 201 | Daily | 7:00 | 8:25 |
| YH 826 | 3 | 7:00 | 8:40 |
| YH 835 | 1,7 | 7:00 | 8:40 |
| YH 909 | 7 | 7:00 | 8:40 |
| YH 831 | 4,6 | 7:00 | 8:40 |
| YH 911 | 2 | 7:00 | 8:40 |
| W9201 | 1 | 7:00 | 8:25 |
| YH 829 | 5 | 7:00 | 11:05 |
| 7Y 131 | Daily | 7:15 | 9:20 |
| K7 266 | Daily | 8:00 | 10:05 |
| 8M 6603 | 4 | 9:00 | 10:10 |
| YJ 751 | 5 | 10:45 | 14:50 |
| YJ 201 | 1,2,3,4 | 11:00 | 12:25 |
| YJ 211 | 5,7 | 11:15 | 12:40 |
| YJ 601 | 6 | 11:15 | 12:40 |
| YJ 761 | 1,2 | 11:15 | 13:10 |
| YJ 761 | 4 | 11:00 | 12:55 |
| YJ 233 | 6 | 11:00 | 12:55 |
| YH 729 | 2,4,6 | 11:00 | 14:00 |
| YH 737 | 3,5,7 | 11:15 | 13:25 |
| YH 727 | 1 | 11:15 | 13:25 |
| W9 251 | 2,5 | 11:30 | 12:55 |
| 7Y 941 | 1,3,4,6 | 11:45 | 13:10 |
| 7Y 841 | 2,5 | 11:45 | 13:10 |
| 7Y 943 | 7 | 11:45 | 13:10 |
| K7 822 | 4,7 | 12:30 | 16:55 |
| YJ 151/W9 7151 | 1 | 13:00 | 16:45 |
| K7 622 | 1,3,5,7 | 13:00 | 14:25 |
| K7 226 | 2,4,6 | 13:30 | 14:55 |
| 7Y 241 | Daily | 14:30 | 16:25 |
| YH 731 | Daily | 14:30 | 16:40 |
| Y5 234 | Daily | 15:20 | 16:30 |
| W9 211 | 4 | 15:30 | 16:55 |

| YANGON TO NAY PYI TAW | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| FMI A1 | 1,2,3,4,5 | 7:15 | 8:15 |
| FMI B1 | 1,2,3,4,5 | 10:45 | 11:45 |
| FMI C1 | 1,2,3,4,5 | 17:00 | 18:00 |

| YANGON TO NYAUNG U | | | |
|--------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| K7 282 | Daily | 6:00 | 7:20 |
| YJ 891 | 3,7 | 6:00 | 7:20 |
| YH 909 | 1,2,3,5,6 | 6:00 | 8:25 |
| YH 917 | Daily | 6:10 | 7:45 |
| YJ 881 | 7 | 6:30 | 7:50 |
| YJ 891 | 1,2,5,6 | 6:30 | 7:50 |
| YH 909 | 4 | 6:30 | 8:05 |
| YJ 881 | 4 | 6:45 | 8:05 |
| K7 242 | Daily | 7:00 | 8:20 |
| 7Y 131 | Daily | 7:15 | 8:35 |
| 7Y 121 | 1 | 8:20 | 9:40 |
| K7 264 | Daily | 14:30 | 16:40 |
| 7Y 241 | Daily | 14:30 | 17:10 |
| YH 731 | Daily | 14:30 | 17:25 |
| W9 129 | 1,3,6 | 15:30 | 17:35 |
| W9 211 | 4 | 15:30 | 17:40 |
| W9 129 | 1 | 15:30 | 17:35 |

| YANGON TO MYITKYINA | | | |
|---------------------|---------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| YH 829 | 5 | 7:00 | 9:40 |
| YH 826 | 3 | 7:00 | 10:05 |
| YH 835 | 1,7 | 7:00 | 10:05 |
| YH 831 | 4,6 | 7:00 | 10:05 |
| YJ 201 | 1,2,3,4 | 11:00 | 13:50 |
| W9 251 | 2,5 | 11:30 | 14:25 |
| 7Y 841 | 5 | 11:45 | 14:35 |
| K7 622 | 1,3,5,7 | 13:00 | 15:55 |

| MANDALAY TO YANGON | | | |
|--------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| Y5 233 | Daily | 7:50 | 9:00 |
| YJ 891 | 4 | 8:10 | 10:05 |
| YJ 891 | 3,7 | 8:20 | 10:15 |
| K7 283 | Daily | 8:25 | 11:30 |
| YH 918 | Daily | 8:30 | 10:45 |
| YH 910 | 7 | 8:40 | 10:05 |
| W9 201 | Daily | 8:40 | 10:35 |
| YJ 891 | 1,2,5,6 | 8:50 | 10:45 |
| 7Y 132 | Daily | 9:35 | 11:30 |
| K7 267 | Daily | 10:20 | 12:25 |
| YH 830 | 5 | 11:05 | 14:55 |
| YH 912 | 2 | 11:30 | 13:25 |
| YJ 762 | 4 | 13:10 | 17:00 |
| YH 832 | 4,6 | 13:20 | 14:45 |
| YH 827 | 3 | 13:20 | 14:45 |
| YH 836 | 1,7 | 13:20 | 14:45 |
| YH 910 | 1,2,3,5,6 | 13:20 | 14:45 |
| YJ 212 | 7 | 15:00 | 16:25 |
| YJ 212 | 6 | 15:15 | 16:40 |
| YJ 752 | 5 | 15:05 | 16:30 |
| YJ 202 | 1,2,3,4 | 15:30 | 16:55 |
| YJ 602 | 6 | 15:55 | 17:50 |
| YH 732 | 6 | 16:40 | 18:05 |
| 7Y 242 | Daily | 16:40 | 18:45 |
| YH 732 | Daily | 16:40 | 18:45 |
| YH 728 | 1 | 16:45 | 18:10 |
| YJ 762 | 1,2 | 16:50 | 18:15 |
| W9 152/W97152 | 1 | 17:05 | 18:30 |
| Y5 776 | Daily | 17:10 | 18:20 |
| W9 211 | 4 | 17:10 | 19:15 |
| K7 823 | 2,4,7 | 17:10 | 18:35 |
| 8M 6604 | 4 | 17:20 | 18:30 |
| K7 227 | 2,4,6 | 17:20 | 18:45 |
| 8M 903 | 1,2,4,5,7 | 17:20 | 18:30 |
| YH 738 | 3,5,7 | 17:25 | 18:50 |
| K7 623 | 1,3,5,7 | 17:40 | 19:05 |
| YH 730 | 2,4,6 | 17:45 | 19:10 |
| YJ 234 | 6 | 17:45 | 19:10 |
| W9 252 | 2,5 | 18:15 | 19:40 |

| NAY PYI TAW TO YANGON | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| FMI A2 | 1,2,3,4,5 | 8:35 | 9:35 |
| FMI B2 | 1,2,3,4,5 | 13:30 | 14:30 |
| FMI C2 | 1,2,3,4,5 | 18:20 | 19:20 |

| NYAUNG U TO YANGON | | | |
|--------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| YJ 891 | 3,7 | 7:35 | 10:15 |
| YH 918 | Daily | 7:45 | 10:45 |
| YJ 881 | 7 | 8:05 | 10:10 |
| YJ 891 | 1,2,5,6 | 8:05 | 10:45 |
| YH 910 | 4 | 8:05 | 9:25 |
| YJ 881 | 4 | 8:20 | 10:25 |
| YH 910 | 1,2,3,5,6 | 8:25 | 9:45 |
| K7 242 | Daily | 8:35 | 11:45 |
| 7Y 131 | Daily | 8:50 | 11:30 |
| 7Y 121 | Daily | 9:55 | 14:10 |
| K7 283 | Daily | 10:10 | 11:30 |
| K7 265 | Daily | 16:55 | 18:15 |
| 7Y 242 | Daily | 17:25 | 18:45 |
| YH 732 | Daily | 17:25 | 18:45 |
| W9 129 | 1,3,6 | 17:50 | 19:10 |

| MYITKYINA TO YANGON | | | |
|---------------------|---------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| YH 827 | 3 | 11:55 | 14:45 |
| YH 832 | 4,6 | 11:55 | 14:45 |
| YH 836 | 1,7 | 11:55 | 14:45 |
| YH 830 | 5 | 12:30 | 14:55 |
| YJ 202 | 1,2,3,4 | 14:05 | 16:55 |
| K7 623 | 1,3,5,7 | 16:10 | 19:05 |
| YJ 234 | 6 | 16:20 | 19:10 |
| W9 252 | 2,5 | 16:45 | 19:40 |

| YANGON TO HEHO | | | |
|----------------|-------------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| YJ 891 | 4 | 6:00 | 8:40 |
| YJ 891 | 3,7 | 6:00 | 8:50 |
| K7 282 | Daily | 6:00 | 9:00 |
| YH 917 | Daily | 6:10 | 9:35 |
| YJ 881 | 7 | 6:30 | 8:50 |
| YJ 891 | 1,2,5,6 | 6:30 | 9:20 |
| YJ 881 | 4 | 6:45 | 9:00 |
| K7 242 | Daily | 7:00 | 9:15 |
| 7Y 131 | Daily | 7:15 | 10:05 |
| K7 266 | Daily | 8:00 | 9:15 |
| 7Y 121 | Daily | 8:20 | 10:35 |
| Y5 649 | Daily | 10:30 | 12:45 |
| YH 505 | 1,2,3,4,5,6 | 10:30 | 11:55 |
| YJ 751 | 3,7 | 10:30 | 11:40 |
| YJ 751 | 5 | 10:45 | 11:55 |
| YJ 761 | 4 | 11:00 | 12:10 |
| YJ 233 | 6 | 11:00 | 12:10 |
| YJ 761 | 1,2 | 11:15 | 12:25 |
| YH 727 | 1 | 11:15 | 12:40 |
| YH 737 | 3,5,7 | 11:15 | 12:40 |
| YH 727 | 3 | 11:15 | 12:40 |
| 7Y 941 | 1,2,4,6 | 11:45 | 13:55 |
| K7 828 | 1,3,5 | 12:30 | 13:45 |
| K7 822 | 2,4,7 | 12:30 | 13:45 |
| K7 264 | Daily | 14:30 | 15:45 |
| 7Y 241 | Daily | 14:30 | 15:40 |
| YH 731 | Daily | 14:30 | 15:55 |
| W9 129 | 1,3,6 | 15:30 | 16:40 |

| YANGON TO MYEIK | | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| Y5 325 | 1,5 | 6:45 | 8:15 |
| 7Y 531 | 1,5 | 7:00 | 8:38 |
| K7 319 | 2,4,6 | 7:00 | 9:05 |
| Y5 325 | 2 | 15:30 | 17:00 |

| YANGON TO SITTWE | | | |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| W9 309 | 1,3,6 | 11:30 | 12:55 |
| 6T 611 | Daily | 11:45 | 12:55 |
| K7 422 | Daily | 13:00 | 14:55 |

| YANGON TO THANDWE | | | |
|-------------------|-------------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| K7 242 | Daily | 7:00 | 10:35 |
| YH 505 | 1,2,3,4,5,6 | 10:30 | 13:10 |
| W9 309 | 1,3,6 | 11:30 | 13:50 |
| 7Y 122 | Daily | 12:15 | 13:05 |
| K7 422 | Daily | 13:00 | 13:35 |
| Y5 421 | 1,3,4,6 | 15:45 | 16:40 |

| YANGON TO DAWEI | | | |
|-----------------|-------|------|------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| K7 319 | 2,4,6 | 7:00 | 8:10 |
| 7Y 531 | 1,5 | 7:00 | 7:48 |

| YANGON TO LASHIO | | | |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| YJ 751 | 3,7 | 10:30 | 12:45 |
| YJ 751 | 5 | 10:45 | 13:00 |
| YH 729 | 2,4,6 | 11:00 | 13:00 |
| 7Y 741 | 1,5 | 11:30 | 13:18 |
| K7 828 | 1,3,5 | 12:30 | 14:50 |

| YANGON TO PUTAO | | | |
|-----------------|------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| YH 826 | 3 | 7:00 | 11:00 |
| YH 831 | 4,6 | 7:00 | 11:00 |
| YH 835 | 1,7 | 7:00 | 11:00 |
| W9 251 | 2,5 | 11:30 | 15:25 |

| HEHO TO YANGON | | | |
|----------------|-------------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| YJ 891 | 4 | 8:55 | 10:05 |
| YJ 881 | 7 | 9:05 | 10:15 |
| YJ 891 | 3,7 | 9:05 | 10:15 |
| K7 283 | Daily | 9:15 | 11:30 |
| YJ 881 | 4 | 9:15 | 10:25 |
| W9 201 | Daily | 9:25 | 10:35 |
| K7 243 | Daily | 9:30 | 11:45 |
| YH 918 | Daily | 9:35 | 10:45 |
| YJ 891 | 1,2,5,6 | 9:35 | 10:45 |
| 7Y 132 | Daily | 10:20 | 11:30 |
| 7Y 121 | Daily | 10:50 | 14:10 |
| K7 267 | Daily | 11:10 | 12:25 |
| YH 506 | 1,2,3,4,5,6 | 11:55 | 14:00 |
| YJ 752 | 5 | 14:20 | 16:30 |
| YJ 762 | 4 | 15:50 | 17:00 |
| 7Y 241 | Daily | 15:55 | 18:45 |
| YH 732 | Daily | 15:55 | 18:45 |
| YJ 762 | 1,2 | 16:05 | 18:15 |
| K7 829 | 1,3,5 | 16:10 | 17:25 |
| YH 728 | 1 | 16:00 | 18:10 |
| YJ 602 | 6 | 16:40 | 17:50 |
| K7 264 | Daily | 16:30 | 18:15 |
| YH 738 | 3,5,7 | 16:40 | 18:50 |
| YJ 752 | 3,7 | 16:45 | 17:55 |
| W9 129 | 1,3,6 | 16:55 | 19:10 |

| MYEIK TO YANGON | | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| Y5 326 | 1,5 | 8:35 | 10:05 |
| 7Y 532 | 1,5 | 10:45 | 12:18 |
| K7 320 | 2,4,6 | 11:30 | 13:35 |
| Y5 326 | 2 | 17:15 | 18:45 |

| SITTWE TO YANGON | | | |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| W9 309 | 1,3,6 | 13:10 | 14:55 |
| 6T 612 | Daily | 13:15 | 14:20 |
| K7 423 | Daily | 15:10 | 16:30 |

| THANDWE TO YANGON | | | |
|-------------------|-------------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| K7 243 | Daily | 10:50 | 11:45 |
| YH 506 | 1,2,3,4,5,6 | 13:10 | 14:00 |
| 7Y 122 | Daily | 13:20 | 14:10 |
| W9 309 | 1,3,6 | 14:05 | 14:55 |
| K7 422 | Daily | 14:10 | 16:30 |
| Y5 422 | 1,3,4,6 | 16:55 | 17:50 |

| DAWEI TO YANGON | | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| K7 320 | 2,4,6 | 12:25 | 13:35 |
| 7Y 532 | 1,5 | 11:30 | 12:18 |

| LASHIO TO YANGON | | | |
|------------------|------|-------|-------|
| Flight | Days | Dep | Arr |
| YJ 752 | 5 | 13:15 | 16:30 |
| K7 829 | 1,3 | 15:05 | 15:55 |
| K7 829 | 5 | 15:05 | 17:25 |
| YJ 752 | 3,7 | 15: | |

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT SCHEDULES

| YANGON TO BANGKOK | | | |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| PG 706 | Daily | 6:05 | 8:20 |
| 8M 335 | Daily | 8:40 | 10:25 |
| TG 304 | Daily | 9:50 | 11:45 |
| PG 702 | Daily | 10:30 | 12:25 |
| TG 302 | Daily | 14:50 | 16:45 |
| PG 708 | Daily | 15:20 | 17:15 |
| 8M 331 | Daily | 16:30 | 18:15 |
| PG 704 | Daily | 18:35 | 20:30 |
| Y5 237 | Daily | 19:00 | 20:50 |
| TG 306 | Daily | 19:50 | 21:45 |

| BANGKOK TO YANGON | | | |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| TG 303 | Daily | 8:00 | 8:45 |
| PG 701 | Daily | 8:45 | 9:40 |
| Y5 238 | Daily | 21:30 | 22:20 |
| 8M 336 | Daily | 11:55 | 12:40 |
| TG 301 | Daily | 13:05 | 13:50 |
| PG 707 | Daily | 13:40 | 14:30 |
| PG 703 | Daily | 17:00 | 17:50 |
| TG 305 | Daily | 18:05 | 18:50 |
| 8M 332 | Daily | 19:20 | 20:05 |
| PG 705 | Daily | 20:15 | 21:30 |

| YANGON TO DON MUEANG | | | |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| DD 4231 | Daily | 8:00 | 9:45 |
| FD 252 | Daily | 8:30 | 10:20 |
| FD 256 | Daily | 12:50 | 14:40 |
| FD 254 | Daily | 17:35 | 19:25 |
| FD 258 | Daily | 21:30 | 23:15 |
| DD 4239 | Daily | 21:00 | 22:55 |

| DON MUEANG TO YANGON | | | |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| DD 4230 | Daily | 6:30 | 7:15 |
| FD 251 | Daily | 7:15 | 8:00 |
| FD 255 | Daily | 11:35 | 12:20 |
| FD 253 | Daily | 16:20 | 17:05 |
| FD 257 | Daily | 20:15 | 20:55 |
| DD 4238 | Daily | 19:25 | 20:15 |

| YANGON TO SINGAPORE | | | |
|---------------------|-------|-------|---------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| 8M 231 | Daily | 8:00 | 12:25 |
| Y5 2233 | Daily | 9:45 | 14:15 |
| TR 2823 | Daily | 9:45 | 2:35 |
| SQ 997 | Daily | 10:25 | 15:10 |
| 3K 582 | Daily | 11:45 | 16:20 |
| MI 533 | 2,4,6 | 13:35 | 20:50 |
| 8M 233 | 5,6,7 | 14:40 | 19:05 |
| MI 519 | Daily | 16:40 | 21:15 |
| 3K 584 | 2,3,5 | 19:30 | 00:05+1 |

| SINGAPORE TO YANGON | | | |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| TR 2822 | Daily | 7:20 | 8:45 |
| Y5 2234 | Daily | 7:20 | 8:50 |
| SQ 998 | Daily | 7:55 | 9:20 |
| 3K 581 | Daily | 9:10 | 10:40 |
| MI 533 | 2,4,6 | 11:30 | 12:45 |
| 8M 232 | Daily | 13:25 | 14:50 |
| MI 518 | Daily | 14:20 | 15:45 |
| 3K 583 | 2,3,5 | 17:20 | 18:50 |
| 8M 234 | 5,6,7 | 20:15 | 21:40 |

| YANGON TO KUALA LUMPUR | | | |
|------------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| 8M 501 | 1,2,3,5,6 | 7:50 | 11:50 |
| AK 505 | Daily | 8:30 | 12:45 |
| MH 741 | Daily | 12:15 | 16:30 |
| 8M 9506 | Daily | 12:15 | 16:30 |
| 8M 9508 | Daily | 15:45 | 20:05 |
| MH 743 | Daily | 16:00 | 20:15 |
| AK 503 | Daily | 19:05 | 23:20 |

| KUALA LUMPUR TO YANGON | | | |
|------------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| AK 504 | Daily | 6:55 | 8:00 |
| 8M 9505 | Daily | 10:05 | 11:15 |
| MH 740 | Daily | 10:05 | 11:15 |
| 8M 502 | 1,2,3,5,6 | 12:50 | 13:50 |
| 8M 9507 | Daily | 13:40 | 14:50 |
| MH 742 | Daily | 13:55 | 15:05 |
| AK 502 | Daily | 17:20 | 18:25 |

| YANGON TO BEIJING | | | |
|-------------------|-------|-------|---------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| CA 906 | 3,5,7 | 23:50 | 05:50+1 |

| BEIJING TO YANGON | | | |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| CA 905 | 3,5,7 | 19:30 | 22:50 |

| YANGON TO GUANGZHOU | | | |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| 8M 711 | 2,4,7 | 8:40 | 13:15 |
| CZ 3055 | 3,6 | 11:35 | 15:55 |
| CZ 3056 | 1,5 | 17:40 | 22:10 |

| GUANGZHOU TO YANGON | | | |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| CZ 3055 | 3,6 | 8:35 | 10:35 |
| CZ 3056 | 1,5 | 14:40 | 16:40 |
| 8M 712 | 2,4,7 | 14:15 | 15:50 |

| YANGON TO TAIPEI | | | |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| CI 7916 | Daily | 10:50 | 16:10 |

| TAIPEI TO YANGON | | | |
|------------------|-------|------|------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| CI 7915 | Daily | 7:00 | 9:50 |

| YANGON TO KUNMING | | | |
|-------------------|-------------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| CA 416 | Daily | 12:30 | 15:55 |
| MU 2012 | 3 | 12:40 | 18:50 |
| MU 2032 | 1,2,4,5,6,7 | 14:50 | 18:15 |

| KUNMING TO YANGON | | | |
|-------------------|-------------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| MU 2011 | 3 | 8:25 | 11:50 |
| CA 415 | Daily | 11:10 | 11:30 |
| MU 2031 | 1,2,4,5,6,7 | 13:30 | 14:00 |

| YANGON TO HANOI | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| VN 956 | 1,3,5,6,7 | 19:10 | 21:25 |

| HANOI TO YANGON | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| VN 957 | 1,3,5,6,7 | 16:40 | 18:10 |

| YANGON TO HO CHI MINH CITY | | | |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| VN 942 | 2,4,7 | 14:25 | 17:05 |

| HO CHI MINH CITY TO YANGON | | | |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| VN 943 | 2,4,7 | 11:45 | 13:25 |

| YANGON TO DOHA | | | |
|----------------|-------|------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| QR 919 | 1,4,6 | 7:55 | 11:40 |

| DOHA TO YANGON | | | |
|----------------|-------|-------|---------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| QR 918 | 3,5,7 | 19:45 | 04:59+1 |

| YANGON TO SEOUL | | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|---------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| OZ 770 | 4,7 | 0:50 | 8:50 |
| KE 472 | Daily | 23:55 | 07:45+1 |

| SEOUL TO YANGON | | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| KE 471 | Daily | 18:30 | 22:30 |
| OZ 769 | 3,6 | 19:30 | 23:40 |

| YANGON TO HONG KONG | | | |
|---------------------|-------|------|------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| KA 251 | Daily | 1:10 | 5:25 |

| HONG KONG TO YANGON | | | |
|---------------------|---------|-------|---------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| KA 252 | 2,4,6 | 22:20 | 00:15+1 |
| KA 250 | 1,3,5,7 | 21:50 | 23:45 |

| YANGON TO TOKYO | | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|---------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| NH 914 | Daily | 22:10 | 06:45+1 |

| TOKYO TO YANGON | | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| NH 913 | Daily | 11:45 | 17:15 |

| YANGON TO DHAKA | | | |
|-----------------|------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| BG 061 | 2 | 11:45 | 13:00 |
| BG 061 | 5 | 19:45 | 21:00 |

| DHAKA TO YANGON | | | |
|-----------------|------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| BG 060 | 2 | 8:30 | 10:45 |
| BG 060 | 5 | 16:30 | 18:45 |

| YANGON TO INCHEON | | | |
|-------------------|---------|-------|---------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| PG 724 | 1,3,5,6 | 12:50 | 14:45 |
| W9 607 | 4,7 | 14:30 | 16:20 |
| 8M 7702 | Daily | 23:55 | 07:50+1 |

| INCHEON TO YANGON | | | |
|-------------------|---------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| PG 723 | 1,3,5,6 | 11:00 | 11:55 |
| W9 608 | 4,7 | 17:20 | 18:10 |
| 8M 7701 | Daily | 18:45 | 22:05 |

| YANGON TO CHIANG MAI | | | |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| Y5 251 | 2,4,6 | 6:15 | 8:05 |
| 7Y 305 | 1,5 | 11:00 | 12:50 |
| W9 607 | 4,7 | 14:30 | 16:20 |

| CHIANG MAI TO YANGON | | | |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| Y5 252 | 2,4,6 | 9:25 | 10:15 |
| 7Y 306 | 1,5 | 13:45 | 14:35 |
| W9 608 | 4,7 | 17:20 | 18:10 |

| YANGON TO GAYA | | | |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| 8M 601 | 3,5,6 | 7:00 | 8:20 |
| AI 236 | 2 | 13:10 | 14:10 |
| AI 234 | 1,5 | 14:05 | 15:05 |

| GAYA TO YANGON | | | |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| AI 235 | 2 | 9:10 | 12:10 |
| 8M 602 | 3,5,6 | 9:20 | 12:30 |
| AI 233 | 5 | 15:00 | 18:00 |

| YANGON TO DELHI | | | |
|-----------------|------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| AI 236 | 2 | 13:10 | 16:30 |

| DELHI TO YANGON | | | |
|-----------------|------|------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| AI 235 | 2 | 7:00 | 12:10 |

| YANGON TO KOLKATA | | | |
|-------------------|------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| AI 234 | 1 | 14:05 | 17:20 |
| AI 228 | 5 | 18:45 | 19:45 |

| KOLKATA TO YANGON | | | |
|-------------------|------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| AI 227 | 1 | 10:35 | 13:20 |
| AI 233 | 5 | 13:30 | 18:00 |

| MANDALAY TO BANGKOK | | | |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| PG 710 | Daily | 14:15 | 16:40 |

| BANGKOK TO MANDALAY | | | |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| PG 709 | Daily | 12:05 | 13:25 |

| MANDALAY TO SINGAPORE | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| MI 533 | 2,4,6 | 15:45 | 20:50 |
| Y5 2233 | 1,2,4,5,6 | 7:50 | 14:15 |

| SINGAPORE TO MANDALAY | | | |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| Y5 2234 | Daily | 7:20 | 16:30 |
| MI 533 | 2,4,6 | 11:30 | 14:50 |

| MANDALAY TO DON MUEANG | | | |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| FD 245 | Daily | 12:50 | 15:15 |

| DON MUEANG TO MANDALAY | | | |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| FD 244 | Daily | 10:55 | 12:20 |

| MANDALAY TO KUNMING | | | |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| MU 2030 | Daily | 13:50 | 16:40 |

| KUNMING TO MANDALAY | | | |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| MU 2029 | Daily | 12:55 | 12:50 |

| NAY PYI TAW TO BANGKOK | | | |
|------------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| PG 722 | 1,2,3,4,5 | 19:45 | 22:45 |

| BANGKOK TO NAY PYI TAW | | | |
|------------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Flights | Days | Dep | Arr |
| PG 721 | 1,2,3,4,5 | 17:15 | 19:15 |

EQUALITY IN SPORT

Women athletes box, shoot, wrestle for recognition

ABHAYA SRIVASTAVA

FOR India's female badminton champion Saina Nehwal, newly crowned world number one, it's been a tough climb to the top in a patriarchal country that has long neglected women athletes.

Although badminton is keenly followed in India, cricket has long been the national obsession, overshadowing all other sports with male stars command eye-popping sums.

"It's difficult to play any other sport in a cricket-mad country, especially if you are a woman," said Nehwal on the sidelines of the Indian Open.

"But I'm glad mindsets are slowly changing. Girls have started saying that if boys can do it, girls can do it as well," said Nehwal.



With the defeat of India's cricketers in the World Cup semi-final last week in Australia, Indian media have been quick to hail the 25-year-old, who has battled injuries and a string of defeats by the dominating Chinese, as the country's new sporting hero.

She joins a series of women - from boxing's Mary Kom to tennis star Sania Mirza - who have succeeded on the world stage, outperforming the men who have long received the lion's share of attention and resources back home.

A new advert showing on Rupert Murdoch's Star Sports urges viewers to "check out" the skills and determination of these women, who include shooters, hockey players and five-time world champion Kom.

The one-minute video, produced in March for International Women's Day, also takes a swipe at male chauvinistic attitudes, with the women sweating through gruelling practice sessions and defiantly asking, "You wanna check me out? Then check out my serve, my bull's eye, check out



Saina Nehwal smashes a return on court. Photo: AFP

my black eye, check out my medals [pause] my Olympic medals."

Although women say their successes are being increasingly recognised, they still struggle to make a living - in contrast to the country's cricketers who were showered with gifts including luxury cars and hard cash when they won the last World Cup in 2011.

"In India you can't make a profession out of sport unless you are a cricketer," said Heena Sidhu, who last year became India's first world number one pistol shooter.

"When I started out seven, eight years back it was really tough to break through," added Sidhu, saying



Indian society still has traditional expectations of women.

"It's not as if people come marching to your house [demanding you quit] but what society thinks affects the parents and eventually it trickles down to the children," she told AFP.

Sports writer Prem Panicker said slowly changing attitudes have given rise to a generation of successful women on the sporting fields.

"As we moved into the 2000s, disposable incomes increased. Parents were more willing to allow their daughters to engage in [sporting] activities. As demand increased, so did coaching facilities," Panicker told AFP.

"I don't think it is any one factor as it is an indication of a progressive attitudinal shift, aided by external factors."

A Bollywood movie has been made about Kom, who overcame grinding poverty and an initially disapproving father to win her titles including an Olympic bronze medal.

But Geeta Phogat, India's first woman wrestler to qualify for the Olympics, in 2012, said she and



others have had to overcome hurdles men simply do not face.

"When I started wrestling my family had to face a lot of criticism from community elders," Phogat, 26, said.

"People said I would bring only shame to my family, no one would want to marry me," said Phogat, who as a young athlete trained with men in northern India because there were no women wrestlers.

"I was told wrestling is a man's sport," said Phogat, who won gold at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi.

"You can't ignore women anymore." - AFP

New number one Nehwal wins Indian Open on home turf

SAINA Nehwal, badminton's new world number one, trounced her Thai challenger, Ratchanok Intanon, on March 29 to win the India Open women's singles on home turf.

Nehwal defeated Ratchanok 21-16, 21-14 in less than an hour in the final of the Super Series tournament in front of an adoring crowd packed into the Siri Fort stadium in New Delhi.

The 25-year-old Nehwal has already had a dream run this year after reaching the final of the prestigious All England Championship earlier this month where she lost to Spain's Carolina Marin.

Nehwal became the world number one - the first Indian to do so - after she reached the semi-finals of the Indian Open tournament, although rankings are not formally announced by the Badminton World Federation until later this week.

Another Indian shuttler, K Srikanth, won the men's singles final in a keenly contested match against Denmark's Viktor Axelsen.

Srikanth defeated Axelsen 18-21, 21-13 and 21-12 in a 55-minute encounter.

He had stormed into the final with a comfortable 21-16, 21-13 victory over China's Xue Song in the semi-final.

Earlier on March 29, the Japanese duo of Misaki Matsutomo and Ayaka Takahashi defeated their Chinese challengers Luo Ying and Luo Yu 21-19 and 21-19 to win the women's doubles final in a 81-minute encounter.

Two other Chinese pairs had a better day, routing their opponents in the mixed and men's doubles finals.

Chai Biao and Hong Wei comfortably defeated Denmark's Conrad Petersen and Mads Pieler Kolding 21-18 and 21-14 to take the men's doubles title in 45 minutes.

China's Liu Cheng and Bao Yixin downed Denmark's Christinna Pedersen and Joachim Fischer Nielsen in the mixed doubles final, with a score of 21-19, 21-19 in 52 minutes.

- AFP

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Dated: 31st March, 2015

BASKETBALL

NBA urges 'inclusion' as Indiana law sparks concern

THE NBA reaffirmed the league's commitment to diversity on March 28, after Indiana passed a law that activists fear allows discrimination against homosexuals in the state.

"The game of basketball is grounded in long established principles of inclusion and mutual respect," the league said in a statement issued jointly with the Indiana Pacers and their WNBA sister club the Indiana Fever.

"We will continue to ensure that all fans, players and employees feel welcome at all NBA and WNBA events in Indiana and elsewhere."

Supporters of gay rights united in outrage on March 27 after Indiana governor Mike Pence signed the law touted as a measure to protect

religious freedom.

The law, which takes effect July 1, makes no mention of gays or lesbians, but activists say it effectively makes it legal for Indiana businesses whose owners reject homosexuality on religious grounds to turn away gay customers.

The Indiana chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union called the law a "backlash" response to a failed bid last year to put a gay marriage ban in the state's constitution.

Pacers and Fever owner Herb Simon said his clubs are committed to "non-discrimination".

"Everyone is always welcome at Bankers Life Fieldhouse. That has always been the policy from the very beginning of the Simon

family's involvement and it always will be," he said.

The NBA isn't the only sports body to react to the new Indiana law.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association will host next week's "Final Four" - the semi-finals of the hugely popular collegiate basketball tournament dubbed "March Madness" - in Indianapolis next week.

The powerful governing body of top-flight university sports is based in the city.

"Moving forward, we intend to closely examine the implications of this bill and how it might affect future events as well as our workforce," NCAA president Mark Emmert said. - AFP

RUGBY UNION

Fiji beat New Zealand to win Hong Kong Sevens



Fiji's Jerry Tuwai catches a ball against New Zealand in the Hong Kong final. Fiji won 33-19. Photo: AFP

FIJI won the Hong Kong Rugby Sevens on March 29, tearing through defending champions New Zealand 33-19 in a powerful display.

With the backing of a roaring Hong Kong Stadium crowd, Fiji made up for last year's heartbreak semi-final loss to England, and went one step closer to qualifying for the Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

New Zealand struggled to get into the match as Fiji pounded through their defence. The All Blacks were down 21-5 at half-time after Savenaca Rawaca put two tries on the board.

The New Zealanders pushed through with a pair of tries from Scott Curry, but the Fijians kept finding gaps and a surge down the left wing by Vatemu Ravouvou sealed the match 33-19.

Fiji have the most-ever wins at the Hong Kong Sevens, with this weekend's victory, marking their 15th triumph.

The top four teams in the Sevens World Series will secure a place in Brazil, where sevens rugby will make its Olympic debut.

Hong Kong – celebrating its 40th edition this year – is the sixth tournament in the nine-stage series, which ends in London in May.

New Zealand had only narrowly

edged Samoa 15-14 to book their place in the final, while Fiji put on an impressive show against series leaders South Africa to win their semi 21-15.

South Africa went on to beat Samoa 26-5 in the play-off for third.

Fiji only just pushed past England 14-12 earlier in the day in an intense quarter-final which went down to the wire.

England and Australia are tussling for the crucial fourth spot in the series standings with three tournaments to go.

South Africa, New Zealand and Fiji are well ahead on points in the top three spots.

Australia fell to South Africa 7-5 in their quarter-final but beat England in the runners-up plate tournament, stretching the series points gap in fourth, with England in fifth.

The Australians took the plate final, beating USA 21-17 in a phenomenal battle against the surging speed of their opponents.

Of the lower-ranked trophies, Kenya took the shield by beating Japan 26-7 and Scotland won the bowl, downing France 26-5.

Russia won the qualifier tournament and will play as one of the 15 top-ranked "core" teams in the next Sevens World Series – AFP

CYCLING

Thomas strong ahead of cobbled Classics

COMMONWEALTH Games champion Geraint Thomas will find himself a marked man over the next two weeks as the peloton tackles the Tour of Flanders on April 5 and then Paris-Roubaix a week later.

With perennial favourites Tom Boonen and Fabian Cancellara out injured, both Flanders and Roubaix will be considered the most open they have been in years.

Over the last 10 years, the two races have been won by either Boonen or Cancellara 13 times – and by someone else just seven times.

'People were looking at me a bit after my win on Friday. That's what it felt like.'

Geraint Thomas
Professional cyclist

But Boonen dislocated his collarbone at Paris-Nice in early March while Cancellara fractured two vertebrae in his back when crashing during the E3 Harelbeke race last week.

With the heavyweight pair missing, Thomas won E3 and then took third at Gent-Wevelgem, behind Italian Luca Paolini and Niki Terpstra of the Netherlands.

Those two races came just two days apart and for Thomas to be still there fighting for victory despite the brutal conditions that made Gent-Wevelgem such an enthralling and chaotic race spoke wonders of his strength and form.

Four other riders managed to take top-10 finishes in both races but Sep Vanmarcke, Alexander Kristoff, Jurgen Roelandts and Daniel Oss were not in contention at the business end of either.

Vanmarcke was among the six men who contested the victory at Gent-Wevelgem but when Italy's Paolini attacked 6km from home, the Belgian did not have the legs to fight to the end.

He ended up sixth and 40 seconds down, whereas Thomas had the strength to join Terpstra in trying to hunt down Paolini.

"I'm happy to be on the podium again. Obviously it would have been nice to go for the win but it's hard when you're coming into the final and everyone's attacking," said Thomas after his third placed Gent-Wevelgem finish.

"People were looking at me a bit after my win on Friday [March 27]. That's what it felt like.

"When Paolini went it was a good move for him but we all looked at each other."

Having finished eighth at Flanders last year and seventh at Roubaix, the Welshman will surely come to the start line of both races as the man to watch.

It has been an incredible rise to prominence at the Spring Classics for Thomas, who first announced his potential in 2011 when he was 10th at Flanders and second at the semi-classic Dwars door Vlaanderen.

This year his form has been better than ever as he also came fifth overall at the week-long Paris-Nice.

One of Thomas's problems in recent years has been a propensity to fall, although he denies that it comes from not being a good bike handler.

He hit the deck again on March 29

but so did many people. He said his landing was soft and he doesn't think it will hamper his preparation for the two "Monument" races coming up.

"The grass was softer than the tarmac! It was unbelievable. The gusts were incredible. It was hard enough just trying to stay on the bike," he said.

"I'll rest up now. Have a good massage, eat well, stay in bed and put my feet up until Sunday [April 5]."

Come that day he will have Terpstra, last year's Roubaix winner, Vanmarcke, who was top four in both Flanders and Roubaix in 2014, and Stijn Vandenberg for company at the very least.

Terpstra and Vandenberg's Etixx-Quick Step teammate Zdenek Stybar should feature too, as will Peter Sagan and maybe even Thomas's compatriot and Sky teammate Bradley Wiggins.

A top sprinter who can negotiate the cobbles and short climbs such as John Degenkolb or Kristoff may also be in the mix, but Thomas will still be the name on everyone's lips. – AFP



Belgian Gert Steegmans climbs up after falling into a brook. Photo: AFP

Sky's Richie Porte holds off Valverde charge to win Tour of Catalonia

Australia's Richie Porte sealed victory at the Tour of Catalonia on March 29 despite Spaniard Alejandro Valverde winning his third stage of the seven-day race.

Valverde picked up a total of 12 bonus seconds on the day thanks to the stage win and an earlier intermediate sprint, but Porte didn't lose any more time on the hilly 126.6-kilometre circuit around Barcelona to win by

4 seconds.

Victory continued 30-year-old Porte's fantastic early-season form having also won his second Paris-Nice title just two weeks ago.

France's Bryan Coquard was second in the stage just ahead of Russian Sergei Chernetski, who won his first World Tour stage on March 28.

Italian Domenico Pozzovivo was just 1 second behind Valverde in third

overall with two-time Tour de France winner Alberto Contador a further 2 seconds adrift in fourth.

"We wanted to try and get the overall win and we fought all day for it, although we knew it was going to be very, very difficult," said Valverde.

"We go away from here with three victories and second in the general classification, so you can't ask for more. It was a very balanced race." – AFP

Sport

Indian sportswomen hit out

SPORT 26



LETHWEI

Myanmar champ will meet American in April

KYAW ZIN HLAING

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AFTER downing his Thai opponent Phat Man Khun in the third round on March 29, lethwei (Myanmar traditional boxing) champion Tun Tun Min focused his attention towards his highly anticipated rematch with American Cyrus Washington.

That grudge match will take place at Yangon's Thuwunna Indoor Stadium on April 11 after the American defeated Tun Tun Min with a third round flying-kick last December.

'Cyrus is a talented boxer ...but he is older than me. I think this is his weakness.'

Tun Tun Min
Lethwei champion

Tun Tun Min, who as well as being Myanmar's traditional boxing open division champion also reigns as SEA Games muay gold medalist from the 2013 Games in Nay Pyi Taw, will fight Washington under bareknuckle lethwei rules.

Tun Tun Min, 23, with a career of 48 fights and 38 wins, has

suffered defeat only once - at the hands of Washington, 33, a former World Professional Muay Thai Federation and World Kickboxing Association champion who has twice fought in Myanmar.

In 2010 Washington faced then lethwei champion Saw Nga Mann in a fight where he believed himself to have won, though admitted on the website of his training club he was unsure of the exact rules.

"So at the end they officially declared it a draw but because of him breaking the rules, whatever they were because they kept changing them and me beating his ass, they offered me the belt. Anyway, I refused," Washington was quoted as saying on the Tiger Muay Thai website.

Washington's advertisement of the fight claims that he successfully defended his "Burmese bareknuckle boxing [lethwei] 72kg title in 2014" and is now "set to make his second defence on April 11".

Tun Tun Min says that this time he intends to use his opponent's age against him.

"Cyrus is a talented boxer with much experience, powerful punches and a strong kick. I must be careful and I think this will be a tough match for both sides. But he is older than me. I think this is his weakness," said Tun Tun Min.

"I've been reviewing Washington's past fights on the internet as preparation for the fight; he's a good opponent, that can't be denied."

The April 11 under-card will feature seven local match-ups. Tickets will cost K5000 for standard and K10,000 for special seating.



Tun Tun Min kicks out against his Thai opponent on March 29. Photo: Zarni Phyo

FOOTBALL

Broadcaster shocks with racial slur

FREEDOM Sports defended one of their broadcast team against accusations of having used racial slurs during their coverage of the AFC U23 Championship Qualifying Group F match between hosts Chinese Taipei and Myanmar on March 27.

The *China Post* reported on March 30 that during the live broadcast of the March 27 game, a female commentator directed a number of comments toward the Myanmar team, including saying she was "not sure what country this is", and "it seems like they spend all day running in the grassland and digging the ground to eat sweet potatoes". Myanmar defeated Taiwan 3-0.

The matches were free-to-air on the organisation's YouTube channel where it describes itself as "a professional production and broadcast team with innovative and thinking planning" and describes its reporting as reporting that "boils your blood and inspires your soul".

"They were just a few jokes and not meant to be disparaging," Freedom Sports told *The China Post*.

The commentators seemed aware their comments may be considered offensive as during an earlier broadcast, reporters had joked about the shortness of members of the Australian side, liking them to natto beans, adding "Hopefully their fans aren't watching our broadcast, but it shouldn't matter since they wouldn't be able to understand."

The Chinese Taipei Football Association responded by saying that it had no knowledge of the YouTube broadcast and that while it had regularly outsourced the recording of the national team's matches to Freedom Sports, the broadcast was not officially sanctioned by the body.

- Staff

SEA GAMES SHORTS



PHILIPPINES

Athletics

Caleb Stuart, the athlete the Philippines are relying on to throw the nation to at least two gold medals, has caused controversy over his eligibility for the games, reported Reuters.

The Filipino-American who reportedly received his Philippine passport late last year has a personal best in the hammer and shot put events that exceed current SEA Games records.

But his Malaysian rival Jackie Wong, who set a national record of 63.71 at the Philippines Open-Invitational Athletics - where he came runner-up to Stuart - questioned his rival's eligibility for June.

"They are saying that he can compete in the SEA Games but I'm not sure myself," Wong was quoted as saying in the *New Straits Times* on March 27.

"Anyway I think the competition will be good and I am determined to improve on my national record," he added.

Stuart, who has a Filipino mother, has returned to California ahead of the games.

The Philippines were targeting 12 gold medals at these games before the emergence of Stuart.

MALAYSIA

Athletics

A target of 23 SEA Games medals has been set by the technical director of the Malaysian Athletics Union technical director Robert Ballard, reports Bernama.

"We currently have three athletes who rank number one in Southeast Asia," he told the news agency at the Malaysian Open Athletics Championships held last week.

He referred to triple jumper Mohd Hakimi Ismail, high jumper Nauraj Singh Randhawa and discus thrower Muhammad Irfan Shamsuddin.

But the triple jumper failed to make automatic qualification for the SEA Games, posting 15.86m, good enough to win gold but well short of the 16.04m recommended distance and not even comparable to the 16.44m leap that won him gold in Myanmar in 2013. His fate

now rests in the hands of the selectors.

Ballard also expects Jackie Wong to medal in the men's hammer but added his expectations had not been formally submitted to the Olympic Council of Malaysia and the MAU.

"When we get closer to the SEA Games, we will decide how many are gold, silver and bronze medals," he added.

Aquatics

Fu Kang, a 15-year-old swimming prodigy, smashed his own personal best to take Malaysia's national 100 metre breaststroke record at last week's Malaysian Open Swimming held in Bukit Jalil, reported Bernama.

The youngster touched the wall in 1 minute 2.56 seconds to dip under the previous mark of 1:02.59s, set by Elvin Chia in 2000. The victory also booked himself a ticket to June's SEA Games.

"I did not expect to renew the national record. It was just unbelievable. This will be my new personal best; before this it was 1:04.01s," he said after the race.

"I really trained hard for this. Especially to qualify for the SEA Games. With the new time, I hope I can gain a

top-three spot. I just need to train some more," said Fu Kang, who studies at the British International School in Phuket, Thailand, under a scholarship.

This will not be Fu Kang's first SEA Games. He debuted in the 2013 Nay Pyi Taw Games by competing in the 200m and 400m individual medley but failed to medal.

INDONESIA

Indonesia have downsized their delegation and trimmed their target as they approach the Singapore event.

A 556 member training team has been cut to 500 names by Satlak Prima, the body tasked with the archipelago nation's success at the 2015 SEA Games.

Kasatlak Prima Suwarno, chair of the body explained that he still felt confident that the nation could bring back 47 to 70 gold medals but that quotas set by the Singapore organisers meant the squads had to focus on genuine medal hopes.

The *Jakarta Post* reported that Imam Nahrawi, Indonesia's Youth and Sports Minister had had to downgrade his expectations of reclaiming second-

place in the medal table - as he had promised to a House of Representatives' sports commission - in light of the program of events adopted by Singapore.

Indonesia had expected medals to come from chess, karate, kempo, weightlifting, wrestling and beach volleyball - none of which find themselves on this year's program.

In 1999 Indonesia fell out of the top two for the first time in its history in 1999 after having topped the table on nine of the 11 occasions it entered the biannual event between 1977 and 1997.

VIETNAM

Vietnamese sports stars have been offered an extra incentive to win at June's SEA Games after last week the National Sports Administration signed a sponsorship contract to reward top performers reported VNS.

MyVita will deliver VND15 million (US\$700) to the best athlete on each day of the competition and an additional bonus to the first gold medallist, best young athlete and best footballer of the Games. - Matt Roebuck